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On Policy, Administration and Well-being**

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Twenty-three centuries ago, over five times the span of years since Niccolò Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, an Indian Brahmin composed a political treatise on government called the *Arthashastra*. That treatise by Kautilya – or Chanakya, as he is sometimes known – synthesized behavioural principles and propositions which have remarkable relevance to development studies. As I searched for a cornerstone on which to base my inaugural lecture here at the ISS, I recalled my excitement thirty years ago on entering a world of ideas and applications beyond the confines of Euro-America. I was then an undergraduate student at the University of Minnesota studying political science, French and history, and I encountered Kautilya's *Arthashastra* as well as Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* or "Prolegomenon to History" long before I was even selected to be an exchange-student at Osmania University in Hyderabad, India. This afternoon I am going to share some of those early thoughts, tempered (of course) with a few decades of my experiences on various continents in various capacities. An advantage of this perhaps unorthodox approach is that it allows me to raise questions and proposals about public policy and administration in their broader, world-wide context through the ages rather than being afflicted – as is so often the case – with what might be called "current-events-itis" and excessive concern with the immediate here and now.

This approach also spares us from having to concoct yet one more policy model or paradigm in a field characterized by pre-theoretical thrombosis and a flood of terminological (perhaps terminal?) nonsense. At times, given the welter of nuanced formulations and phraseology in policy studies, and the apparently unquenchable urge to invent further frameworks, one recalls the adage about wars and generals, which I often apply to health care and physicians. As war is far too important to be left to the generals, and as health is too important to be left to the doctors, so development studies are too important to be left exclusively to either policy makers or policy analysts. There are scholars for whom the label "policy" serves as a sort of *mantra* or ritual incantation. If repeated often enough, such a term brings its own reward – particularly if it remains devoid of contaminating contents. Some years ago a colleague in Madison, Wisconsin, revealed how the learned term "policy" becomes a rhetorical device that prophylactically permits lots of suggestive motions without ever actually entailing any embarrassing consequences. Beware

those who arrive with policy on their lips but not in their hearts, hands or other appendages.

For this reason I will also invoke a familiar image – at least in western culture – the image of Sisyphus and his unending quest. The myth may be applied as much to the seemingly unending series of repetitive, iterative policy models and approaches, as it remains relevant to the more mundane (and perhaps therefore more real) matter of physical well-being. Later in my lecture I shall discuss the physical slippage involved in some current development policies, and raise warnings (albeit not original ones) about whether development as now measured is an infinitely sustainable process. I shall also suggest how a few well-placed wedges of policy and administration might inhibit backsliding. Since a good deal of my subsequent comments will concern the less well-known South Asian pundit called Kautilya, let me first briefly review the essence of the Sisyphian myth and refresh our memories of its significance.

Sisyphus, one of the heroes (or perhaps anti-heroes) of ancient Greece, founded the city of Corinth. As far back as Homeric times, he was reputed to be the craftiest of men; indeed, sometimes he was alleged to have fathered Odysseus, protagonist in the Trojan Wars, so great was their resemblance in the mastery of deceit, trickery and chicanery. Sisyphus repeatedly created difficulties for Zeus and the other Greek divinities, details of which need not detain us here. But the gods eventually decided that Sisyphus had to submit to his mortal destiny. Before dying, however, Sisyphus advised his wife to ignore the customary practice of ancient Greece by not providing him with funeral honours and ceremonies. Then, as soon as he reached the Underworld, Sisyphus complained to its presiding deity, Hades, about his wife's negligence and asked permission to return to earth only for a moment in order to punish her. Hades granted his request but, once Sisyphus was again back on earth, he refused to return to the Underworld. This time Sisyphus had really gone too far, and the infuriated gods punished him for his bad faith by condemning him eternally to roll up the slope of a mountain an enormous boulder which, each time it nearly reached the summit, slipped back down again (Guirand 1968:182). In sum, the myth of Sisyphus connotes and evokes the image of eternal frustration – of eternal failure. Perhaps another Greek myth, that of Tantalus fruitlessly grasping at grapes which he never

obtains, would as well serve our imagination but let me return to Kautilya and his lessons about policy, administration and well-being.

