

discrimination. He had the courage of conviction to state his difference candidly. Yet he remained and does to this day, far from an outright opponent of positive discrimination, one who is interested in attempting to improve academic and professional standards while not becoming insensitive to the demand for equity. The exchange between him and another former Adiseshiah Awardee, Yogendra Yadav, on this question must rank as one of the finest dialogues between two specialists on a theme of great public importance. Mehta has developed a perspective on positive discrimination, which while not endorsing everything done in its name, opens the eyes of the discerning to conundrums which are found in abundance in its fold. To him should also go the credit for situating the discourse on positive discrimination within a frame of reference where excellence and equity are not seen as antagonists, rather they are perceived as capable of being creatively blended. While seeking to promote and nurture excellence Mehta is forever mindful of the need to ensure that the interests of those who require state support through interventions are protected. Mention should also be made of his sage advice to the private sector to utilize the demand for reservations as an opportunity to arrive at a legitimization of its performance not

merely as an economic unit but in terms of connecting to goals that society holds as being central. With his nuanced reading of and response to state intervention in a contentious field of policy Mehta has elevated the discussion to a new high.

As scholar, incisive analyst and commentator on contemporary issues of policy Pratap Bhanu Mehta has scaled major heights in the social sciences. And to signify his substantial and significant contributions the jury consisting of Professors Romila Thapar, S.R.Hashim and T.K.Oommen unanimously recommended that the Malcolm Adiseshiah Award for 2010 be presented to him.

Malcolm & Elizabeth Adiseshiah Trust
17,(New No. 4) First Cross Street, Indira Nagar, Adyar, Chennai - 600 020.
Phone : 044 2445 6225 • Email : meatrust@dataone.in



Prof. PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

President & Chief Executive
Centre for Policy Research
New Delhi

A Profile

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A social scientist of distinction, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, presently President of the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, was educated at St. John's College, Oxford and Princeton University. He was Professor of Law and Governance in JNU and Associate Professor of Government and Social Studies as well as Visiting Professor at Harvard. At present he is a participant in the Global Faculty Programme of the New York University Law School. He is associated with several leading international journals apart from being a well known and widely read columnist in the print medium.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta works at the meeting point of philosophy, theory and policy. This invests his work with a felicitous blend of philosophic inquiry, theoretical elegance and profundity and contemporary empirical relevance. It is this which places him in the

league of researchers of the highest quality and enables him to travel almost effortlessly from philosophic contemplation to matters of policy concerns. Mehta's research interests focus on issues of proximate as well as long term importance. The first of them is to understand India's democracy and the manner in which it attempts to contribute to the country's transformation, an inquiry he takes up in his well known book *The Burden of Democracy*. In doing so he confronts intricate questions concerning the manner in which Indian democracy has had to meet grave challenges such as harmonizing the expectations of the people who participate in the democratic structure with the legitimate roles that the state has to play. He posits as the basic quest of democracy the yearning for self-respect and interrogates the critical issue of how to ensure moral well-being and accountability. Related to this is Mehta's concern with the role of law and legal institutions and judicial intervention and the degree to which the law can help realize the social and economic objectives which society regards as of primordial significance. A third major focal point in his work relates to the consequences of globalization and whether it impedes the functioning of democracy, especially its ability to lead towards a more equitable society. Running through all these is his constant engagement with ethical issues.

A notable contribution of his is the volume he has edited with Niraja Gopal Jayal, *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India*. This work has elicited praise from distinguished authorities in the field who have hailed it as placing the study of India where it rightly belongs, in the forefront of political science. On the same plane ranks the volume edited with Devesh Kapur, *Public Institutions in India: Performance and Design*. In this the centre of discussion is the design, performance and adaptability of India's diverse range of institutions with respect to governance. A central emphasis here is the way in which the modern state strives to secure legitimacy by carrying out governance through institutions. A committed scholar and researcher Mehta has a number of publications in leading journals from all over the world. He is also a keen disseminator who is ever willing to share his views and expertise with the larger public. That this has not prevented him from rigorous scholarly pursuit is proof of his academic commitment and expresses the belief that the scholar should engage in communicating his results and concerns with those who are affected by state action.

Mehta was the Member-Convener of the National Knowledge Commission but resigned on account of a major policy difference with the government and that on a sensitive issue pertaining to positive