

BOOK REVIEW

*Mayank Shrivastava*¹

¹ PhD Scholar, Amity University Chhattisgarh. Assistant Professor – I, Amity Law School, Amity University Chhattisgarh, Manth Kharora, Raipur (CG)

PUBLIC POLICY IN INDIA, Rajesh Chakrabarti and Kaushiki Sanyal, Oxford University Press 2018, New Delhi, ISBN – 13:978-0-19-947069-3, Pages 197, Price Rs. 350

Rajesh Chakrabarty and Kaushiki Sanyal have both been key writers whenever there is a discussion related to India's policy formulation. They have had a multidimensional focus on the subject, be it the financial, economic, or social sectors. Dr Chakrabarti is a great orator of public policy and has continuously been working in policymaking, not only in India but also overseas. Financial sector analysis and the requirements of a developing economy have always been among Dr Chakrabarty's top interests. Kaushiki Sanyal, on the other hand, is an entrepreneur having a different and more practical approach towards policy framing. She is the CEO and Co-Founder of Sunay Policy Advisory Pvt Ltd, New Delhi. She has continuously been working in the area of policy and management consultancy.

Both the authors belong to different horizons, academics to entrepreneurship, and thus have collectively paved the way towards a very wide vision for public policy and its framework in India.

Public policy has always been a very debatable and vaguely defined topic. It tends towards the open-ended questions about whether there shall be a straight-jacket formula to define it or it should be a concept based upon the ultimate object, which will differ from time to time.

The term public policy has been evolved with the eras; its traces are found from Kings and their advisors' time. If seen in the present era of Democracy and the evolution of sovereignty, it has directly been attributable to the State and its action towards the population residing there. The State action is based upon cultures & customs.

Public policy has a broad colonial and administrative history. However, it is one of those very curious, pervasive, and essential areas where a very little amount of work has been done. Policymaking has always been considered a procedural measure, and not much heed has been paid to check the nuances that are directly related to it. International publications have not covered Indian policymaking satisfactorily, which makes it quintessential to find out the character with the paucity of the resources available.

The authors have referred to the term public policy as a guide to decision making. The core of public policy lies upon the rules that affect the general public at large. There have been multiple instances where the authors have traced the presence of public policy in some way or other in the works of philosophers and thinkers of various eras like Sun Tzu, Kautilya (Chanakya), or Machiavelli. The authors have emphasised public policy as an old

¹ PhD Scholar, Amity University Chhattisgarh. Assistant Professor – I, Amity Law School, Amity University Chhattisgarh, Manth Kharora, Raipur (CG)

yet dynamic concept, which can be considered similar to management, international trade, economics, etc. All of these have ample space for advancements in all spheres of time.

The initial shreds of evidence of Public policy, as used in the current times, are found in American political history. The US president, Woodrow Wilson, back in the 1880s, emphasised the need to run the administration when he said, 'It is getting harder to run a Constitution than to frame one.' He believed that there should be a pre-defined way in which the administration of a nation should work. The concept has revolved around making the wholesome administration effective and efficient and has not been restricted to mere political establishments and objectives.

The authors in this book have emphasised the emergence of public policy in India. They have mentioned the evolution of the concept with the help of various important events and incidents that took place in the initial phase of independent India. Public policy emerged as a field in India, majorly in the Nehruvian era, when people of various important fields like economics, science, and technology contributed. Some of those key persons were PC Mahalanobis, HJ Bhabha, etc.

The soviet union's strategies inspire the Indian system of economic policies. The system of Five-Year Plans for economic advancements have been one amongst them. The plans for strengthening the economy were divided into small and more robust strategies focused upon the needs according to time, which eventually acted as a boon for the Indian economy when it took a shift from agriculture to other industries.

The policymaking saw a drastic interference of bureaucracy after the Nehruvian era ended. This change diluted the strength that was very evident and made it a monopoly of those high-level officers of Executive.

However, after the introduction of Public Policy as a subject like public management, administrative laws, etc., in the leading professional and academic institution, the concept has shifted towards more research and innovation-oriented approach. The public policy students now see it as a subject having a wide scope of evolution and growth. The current times show that public policy has become the need of the hour as many national and international organisations have advocated for a need for public policy experts to combat the new issues emerging as a result of political and administrative arbitrariness.

The book has also connected the ideas like distributive justice, collective interest, and social justice with the concept of public policy by discussing the State's requirements to fulfil the needs of every citizen in the best possible manner. The policies shall be framed in such a manner that justice should not only be framed but should also reach every person equally and fairly. Allocation of resources in an optimum manner should always be the central focus of every framed policy. Also, societal interests should always be given preference over individual ones.

A nation like India can think of reaching the epitome of preamble engraved in the Constitution only when the policies are framed, keeping them in mind. Collective interest and distributive justice become quintessential when talked about a policy that reaches all and benefits the whole population in an optimum manner. It is always expected that a policy should have the potential to cater to the whole society and the nation at large.

