

BOOK REVIEWS

Rumki Basu, *Democracy and Public Policy in the Post-COVID-19 World: Choices and Outcomes* (1st Edition) (Routledge, India, 2020), 232 pp.

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Today we are passing through one of the most turbulent crisis in the form of coronavirus. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only impacted the world in terms of health and well-being but is reshaping our lives economically, politically, socially and emotionally. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. All governments of the world are striving hard to contain the spread of COVID-19. A structured and well-coordinated approach is critical for tackling this global crisis. The spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is changing how we lead our lives and how political leaders are making decisions at the local, national and global level. The book *Democracy and Public Policy in the Post-COVID-19 World: Choices and Outcomes* (First Edition) by Rumki Basu is a sterling contribution in comprehensively presenting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on future policy making in India and other democracies. It critically analyses the existing theories, models and approaches on policy making process and studies their contemporary relevance. A similar book entitled *The Case for Democracy in the COVID-19 Pandemic* by Seedhouse (2020) explores the psychological biases; distorted risk perceptions; frenetic journalism; the disputed science; the narrow focus of 'experts'; value judgements dressed up as truths; propaganda; the invisibility of ethics; and the alarming irrelevance of inclusive democracy that have been features of governmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The edited book consists of fourteen chapters excluding introduction. This book is divided into two sections. Section I critically delves into the existing theoretical frameworks, models and approaches in the area of public policy and their contemporary relevance. Section II is completely devoted to some sectoral policies to understand the complex policy processes in India. Introductory part provides an account of global transformations, the role of India and China, democracy, state capacity and public policy, policy in India, policy choices and outcomes with respect to COVID-19, emerging global scenario, reasons for choosing democracy and the importance of policy studies. In the book *Pandemics, Politics, and Society Critical Perspectives on the Covid-19 Crisis*, Gerard Delanty (2021) provides an analysis of the social and political dimensions of the coronavirus pandemic and historical contextualisation as well as perspectives beyond the crisis. It covers areas such as the nature and limits of expertise, democratisation, emergency government, digitalisation, social justice, globalisation, capitalist crisis, and the ecological crisis. The book commences with discussions on the post-COVID-19 era. According to Basu, there is a need to rebuild a relationship of faith and trust between the state and the citizens. During this dark hour of crisis, India rediscovered the necessity of state and public action (p.11). *Public Administration in the 21st Century: A Global South*

Perspective (2019) by the author also examines the transformations happening in global societies, the economy and in politics. It presents a reassessment of governance in heterogeneous developing countries that goes beyond the traditional Weberian bureaucratic model, toward new models of organisation and management.

Section I of this book entitled Public policy frameworks, theories and approaches comprises six chapters namely theoretical framework on public policy, challenges to multi-disciplinary approaches, public policy communication, perspectives on human rights, human security and public policy, ethics and public policy and changing paradigms of strategic political process in public policy formulation and governance in India and USA. The first chapter by C. Sheela Reddy argues that the study of public policies assumes significance in the wake of global challenges such as economic turbulence, climate degradation, terrorism, health emergencies, inequitable allocation of resources and rapid digitisation (p.29). The second chapter depicts the issues and consequences of a multidisciplinary approach to policy sciences. The author concludes that the main problem of public policy is the desire for scientific knowledge to address contemporary issues on the one hand and the political nature of policy decisions on the other (p.61). Dipankar Sinha's chapter helps to analyse an understated theme, the role of public policy communication in public policy dynamics. The author concludes by saying that public policy-related communication also involves normative issues of justice, access, equity and the complicated question of democracy as well (p.73). In chapter four, Kadloor Savitri attempts to describe conceptual and policy influences that shaped the idea of human security from a human rights perspective. This chapter also seeks to demonstrate that any understanding of human security is likely to be incomplete if it does not factor in the priceless discussions afforded by the concepts of human rights, rights-based approach and right to development (p.78). The chapter on ethics and public policy by Nilesh Kumar Joshi observes that no public policy has been labelled as 'just' policy, irrespective of all conditions observed by the state. Debasis Bhattacharya's chapter provides a comparative analysis of the sharp political brinkmanship in the negotiation during the policy processes of two of the most monumental public policy reforms in two democracies – the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India and NAFTA in the USA.

