

IN MEMORIAM

DR. C. D. DESHPANDE

(Born 14.1.1911; Died 14.11.1999)



Born in a well-to-do Maharashtrian brahmin family as the eldest. Dr. Chandrasekhar Dhundiraj Deshpande was popularly known as CD among the academics and 'dada' among relatives and near-ones. He did his post-graduation with History and Politics as subjects from Elphinstone College, Mumbai. After a short stint as a tutor in his mother institution, he proceeded to U. K. for higher studies. He did the post-graduate diploma in Geography in the University College, London,

with Prof. C. B. Fawcett as his teacher. He had attended Prof. S. W. Wooldrige's field camps in the Weald, picking up his wisdom in field geomorphology. Returning home, without an opportunity for further studies, on account of his father's terminal ill-health, he joined government academic service at Karnatak College, Dharwar. Bulk of his academic career was spent in the Karnatak College, where he set up the Department of Geography, and trained under-graduates and post-graduates.

When the Karnatak University was formed, he became a member of its first Syndicate.

With the creation of bilingual Bombay State in 1956, he opted for the Bombay Education Service. After serving as Principal at the Government College, Visnagar, Gujarat College, Ahmedabad and Rajaram College, Kolhapur, he was absorbed in education administration to work as Chariman, S.S.C.E. Board and Director, Higher Education. During this time, he did a semester assignment as a visiting lecturer, at the National University, Canberra. Taking premature retirement he re-entered the academic world as the first Professor of the newly created Department of Geography of the Bombay University (4.12.1969). On superannuation, he shifted to the Centre for Regional Development Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi for a period of four years as a Senior ICSSR Research Fellow. Since 1980, till death, he lived in Pune. He never 'retired' in the true sense of the word, carrying on with his activities and interests in promoting the cause of geography.

Dr. C. D. Deshpande was a first generation University geographer in India. His contributions to Indian Geography were substantial. His research articles are scattered in many Indian journals such as the Indian Geographical Journal, Madras; Deccan Geographer, Hyderabad; Bombay Geographical Magazine, Bombay; Indian Geographer, Delhi; Annals of the NAGI, Delhi; Transactions of the IIG, Pune and others.

Dr. C. D. Deshpande was a regional geographer, par excellence. His association with the state government in the preparation of the Statistical Atlas of Bombay State, led him to write 'Western India-A Regional Geography', published in 1948 from Dharwar. This work eventually earned for him the D. Litt degree of the Bombay University, a decade

later. This was to be followed by the National Book Trust publication 'Geography of Maharashtra' (1971) initially in English and subsequently translated in Marathi. His magnum opus in regional geography, 'India-Regions' was the outcome of the ICSSR fellowship. Apart from these monographs, his research contributions on Bombay Karnatak, Chandanapuri Valley in Ahmednagar, Pampore in Kashmir, Naga villages are noteworthy contributions on regional aspects. His contribution to the State Gazetteers on some districts were good regional summaries at micro-level. The Geddes memorial volume on the 'Maratha Lands' brought out by the Bombay Geographical Association was an edited work of the unpublished manuscript, posthumously brought out by Deshpande in collaboration with A.T.A. Learmonth. In all these works, he brought to focus his deep insight and perception of Indian historic, cultural traditions of regions in their respective geographical environments. In his search for regional identities and personality, he was in the mould of the regional school of classical geographers.

Though he has also written on regional planning and other aspects of the discipline, an area of enduring interest to him was cartography. His contribution to the Historical Records Commission, published in the Indian Archives (1953) under the title, "A Note on Maratha Cartography" is a bench mark paper on Indian Cartography. His ambition to bring out a marathi atlas volume of the Marathi Viswakosh unfortunately did not materialise for reasons beyond him. So too, his desire to bring out a cultural atlas of Maharashtra did not fructify. In his "Shahare" written towards the closing years, he made a successful experiment of writing in marathi on urban geography for Indian college students.

Promotion of the cause of geography at all educational levels was dear and close to his heart. Apart from a constant guidance to writers of text books of school geography, in his capacity as the chairman of the text book committee of the state's "Bal Bharati," he himself participated in the writing of school text books for IV and V standards. As the chairman of the X standard text book committee, he made bold attempts to present geographic concepts in an attractive manner, with many visuals and new methods. During his sojourn at Delhi, it is his herculean efforts and hard work that witnessed the creation of the National Association of Geographers, India. He not only wrote its constitution, got recognition as a national academic forum, but also edited its journal during the first decade of its existence to sustain standards and quality. He was not pleased when the Institute of Indian Geographers was formed at Pune, and started bringing out its Transactions, because he was afraid that there were many 'national' journals, catering to regional needs, but not rising to a national status; however, at a later point of time, he was to become the President of the Institute. He had served as the President of the Bombay Geographical Association for many years, besides being a member of the Boards of many geographical journals of the country. In the late years of his life, he was feeling suffocated that adequate efforts are not flowing towards the promotion of Geography at national and regional levels. As a founding member of the Indian National Cartographic Association, he desired the coming together of geographers and cartographers, which is yet to happen.

As a geographer, Dr. Deshpande was a towering personality, but he was greater still

as a human being. He had a tall, handsome personality, admired by every one. He was a good sportsman and tennis player. He had served national cause as a UOTC officer, while at Dharwar. He had a warm, genial and pleasing temperament that endeared him to one and all. He was deeply religious. He had a unique capacity to readily mix and merge with any group of people, academics, administrators or general public. He was equally at ease with children, students or elders. He was a man with many facets. He was not only a connoisseur of good food, but himself a good cook, all the time experimenting with recipes from different parts of the country. He was a great gardener, his front and backyards in the Kalina campus were a cynosure to students and faculty because of its 'green' and pleasant appearance in the midst of a desolate waste. He was deeply attached to his family and students. He had a host of friends and admirers, abroad and closer home.

Yet Dr. Deshpande was not without human failings. Being a lover of company, he was not always discriminatory and his helpful attitude was more often than not reciprocated in equal measure. In the closing decade of his life, especially after the death of his wife, the only son, and the eldest daughter, he was feeling increasingly lonely, but had the courage of conviction to carry on, turning more and more to meditation and prayers.

In the sudden death of Dr. Deshpande at a ripe old age of 88, Indian geography has lost a pioneer, a father-figure, a helpful guide and above all a warm and hospitable human individual.

— B. Arunachalam

Prof. C. D. Deshpande was the president of the Institute of Indian Geographers for a term (1986-89) during which he guided its destiny. The president, the office bearers, and the members of the Institute deeply mourn his death and will ever remember his contributions to Indian Geography. - Editor