The book has mentioned about both theoretical and practical approach towards policymaking. It has depicted that a societal change requires a little bit more than merely good policy framing by citing the examples of khap panchayat, bonded & child labour etc. It has emphasised on the need for strict compliance which may even be extended to punitive measures. The authors have focused upon multiple theories like stages theory, punctuated equilibrium framework, multiple streams approach, which have helped the concept evolve with time.

The authors have tried breaking the whole process of policymaking into some concrete & pervasive steps. The steps begin from identifying the agenda and end not merely on implementing but extend to the evaluation of the policy so formulated. The most important step seems to be the articulation as it has the highest degree of bureaucratic interference. Articulation also is crucial because it relates to drafting a policy that remains sound on all the legal, political and moral grounds. Adoption and implementation are purely procedural steps that do not require much of brainstorming. The steps though define the manner, they lack in addressing the challenges when real implementation takes place. It becomes quintessential to find the grey areas that may lead to poor implementation and the way ahead.

A policy is highly affected by complex and vague administrative structures. The way it moves from one department to another, everyone making some or many changes in it, make it very difficult to retain the original essence of a policy. Lack of coordination across the agencies also impacts it negatively. Policymakers are chosen by an old and seemingly redundant process that does not focus on the skills that they are going to be useful. Lack of appropriate training and motivation also leads to poor implementation many times.

Based on the observations, the authors have tried formulating certain principles to make the implementation process optimum. These principles broadly include time-bound and clear targets, clarity of roles, adoption of scientific methods, inclusive decision making to enhance motivation levels, and ensuring proper feedback.

The authors have mentioned that evaluation of a policy shall always be the ultimate step as mere implementation cannot guarantee success. Every policy that is adopted can be implemented; the real problem is identified when a proper evaluation is done. The need for evaluating the impacts has been addressed with the example of international institutions like the World Bank & United Nations, which are having a dedicated department for impact evaluation. Even in India, NITI Aayog has focused upon the post-implementation impacts to check the level of efficiency of a policy.

The authors have emphasised on various techniques of evaluating the impacts of a policy based upon their usage in India. The major techniques that have been significantly used are randomised-control-trials (RCT), where random groups are created, and impacts are evaluated over them; & difference-in-difference, where the outcome is compared to the previous outcomes and the conclusion is drawn based on differences that arise. The RCT technique seems to be more effective as against the difference-in-difference technique due to its pervasiveness and effectiveness; also, this technique is not reliant upon the prior outcomes, rather it is a forward-looking process.

Once properly evaluated, a policy requires filling of the gaps. Evaluation can only introduce the gap or issue; it cannot be rectified merely by evaluating. There is a sheer need to have a framework to strengthen the overall

mechanism of policymaking in India. As per the authors, India is one such nation which has the attributes of multiple nations within. Some portions do great, some lack severely; which makes uniform policymaking difficult. India has been developing on various fronts, be it the economy, technology or even culture; which makes it even more difficult to cater to the needs of such an evolving society. The policymakers need to cope up with all these challenges in order to develop a complete and concrete policy.

There have been multiple hindrances in the process which mainly are attributed to lack of good governance; which in turn is a result of less training, low public participation, lack of information & very less academic-government connect. Good governance essentially requires a connection between the general public and the government. A situation where the government is neither accountable nor participative, governance suffers a lot. The public expects due knowledge and information from the government, and the government, in turn, should make the optimum use of the human resource by indulging more with them. A public-government contract will surely help in recognising the changes that are required in existing policies and the expectations from the upcoming ones.

In real terms, a policy is said to be empowering if it has the improvement of the standard of living as its central focus. The quality of laws & policies is many times compromised to cater to the needs of the highest proportion of society. However, there is always a scope of betterment with the help of participation & accountability. If the bills are made with an intent to show future implications, they will definitely work better.

Criticism and dissent are very strong pillars of any cultured society. The stringent laws and majoritarian views restrict an individual's power to criticise, which leads to a situation where shortcomings remain unidentified. The persons capable of assessing should get an opportunity to analyse all the benefits and disadvantages without any bias or threat. Technological advancement also contributes to strengthening the whole system thus more & wide use of technology should be promoted.

Eventually, a policy will be strengthened when people gather information about it. Lack of information is always a barrier to great feedback; thus, the focus should be on the dissemination of information to the maximum population. The use of technology and legislation should collectively focus upon the enhancement of reach and participation through proper awareness. India lacks in coordination which may have an adverse effect on access to information; the policies should always focus on bridging the gap between the agencies and the target population.

The authors have described the overall journey of policymaking in India inclusive of all the expectations and the shortcomings. Formulation of a policy requires certain concrete steps which should not only focus upon proper implementation but always have ample scope of improvements via evaluation. A policy once evaluated, reveals the gap between the actual and ideal situation. This gap is to be filled with the help of participation and involvement of all the advancements. The authors have tried explaining the flaws in policymaking in India with the help of real examples varying from political to corporate regime. The overall concept of policymaking seems to be a dynamic & ever-evolving process which requires adaptation of advancements and innovations.