

My Challenging, Fruitful M.A. in Economic and Public Administration



P C Mathur

Prakash, nicknamed 'Titi' by his dadi and called 'PC' by his friends was born in Alwar, a constituent Princely State of the Rajputana Agency since 1832, on June 1, 1940 in diasporic family of civil service Kayasthas drenched in the Mughal-Muslim culture of Old Delhi. He is a University of Rajasthan faculty pensioner with a continuing passion for academic activity 'To see Rajasthan better, To make Rajasthan better.' He lives in Jaipur with his wife Shashi, and his daughter Sfoorti works in Gurgaon.

Getting there

When I was young, my father, a civil servant, was often transferred from one town to another in Rajasthan. In 1953, when I was in Class 8, I took a State-level Board examination, and scored very good marks. Before this, I had studied in three different schools in three different towns (Alwar, Bharatpur and Jhalawar). I had two separate stints in the Happy School located at Alwar. This school still occupies a soft corner in my web of memories because it was a pioneer in adopting the world-famous Montessori method of teaching young children. More importantly, it provided a green ambience with plenty of trees to climb whose height was not a deterrent and their branches were low and strong enough to bear the weight of young primary calls students.

In 1955, I appeared in a State-level High School examination. This examination was commonly called Matric. Passing the Matric examination was a significant achievement those days. Then, I went on to appear in a State-level Intermediate (equivalent to Class 12) examination in 1957. After this, I enrolled for the B.Sc. degree. Again, I attended three different colleges in three different towns (Bikaner, Ajmer, and Jaipur). Because of these changes, I missed out on many portions of the tough B. Sc. syllabi with inevitable, disastrous results.

So, I was at somewhat of a loss when I got my B. Sc. Degree.

Nevertheless, in 1959 I cleared the coveted all-India Entrance Examination for the newly-launched Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). However, when I travelled to IIT, Kharagpur for an admission interview, as expected, I was rejected because I was born with a Harelip and a Cleft Palate. These problems had been only partially repaired by a competent Surgeon amidst the chaos of wartime Delhi.

Now, I was really at a loss.

It was only by chance that I heard some of my class-fellows talking about the bright chances of being admitted to M.A. courses at the University of Rajasthan. I made further inquiries in this regard. Indeed, there such an M.A. course in something called Public Administration but it was located in the Department of Economics. The Department was headed by Professor M V Mathur who had some linkages with the small town of Behror, Rajasthan, from which my Grandmother hailed.

However, these personal details made no deep impact in our family since my father had been out of Alwar for a long time. Moreover, he had gone to Delhi for his B.A. and M.A. degrees, while Professor M V Mathur had come to Jaipur for his High School education, and had subsequently

earned his M.A. in Economics from Allahabad University. He was selected for a faculty position in the newly-established University of Rajasthan in 1949.

Right from the start, Prof M V Mathur had established academic bridges with some top officers of the Government of Rajasthan as a part of the rising tide of Government-University collaboration in the emerging domain of Economic Planning and formulation and evaluation of public policies. Nevertheless, his name had never been heard in my family although both my father and Grandmother could relate to the family elders of Professor M V Mathur's Behror family.

And most certainly, my father had no inkling about the academic fame that Prof M V Mathur had started to earn in the Rajasthan Government Secretariat at Jaipur, since my father had been posted outside Jaipur until 1958.

The course

I sought and got admission along with seven others students for an M.A. in the new-fangled discipline of 'Economic and Public Administration'. Prof M V Mathur had designed the degree along the lines of a new course devised by Prof J K Galbraith at the University of Chicago in 1948. Prof Galbraith had combined the study of Economics with the study of Public Administration, a combination never seen before in USA. This degree was never duplicated at any other University in India. Even at the University of Rajasthan, it was, alas, dismembered after a few years.

'Economics' rather than 'Public Administration' dominated the Department of Economics and Public Administration. Economics catered to the ambitions of a much larger cohort of students, who were much better defined in the sense that they could look forward to jobs in universities and colleges. Some could even think of making a living by teaching High Schools and Intermediate Colleges, while a few distinguished Economics alumni had already made it to the coveted all-India and state-level civil services.

The Economics and Public Administration students soon learnt that the rules of the Civil Services examination explicitly reduced the success-chances of Public Administration students by ruling out the choice for combining Management with Public Administration. As this rule was not applicable to the Economics students, it clearly disadvantaged the Economics and Public Administration students with even University toppers in this discipline flailing – and, more often than not failing – in the Civil Services examinations.

