

# Foreword

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Few short treatises can be more timely than this exemplary sketch of the problem of corruption. Disproportionate emphasis has been put in recent years on the technological, scientific and economic dimensions of social change, with insufficient treatment of the many other value-institution features inseparable from the processes involved. Not the least of these neglected aspects is corruption, a complex and pervasive phenomenon to be differentiated from criminality, for example, and other closely connected but distinctive patterns of organized and unorganized behavior.

Dr Alatas has deflated a great many hypotheses that have been put forward to account for some of the corruption that has so often appeared during the years of transition from a "traditional" society. Intimately informed as a scholar and a participant of the details of many cultures, notably those in

Southern and Eastern Asia, the author has, for instance, quietly challenged the supposed impact of the "gift" as a traditional cultural practice whose predisposing effect has been to further a contemporary sub-culture of corruption. He has successfully dealt with one of the most commonly mentioned consequences that is often alleged to justify the policies of toleration on the part of those who influence official and private acquiescence in corrupt acts. Professor Alatas spells out with great lucidity the definitional distinctions and the kinds of historical and contemporary data that must be brought into the analysis before credence could be given to the suggestion.

This temperate, scholarly and acute analysis is a prologue to what I hope will be a new burst of scientific, scholarly and policy-oriented effort to bring our understanding of corruption to the level that has been attained in the study of some other social manifestations. The approach is eminently sound because it is thoroughly contextual. Professor Alatas makes it unmistakably clear that the phenomenon in question can only be grasped when it is explicitly related to the cultural setting where it appears and with which it continually interacts.

Only the most superficial mind could be satisfied with reflecting that the "corrupt" like the "poor" are always with us, and that nothing new can be learned by exploring the form and magnitude

of corruption in any specific nation or locality. On the contrary, significant dimensions are only revealed when it is possible to identify the particular constellation of factors present in a given place at a definite time, and to ascertain their relative weight in stimulating or inhibiting corruption.

Without going further in underlining the importance of the present topic or its treatment, let me add my voice to those who will perceive in this discussion a fresh start in comprehending and contributing to the eventual control of one of the most recalcitrant characteristics of public and private life of yesterday or today anywhere in the community of man.