Section II of the book denominated Policy making in India: choices and outcomes has eight chapters which are reflections on specific sectoral policies in India. Ramabrahmam Ivaturi and Ramya Chitrapu's chapter titled Promoting quality policy research in India: need for an evidence-based approach illustrates that evidence-based policy making has today emerged as a precondition for policy making across the world. This chapter examines the crucial importance of evidence-based policymaking in the context of India. Chapter eight titled State and public policies in India: a symbiotic relationship by Baljit Singh Mann describes public policies as a mirror image of the state framed to realise its constitutional mandate. It also highlights a paradigm shift in Indian public policy with the advent of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) (p.139). The author concludes that the neo-liberal Indian state formulated populist, neo-liberal and right-based policies which substantially undermined and partially consolidated its welfare credentials.

Ravinder Kaur and Venkatamallu Thadaboina in their chapter examines that the focus of governments in the digital age is to provide good governance to citizens by adopting information and communication technology (ICT) tools in public sector

management and public service delivery. The chapter concludes that policy changes are required for effective implementation of the programme. In chapter ten, Madhumita Bandyopadhyay considers the role and process of decentralised planning and management of elementary education involving local authority as well as SMCs (p.158). Siddhartha Mukerji in his chapter emphasises that the development of a nation largely depends on the health and well-being of its citizens. The chapter explains the pattern of policy transition in the health sector, with a special focus on public health policies in the post-COVID-19 era. In the book, *COVID-19 and Public Policy in the Digital Age*, Monti & Wacks (2021) explores how states and societies have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and their long-term implications for public policy and the rule of law globally. It examines the extent to which existing methods of protecting public safety and national security measure up in a time of crisis. It provides a critical analysis of the notion of global surveillance in relation to the pandemic.

Pratip Chattopadhyay's chapter is a case study of Kanyashree Prakalpa programme in West Bengal. Chattopadhyay concludes that the degree of inclusiveness of Kanyashree dodges initial politicisation and recurring criticism and translates 'development as freedom' in practice in the highly politicised India of our times. The chapter titled 'Efficacy of MGNREGS in achieving SDGs' by Moitri Dey explores the efficacy of the policy to achieve the targets of the SDGs. According to Moitri, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has been recognised as a 'core of the core' policy to achieve SDGs (p.210).

The concluding chapter entitled the Indian state, democracy and the citizen: public policy challenges in the post-COVID-19 era, examines the impact of the COVID 19 on India. *Indian Administration Structure, Performance and Reform (2019)* by the author traces the transition from an era of 'government to that of 'governance which has brought the Indian administrative system to the threshold of seminal changes in the 21st century. The reform initiatives in Indian administration in the post-globalised era have been tracked and new emerging concerns have been outlined. The author argues that the post-COVID-19 era will require both the Centre and the states to work in coordination for major policy reforms in every sector (p.223). Another book titled *Public Administration in the Time of COVID-19* by Robinson, & Wehde (2020) illuminates public organisation's responses to COVID-19. Furthermore, it opines that response to COVID-19 will require networked responses from public organisations as well. The author concludes by saying that, in the post-COVID-19 period, all democracies in today's post-globalised era need to renegotiate the relationship among state, society and the citizen.

This book provides immense knowledge to the readers to understand the two world approach of public policy making today. The present book will be of great interest to scholars and researchers of public administration, public policy, political theory, globalisation and global democracy. Another positive thing about this book is that it attempted to address some sectoral areas to understand the complex policy process in India. The contributions of feminist perspectives have made important contributions to the study of public policy. A significant critical examination of the book is that it ignored the need for a gendered analysis of policy design. Reading through this book, it is found that the authors have ignored some pertinent areas and issues with regard to democracy and public policy like the social welfare and

citizen administration, the implications of COVID 19 on society and polity in other democracies, role of different stakeholders in the management of COVID 19, public policy and the mass media. Mass media plays a crucial role in information distribution and thus in the political market and public policy making. Nonetheless, the book will also be of interest to bureaucrats, NGOs and government officials.

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