Kautilya is occasionally caricatured as an incarnation of malicious evil for, as Saletore (1963:535) notes, he "as much presented a picture of the immoral practices of kings and Brahmin ministers in the fourth century B.C. as Machiavelli did of the immoral rules of Christian statesmen in the fifteen (sic) century of his *Prince*." Realism dictates a recognition that these corrupt conditions and practices had existed long before the respective work was compiled, and that the authors had merely observed and recorded the facts, and then deployed them in a pragmatic manner. Kautilya's treatise on government opens with a verse declaring "this *Arthashastra* is made as a compendium of almost all the *Arthashastras* which, in view of acquisition and maintenance of the earth, have been composed by ancient teachers" (Shamasastri 1951:1). Kautilya selected his political formulas and principles on the basis of proven usefulness instead of idyllic formulations. Such selection of verified principles on which to construct contemporary efforts is characteristic of – or, rather, ought to characterize – modern, applied policy analysis.

Kautilya's writings are permeated by a concern for results and an evaluation of techniques in terms of success. Although Kautilya was clearly preoccupied with factual matters, the late great historian A.L. Basham (1954:80) credits him as well with a flexible approach to political realism and to the instrumental role of ideas. Kautilya comprehended the immense practical influence that ideals exert on political reality. But above all he emphasized the importance of empiricism as opposed to rationalism. Resolution in accepting the facts of observation and applying them politically is the mark of a committed empiricist. To cite Saletore again (1963:281), there is an "extraordinary thoroughness [in] Kautilya's work; its eminent inductiveness and practical character, its unflinching logic and heedlessness of adventitious moral or religious standards, and its wide range of subjects and interests which give it a unique combination of features that, in European literature, we find only separately in an Aristotle, a Machiavelli, and a Bacon..."

Like St. Augustine and many other political philosophers, Kautilya subscribed to the widely shared assumption that human nature is basically nasty. Anticipating the arguments of Thomas Hobbes by several millenia, he thus posited a rudimentary theory about the contractual origin of

political society and explained how the people of India, weary of social anarchy, had voluntarily submitted to a monarch (Basham 1954:83). Yet Kautilya also acknowledged that humankind has a capacity for good and expressed this understanding in terms contingent upon the activity of the monarch. Thus, if the king were good, the people would be likewise; if he was evil or even passive, the people's base instincts would run rampant. Chapter XIX of the *Arthashastra* lays the cause-and-effect relationship upon the proverbial line: "If the king is energetic, his subjects will be equally energetic. If he he (sic) is reckless, they will not only be reckless likewise, but also eat into his works" (Shamasastri 1951:36). In short, Kautilya emphasized the significant leverage of good governance and, on the other hand, the disastrous consequences of an incompetent state. Were he alive today, Kautilya would resonate to the trenchant conclusions of the 1991 *Human Development Report* – unambiguously stated on its very first page – that "the lack of political commitment, not of financial resources, is often the real cause of human neglect" (UNDP 1991:1).

Firmly coordinated state machinery as a mode of government marks the most sweeping variation of the Arthashastran state from the prior political order. The bulk of the treatise is actually more concerned with the minutiae of bureaucratic detail than with either the acquisition or maintenance of power *per se*. Indeed, the *Arthashastra* is frequently described more as "a manual for the administrator than a theoretical work on polity discussing the philosophy and fundamental principles of administration or of political science. It is mainly concerned with the practical problems of government and describes its machinery and functions, both in peace and war..." (Altekar 1949:5). However, while great emphasis is placed upon the prescription of the correct secretariat for government administration, Kautilya's prescriptions went much further than merely describing the static institutions of government; he also recommended extensive economic planning (Ramaswamy 1962:27) and frequent sampling of public opinion through an internal security system (Basham 1954:121). The scope of subjects discussed, and upon which recommendations were made, is extremely broad including social class, the family, the individual, education, sexual relations and prostitution, crime, local government, sundry occupations, and a variety of other topics (*ibid*). These rules and regulations in the *Arthashastra* provided blueprints for a strong, relatively centralized state complete with an extensive bureaucracy.

Recommendations in the *Arthashastra* for state initiatives and for regulation of society imply a belief on Kautilya's part in a concept of man's innate abilities similar to Machiavelli's "virtu". This quality does not hinge solely on having a goal in mind towards which to direct one's energies, but also includes the ability of governments to act and to cause their goals to become reality (Muir 1936:150). Today the term "policy" connotes such synergistic combination of goals and methods, ends and means. Furthermore, ultimate success does not depend only upon the qualities of individual leaders but inevitably, and more importantly, upon the people, their culture and capacities.

