

## **BOOK REVIEW:**

**BASU, R. (ED.). 2020. DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC POLICY IN THE POST-COVID-19 WORLD: CHOICES AND OUTCOMES. ROUTLEDGE, TAYLOR & FRANCIS GROUP, PP 218**

---

### **Purusharth Chawla**

*Research Scholar (Masters), Public Policy,*

*Jamia Millia Islamia*

*Email: purusharthchawla@gmail.com*

The pandemic brought forth the realities of the health systems across the globe. It certainly impacted the economic conditions in both developed and emerging economies. While some have the worst inflation in decades, there are others who are on the brink of bankruptcy or under heavy debt from countries and institutions. Another change that is currently happening on a global level is the paradigmatic shift in the world order. While the fragilities of the developed economies were revealed, the strengths (and already known fragilities) of the developing world were also discovered. For instance, India's performance on the global level as the 'Pharmacy of the World' and high rate of vaccination in India, Bhutan and other South-Asian countries can be well contrasted to vaccine hesitancy in the West. When the status quo is challenged, how societies function, global alliances are formed, public policies are prepared, all transform to make a new world order beginning with the minutest to entire structural changes across departments with a citizen-centric approach, especially in democracies.

*Democracy and Public Policy in the Post-Covid-19 World* edited by Rumki Basu seeks answers to the questions of this new global order and give insights into the way in which public policy formulations might transform in the new world with an emphasis on Indian democracy and its policies. Every nation faced challenges based on their demographics, available infrastructure, and most necessarily on the policies formulated to fight the virus. However, the text discusses the challenges that democracies across the globe faced, at the core of which lay the dilemma-'lives vs livelihood' with the implementation of stringent lockdowns. The essays analyse the policies of the Union Government in face of this challenge faced by India particularly as it was necessarily a central concern for the country with the need for a strict lockdown and easing of it later in a phased manner. Another important aspect discussed at length is the health policy of the country with its absolute

strengths, loopholes, abysmal failures, and all the other components such as ramping up of public health infrastructure, controlling the spread of the virus et al. Basu in the Introduction gives an insight into the issues analysed in the text with the emphasis not only on the health policy but also policy choices on food security, education, employment and incentives among others during the pandemic. Furthermore, the text deals with global comparison among democracies, models of India and China, the impact of the pandemic and current status of sustainable development goals, and global transformations in the backdrop of all of these changes.

The collection of essays lays down the base for the understanding of a definition of public policy and various models and nuances related to it. C. Sheela Reddy's essay 'Theoretical Framework and Dynamics of Public Policy Trajectories' describes the ways in which the economic, social, cultural, political and their intersections define public policy for any demographic. Reddy describes how policy formulation is a "complex and dynamic process" (Reddy, 2021, p.32) and explains how a policy can never be based only on empirical observations. A. Venkatraman analyses the challenges to multidisciplinary approaches in policymaking in his essay. He discusses the difference in the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches and how policy solutions need to view interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral solutions to issues; in order to make informed decisions with the knowledge of trade-offs between various sectors, alternative solutions, et al.

Kadloor and Joshi, in their respective chapters in the collection, try to grapple with the serious notion of human rights and ethics linking their impact to public policies and vice-versa. While Kadloor tries to understand the relationship between human rights and human security along with the impact of their interaction on public policy; Joshi tries to find the meaning of the otherwise "vague" term 'ethics', defining ethical/moral grounds as those justified in resource allocation. He further highlights key challenges in incorporating these ethics in policy formulations. Bhattacharya discusses the passage of certain policies in the Parliament, comparing the GST implementation in India to NAFTA of the US. In both cases, rare political alliances were seen with the BJP-led NDA able to garner regional support in Rajya Sabha for the GST Bill and support to Clinton Administration's NAFTA by like-minded Democrats and Republicans.

The chapters in the second section of the book deal with the policy choices of India on education, health, e-governance, and gender and their outcomes, followed by recommendations for various sectors discussed. Ivaturi and Chitrapu in their essay discuss a need for evidence-based policymaking in

India, laying out various reasons in its favour including improvements in the quality of policies formed due to evidence from the ground at its core. Balajit Mann in his essay “State and Public Policies in India- A Symbiotic Relationship”, traces the trajectory of policymaking in the country with the direct relationship with the postcolonial Indian State and the agenda of public welfare central to all policies. Kaur and Thadaboina study the impact of ICT on administrative reforms. Digitisation is believed to streamline the data and make service delivery more efficient. The essay critically analyses the hits and misses of the digitisation of land records. In order to achieve growth and development, any nation needs a strong framework of the education system. While providing literacy is one of the Sustainable Development Goals, the education system in our nation is decentralised to include the community in the framework. In light of this, Bandhopadhyaya traces the history, role and current on-ground status of these decentralised bodies and their impact on children’s inclusion in the system.

The health realities of the country were laid bare during the pandemic with the infrastructure seemingly lacking in the handling of a health crisis. Siddhartha Mukerji in “Recent Transitions in India’s Public Health Policy” traces the bottlenecks in the health policy of the country and emphasises the need for rampant change. Furthermore, during the pandemic, the unemployment rate worsened in the country.

The need to provide temporary employment to lower-income, especially migrant labourers increased. One of the schemes that worked on the ground was MGNREGA. Moitri Dey in her chapter highlights the efficacy of the scheme and the working on the ground to achieve SDGs. Dr Basu in the last chapter of the collection presents a critique of the policies of the country during the pandemic and in relation to the ground realities of increase in poverty, gaps in education, health, reduction in income, unemployment, inflation, and many other issues concerning the public. Her analysis includes several sectors that present a broader picture of the Indian democracy at present and major challenges that it faces in the backdrop of the pandemic.

The work by some of the leading scholars of public policy and public administration paves the way for more relevant research in the field of policymaking in the post-pandemic world. The text answers several questions about public policies and becomes an important work to understand the changes in policymaking in the changing world order post-pandemic. The solutions provided to improve the situation on the ground with every sector discussed provides crucial insight on the way forward for the economy in the context of ground realities and includes social, political, cultural, economic

and other factors in formulating policy framework.

***Reviewer Bionote:*** *Purusharth Chawla is a postgraduate student of Public Administration at Jamia Millia Islamia. His interests include reading literature, analysing and writing on issues of governance, international affairs and public policy.*