

research output and the contacts he had in the country and the rest of the world, he enabled the Institute to gain recognition as a major centre for social science research. He chaired many other institutions and professional bodies in Tamil Nadu and the rest of the country. Whatever he took up, he was a man of vision and action, always dreaming and always acting, and by his commitment always exhorting others to join him.

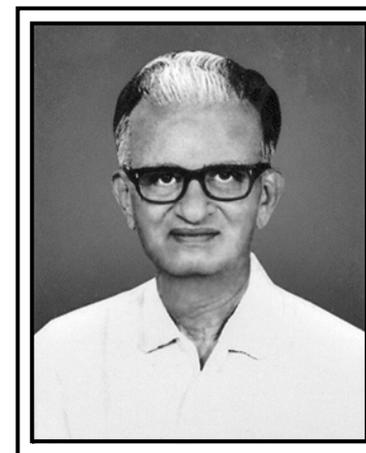
Trained as an economist Adiseshiah continued his involvement with the subject all through his life. His students, some of whom like Prof. K.N. Raj, who later on became actively associated with the teaching of economics, policy making and institution building, still recall what a tremendous inspiration Adiseshiah was to them. In his quasi-autobiographical work published under the title *Let My Country Awake*, Adiseshiah recalls how the teaching of economics, first in Calcutta and then in Madras, was a learning experience for him also. He records that his own economics was shaped “in the villages of Bengal and South India with their rural service centres where we [he and his students] worked out the economics of hand-pound rice, hand-made paper, handloom textiles, crop rotation and rural credit, rural medicine, sanitation, adult literacy and curriculum reform” and that “it was there that I found the testing ground for the many ideas and plans that I carried with me to UNESCO in Paris and from there to the four corners of the earth”. The same texture of intimate links with real life became the distinct feature of all his writings subsequently and that made his commentaries on economic issues distinctly unique. In UNESCO he never wrote a mission report about any country without familiarising himself with the specifics of each situation, practically always through visits and personal contacts of many kinds.

Back in India, the many scholarly papers he wrote, his incisive editorials on the economic situation in Tamil Nadu, in the country and in the international arena that

he wrote every month from 1971 till 1994 in the *Bulletin Madras Development Seminar Series (MIDS Bulletin)* and the *Mid-Year Review of the Indian Economy* that he authored for several years (published by the Indian International Centre) were received with wide acclaim and are still considered to be very weighty professional contributions.

Malcolm and Elizabeth Adiseshiah had decided that after their life time their properties would be devoted for the continuation of the work they were doing. Elizabeth Adiseshiah passed away in 1986 leaving all her property to her husband. In his Will, Malcolm Adiseshiah bequeathed their residential property to the Madras Institute of Development Studies and stated that the rest, the financial assets, should be used to set up a new trust for conducting programmes in the broad area of economics-- teaching and research, both fundamental and applied, and that the trust should be named Malcolm and Elizabeth Adiseshiah Trust.

In life through tireless work and in his Will through a rare gesture worthy of emulation by the affluent in our land, Malcolm Adiseshiah demonstrated his commitment to the spread of knowledge and the upliftment of the less privileged. Truly was he one of the most outstanding and humane personalities of our time.



**MALCOLM ADISESHIAH**  
(1910 - 1994)

## *A Profile*

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## *A Profile*

“In the years following independence, India was sending forth in triumph into the world a noble set of its choice citizens with enlightened ideas of society and civilization. It was the era which saw India emerge as one of the leading nations of the Third World. Malcolm Adiseshiah, with his unflagging perseverance and indomitable courage, is among the most eminent of those early emissaries.” These are the opening sentences of a biographical sketch of Dr Malcolm Adiseshiah in the volume of essays and reflections his colleagues and admirers brought out on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1990 (*Economy, Society and Development*, Sage Publications, 1991, which those interested may look up for a more detailed account). That this was not an exaggerated claim can be seen from the fact that for over two decades from 1948 Adiseshiah was a top official of UNESCO, including its Deputy Director General from 1962 to 1970. Those who were familiar with the UNESCO's functioning of the 1950s and 1960s would also testify that it was Malcolm Adiseshiah who converted that organization which in its early years was something of a limited club of the so-called advanced countries of the world into a truly global body, concerned not only with the science and culture of the affluent, but primarily with the education and development of the vast majority of human beings.

Adiseshiah was born in Vellore where he also had his early education in the Voorhees School and College. He then moved to Loyola College in Madras from where he took a B.A.(Hons) degree in Economics. After teaching at St.Paul's College, Calcutta for a brief period, he went over to England for the doctoral programme in the London School of Economics and the Cambridge

University. With a doctorate he returned to India in 1940 as Professor of Economics in the Madras Christian College. He left the College in 1945 and worked with the World University Service in Geneva before moving to UNESCO.

On his retirement from UNESCO in 1970, he returned to India and Tamil Nadu determined to devote the rest of his life in the service of his country, especially in the spheres of economic development and education. Together with his wife, Elizabeth, they had registered a Trust in Paris for these purposes setting aside a substantial portion of their resources also to carry out their mission. So was founded the Madras Institute of Development Studies late in 1970. When, in 1972, Adiseshiah became a member of the newly constituted Tamil Nadu Planning Commission, he used the Institute for his studies pertaining to the state. It is noteworthy that the first study done through the Institute, which later came out as its first publication also, was *Income earning trends and social status of the Harijan Community in Tamil Nadu*.

That was symbolic of Adiseshiah's commitment to use his privileges and resources in the service of others, especially the least privileged in society. All through his life he was led by the conviction that knowledge had a liberating and uplifting role and hence making knowledge available to others was a sacred duty. And he used every opportunity he came to have to convert this conviction into action. He was the Vice-Chancellor of the Madras University from 1975 to 1978 and during this short period he introduced the semester system and granted autonomy to selected colleges, making the University the pioneer in the country for this innovative scheme. He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1978 and he made use of the opportunity to initiate a programme of adult literacy in the country, and push it with vigour, especially in Tamil Nadu. He was Chairman of the Madras Institute of Development Studies from its inception till his death in 1994. Through his own prolific