In terms of current applicability of such an ancient document, the empiricism advocated in the *Arthashastra* remains a requisite for the development of policy sciences. Reliance upon observable and verifiable (or, rather, falsifiable) phenomena fulfils a basic requirement for the scientific method. Rejection of idealism, on the other hand, is not the mark of an astute politician. While impossible to attain directly and immediately, ideals provide significant points of reference for the utilization of human energies. Promotion, or even the apparent promotion, of a common good increases the influence of the promoting government.

Furthermore the centralization of government, on which Kautilya elaborated at length, characterizes modern society. Indeed, today we are increasingly and correctly concerned about over-centralization and about possibilities for viable decentralization but we ought not to lose sight of the historical horrors of pre-centralized anarchy. One need neither love nor advocate a centralized state in order to be aware of this classic dilemma. While we can only hypothesize that part of Kautilya's success emanated from this structural emphasis on the organization of state institutions, government no longer served only as an arbitrator of mankind's basically violent nature; sheer maintenance of law and order had expanded into the promotion of a complete way of life. Rapid accomplishment of ends became possible also as popular energies came to be directed by a central authority. Whether the ends accomplished serve the well-being of humanity is, of course, a different question.

In addition to the centralization of government authority, Kautilya's prescriptions – like those of Niccolo Machiavelli many centuries later – include the use of force and coercion. The important aspect of force is not the immediate acquisition of power, but the long-range use to which

power is put. Many LDCs today, for example, continue to insist that their low levels of education, industrial development and political maturity require not only authoritative but also authoritarian allocations of energy and resources if any progress is to be made. Yet, in the long run, force almost inevitably turns upon itself; while its utilization in short range projects can achieve certain ends rapidly, coercion must be deployed carefully. The issue hinges upon the rejection of force as an end in itself and the alternative acceptance of force as the means to some end, some ideal. Unfortunately, the empirical track record of such ideational distinctions is not impressive.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the realist position represented by Kautilya is the emancipation of political affairs from the grasp and/or throes of institutionalized religion. While ideals are essential for the proper functioning of any political system, their negative incarnations as dogma and doctrine, inflexibility and immutability, become distinctly dysfunctional in the heterogeneous world of development policies. In addition, institutions of any kind tend to ossify and become corrupt, especially when they have vested interests, as recent events in Eastern Europe and elsewhere indicate. Since an ideal society is as unattainable as the mountain-top sought by Sisyphus, pluralism must be protected; no single interest or agency or party may be allowed to obtain total control of society. While development studies may suffer eternal frustration in terms of never achieving all policy goals, perhaps at least a few wedges may be inserted to prevent the boulder from rolling back down the hill.

As an illustrative application of Kautilyan practice and Sisyphean problems, let me turn briefly to an enormous subject in development studies and development policies: the overall ideal of well-being for humankind. Although this issue of well-being cannot be concluded in a life-time, much less an afternoon, I would like to sketch some aspects of the complex linkages among health care, human capital and population growth. I do so with some fear and trepidation of being misunderstood, if not charged with hubris, but an inaugural lecture probably ought have a bit of spice. And at least the example nicely addresses three major lessons of Kautilya, namely an essential empirical verification of theories; the need for vision and ideals; and an abiding concern about the organizational structures and instruments available for implementation.

Quite probably no demographic trend arouses as much concern and controversy as accelerated population growth in low-income countries. The UN Population Division estimates that between 1950 and 1985, the population of the more developed regions of the world grew by about 41 percent. During that same period the population of the less developed regions increased by about 119 percent – or almost three times as fast. Although the tempo of growth varies by country and year, this "population explosion" affects virtually every society in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The total population of these areas is now growing by over 80 million annually.

If material well-being is the boulder of Sisyphus, ecology and demography represent the slope of his eternal hill. Rapid population growth erodes whatever economic growth occurs, reducing or altogether cancelling potential improvements in living standards. It aggravates such conditions as poor health, malnutrition, illiteracy, and unemployment. Furthermore, burgeoning numbers of people overwhelm the state with demands for social services while food shortages can destabilize government. It is sometimes said that rapid population growth not only widens the gap between rich and poor countries, but also pushes humanity towards an era of scarcity – perhaps even an unsustainable over-reach of the environment's carrying-capacity. This Club-of-Rome view is well known (King 1991).