The Economics and Public Administration curriculum was designed to impart a middle-heavy dose of Economics to the students. So, we studied courses such as Principles of Economic Planning, Public Finance and Statistics with students who were studying for a conventional M.A. in Economics; we were outnumbered 1:5 by conventional Economics students. These courses were taught by faculty who had M.A. and Ph. D. degrees on Economics, and they looked forward to greener pastures in Economics, not Public Administration. Our professors, even if they tried to make some efforts to address our deficiencies, could not do much.

One of courses that did not have this problem was on Regulation of Utilities. Dr. D D Narula, who went on to become a Professor of Economics the University of Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh University, later became the Secretary of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, taught this course. He was able to convey to me the nuances of regulating the public utilities at least decades before the idea was put into practice in India.

However, Professor J M Joshi who taught us Public Finance, did not have the luxury of teaching the Economics and Public Administration students alone; we had to attend his lectures in a packed hall. This was also the case with Prof M V Mathur's course on Principles of Economic Planning. His lectures were lucid, and I learnt a lot from him. Probably, my Economics class-fellows got more from him, but I can dare to say that his lectures have helped to make academic progress in understanding the administrative dimensions of policy formulation and implementation under the umbrella of the Mahalanobis model, which was adopted by the Planning Commission to promote Import-Substitution industrialisation. Mahalanobis's approach was a great modification of the planning modalities adopted by Gosplan in USSR, and included Prof Leontief's technical formulation of input-output tables.

On a personal note, not as an Economics and Public Administration student, I had some doubts about Prof M V Mathur's unquestioning assumption that the technical exercises of the Mahalanobis approach of capital-intensive investments in gigantic multi-purpose projects producing 'Machines to make machines to make machines to make ...' could be formulated and implemented by Union and State governments and their Public Sector enterprises. Could the long-term planning underlying this approach be in synch with India's electoral cycle of elections every five years? No doubt that the Planning Commission had long-term 25-year perspective-plans prepared by the Perspective Plan Division headed by Shri Pitamber Pant, but much of the practical focus was on the Five year Plans

Prof M V Mathur had created an innovative weekly General Seminar, which all the students and faculty members were expected to attend. In the seminar, a student had to prepare a paper, and be grilled on it by the attendees. Although totally unaccustomed to such an academic exercise, I enjoyed the General Seminars.

Although, as expected, the Seminars were dominated by students and teachers of Economics., I did manage to put together and deliver a General Seminar paper on what I designated as the 'Prosperous Posterity Theory'. In this paper, I discussed the lack of democratic legitimacy in economic planning. I cited economists like Hayek, and students of Political Economy like Jeweks, who figured prominently in the small-sized literature on the lack of 'fit' between Planning and Democracy, whose conjointment signalled, to a distinguished British author, Lord Hewart, the germination of a 'New Despotism' in a country which had been progressing on the pathways of Democracy since 1215 AD.

It gives me a great sense happiness when I recall the intense debate my presentation excited. My class-fellow, Ramesh Arora, presented a small counter-point paper asserting that the Planning Commission was only looking ahead for 5 Five-Year Plans and not 15 Five Year Plans. A young but very erudite Yoginder K Alagh, who was a Research Scholar in Economics, rebutted my arguments. Later, 'Alagh Sahib' as I call him even today (he has climbed several ladders up in the academic arena and also in the political hierarchy, having served as an Union Minister in the Rajiv Gandhi Council of Ministers) was gracious enough to contribute a written rejoinder for the an Economics and Public Administration Department's annual Digest, edited by Dr D D Narula.

I would like to add that I was able to publish my 1961 paper in Political Contours of India's Modernity in 1994. I would like to further like to add that my Swantantra-party biases have softened considerably; nowadays, I am almost in mourning at the unlamented demise of the Planning Commission whose exertions were able to raise the Republic of India's GDP growth-

rate from the annual average prevailing for nearly 250 years before 1950 from below 1% to nearly 2.5 % in the first 15 years in the life of the Republic of India since 1950.

Let me return to the Economics side of my M.A. We had a course taught by Dr K Vishanathiah. He had just returned from Syracuse University, which had a strong Department of Public Administration. So, he was *au fait* with recent developments in the teaching of public administration teaching in USA, which was getting increasingly inter-braided with it overseas applications as the US was slowly inching towards filling the vacuum created by the wholesale devastation of the British economy.

Gold Medal

I stood first in the M.A., examination, securing a First Division with 67 percent marks, which was a major achievement in those days. The University awarded me a Gold Medal, which was ceremoniously given to me by Prof J K Galbraith himself, who was then the US Ambassador to the Republic of India.

Compared to all other students who got the University of Rajasthan Gold Medal in 1961, my award was perhaps less distinguished because Economics and Public Administration was a newly-established discipline taught only at the Jaipur campus of the University of Rajasthan.

© P C Mathur 2015