Certainly the scenario of an ever-increasing population consuming the world's resources evokes powerful emotions. But one must, like Kautilya, examine the empirical record. Experience suggests that the consequences of rapid population growth are rather different from those commonly supposed. For example, does rapid population growth prevent economic progress in LDCs? The OECD Development Center recently reviewed the economic growth rates of 32 countries, whose populations comprise about three-quarters of the current world total. The sample included China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia as well as other major Asian and Latin American countries, although it excluded all of sub-Saharan Africa due to lack of reliable data. The evidence indicates that rapid population growth has not prevented, but rather been associated with, major improvements in productivity in many of these societies. Although correlation does not imply causation, and certainly says nothing about equitable distribution of benefits, the surprising fact remains that the two trends coincided.

Rapid population growth has been driven by a revolution in health. Between the mid-50s and the mid-80s, average infant mortality rates in less developed regions fell by half while life expectancy rose by more than 16 years. At least by these particular measures of life-chances, the "gap" between rich and poor countries narrowed in recent decades. Health progress itself constitutes an improvement in living standards and suggests betterment of various factors bearing upon health, such as nutrition, education, and housing. Improvements in health also directly affect a population's economic potential. Human capital, to be sure, corresponds with economic potential rather than with actual achievement. Like other forms of capital, human capital need not be used; it might even be depleted or squandered. But the same forces that have expedited population growth in poor countries appear to have increased the potential for widespread material advance.

Despite this cautious optimism, the question remains whether continued population growth will place a devastating burden on the global environment and endanger the well-being of all by crippling the carrying-capacity of planet Earth? Global environmental degradation poses a real threat, and some argue that irreversible damage has already been done; if so, public policies can, at best, only deal with damage-control and damage-limitation. Yet concerns about impending resource exhaustion and environmental catastrophe have been voiced for more than a century. While the inaccuracy of past predictions does not invalidate current concerns, it should raise questions about why such dire forecasts have been so wrong! At the very least, development studies must stop oscillating between the gloom-laden Cassandra complex and Pollyanna's rose-tinted promises.

As I stated a moment ago, the 20th century has witnessed a revolution in health. Since 1900 improvements in life expectancy have been dramatic. Even the terrible wars – past and present – during our century have only delayed these achievements. Of course, health progress in the future might be halted by some cataclysm or a plague with which humans cannot cope. Some commentators believe the AIDS epidemic to be just such an affliction. Unfortunately, one need not wait for a hypothetical future to find examples of interruptions and even reversal of health progress in national populations. The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe provide sufficient evidence.

To mention only the former, the Soviet Union in the 1950s reported a rapid drop in overall mortality and corresponding increases in life expectancy. By the early 1960s UN agencies had estimated life expectancy to be slightly higher in the Soviet Union than in the United States. However, Soviet mortality reductions then ground to an abrupt halt. During the following decade, death rates rose for virtually all adults, male and female, while mortality rates began to rise for Soviet infants. Although the initial official reaction was to withhold data on these trends, Gorbachov's policy of *glasnost* provided evidence of their scope. Between 1970 and 1985, Soviet death rates for persons in their late forties are now reported to have risen by over a fifth; for those in their late fifties, by over a fourth. Over approximately two decades, Soviet life expectancy at birth fell by almost three years (Eberstadt 1991:124).

Information from Eastern Europe indicates that the Soviet Union is not unique. The World Health Organization recently estimated that by the late 1980s total age-standardized death rates were higher for members of the erstwhile Warsaw Pact than for such nations as Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela. Smoking patterns, drinking patterns and health care policies all played their part while environmental problems played a greater role than had previously been appreciated. Whatever the etiological origins of these trends, their implications for state power are unmistakably adverse. Rising adult mortality rates reduce the potential size of a country's work force; and rising morbidity rates divert resources towards remedial health care. In both ways, with deteriorating health, the economic potential of surviving groups may well be constrained and their morale diminished.

There is nothing immutable or inevitable about the unfavourable mortality trends in the USSR and Eastern Europe. On the contrary, given generally improving health potential worldwide, it would almost seem to require special efforts to prevent health progress. Yet those states proved to be unwilling or incapable of embracing the sort of policies that would have prevented such declines. Despite empirical evidence about substantive failures, corrective measures were not taken. One potential cause, which needs to be explored in depth, is the absence of linkages among citizens, health professionals, and policy makers. In other words, the complex mechanisms of procedural and substantive participation must be examined. And, by extension, the structures of government become

all-important because decentralization is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for citizen participation to have meaning.

Well-being is a matter not only of power but of the ends for which, and the means by which, power is exercised. Such issues are directly germane to public policy and administration. In terms of development, power needs to be guided by principles that are broadly shared by government and populations alike; by, if you will, Kautilya's monarch and people. The principles to which development studies subscribe include respect for individual rights and private property; adherence to the genuine rule of law; affirmation of the propriety of limited government; and a belief in the universal relevance of these principles.

While these values and precepts are not necessarily shared, or only intermittently acknowledged, by the states which preside over the great majority of the world's population, development studies need to examine dispassionately and objectively the empirical results of using – and not using – these principles. Some might argue that these values – the notion of a politically liberal and open socio-economic order – are culturally specific and therefore cannot or should not be promoted worldwide. Such a view, of course, is widely endorsed by governments hostile to these notions in principle, or unwilling to be constrained by them in practice. Nevertheless, the insights of Kautilya and the practical nature of the *Arthashastra* indicate that those of us who are committed to the principles and practice of development studies are not as ethnocentricly culture-bound as some would claim.

I conclude this inaugural lecture with a pair of observations, based on my approaches and concerns evident this afternoon, which are of particular relevance to the ISS and to how I envision my own role here. First is a strong endorsement of an interdisciplinary approach to applied policy analysis; second is a commitment to the synergistic tasks of research, teaching and project activities.

Applied policy analysis is inherently interdisciplinary because societal problems seldom, if ever, fall within the boundaries of any single discipline. As a consequence, a variety of disciplinary perspectives, expertise and analytical skills are almost always needed to acquire the requisite substantive knowledge and perform the required analyses. Interdisciplinarity serves as corrective counter-balance to simplistic, one-factor

determinism – whether economic or any other variety. Or as H.L. Mencken once quipped "for every problem there is a solution that is neat, and simple, and wrong!" Given the inevitable knowledge, data and analytical limitations which policy analysts face, they are *never* able to eliminate the *uncertainty* which policy makers must confront when choosing from among policy options. Although an interdisciplinary approach cannot overcome those limitations, it can help to safeguard the policy maker by broadening the research and by either filtering out or identifying disciplinary and personal biases. Furthermore, interdisciplinarity underscores the importance of historical knowledge in policy and administration. Unlike mechanistic uni-causality, history places development issues in holistic perspective and provides an integrated view of the long-term process of change.

As for my second commitment, one way to remain fresh and up-to-date in one's field is to have a research project underway that helps inform your teaching. I would submit that personal scholarship and effective teaching are highly correlated, for research enlivens the substance of teaching; it also sets an example of an inquiring mind that relishes the challenge of new questions and knows how to go about getting answers. But there are two caveats. One is that personal scholarship need not always be the same as published research. The connection between keeping current in one's field by revising course outlines regularly to include new books and articles, and providing quality performance in the classroom, is a critical consideration for every teacher.

The other caveat is that, while research may indeed make better teachers, no one should hold the illusion that serious research doesn't take time away from course preparation, grading, student conferences, and many of the other obligations of teaching. Few people so balance their tasks of teaching and research that they succeed in excelling at both. All too often superspecialization sets in and mediocre research pushes out the time needed to be a good teacher – because good teaching is more difficult than mediocre research. One of the paradoxes of scholar-teachers' lives is that teaching and research simultaneously enrich one another just as they also steal time from one another. An easy answer, of course, is balance – and a 90-hour week – and perhaps periodic reflections about Sisyphus and Kautilya and their respective contributions to our agenda in development studies. Another answer would be, if I may be permitted



to conclude my inaugural lecture on "Policy, Administration and Well-being" with an appropriate, albeit sobering, aphorism attributed to that insightful 16th century Dutch *stadhouder*, Prince William of Orange:

**We need not hope in order to act,
nor to succeed in order to persevere.**

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