

## BOOK REVIEW

**Democracy and Public Policy in the Post-COVID-19 World: Choices and Outcomes**  
Edited by Rumki Basu., Routledge 2021 pages 217

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Rumki Basu, Professor of Public Administration and former Head of the Department of Political Science, Jamia Millia Islamia has presented an anthology of articles on the likely impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on future policy making in India and other democracies. She has critically looked at the available theoretical frameworks, models and approaches used in the policy making process and studied their contemporary relevance. Further she has examined India's policies on education, health, e-Governance and gender and work and provided recommendations for the future.

Rumki Basu is eminently qualified for undertaking this work having published 12 books and 40 articles on issues of public policy and governance, international organization and the political economy of development in India. She has presented several papers at the World Congress of Political Science over the past 3 decades and was conferred a research fellowship by the Indian Council of Social Science. Prof Rumki Basu represents the pre-eminent scholar in Public Administration in India [today](#), widely respected for her thoughts on public administration and public policy.

The book research was undertaken in 2020 in the backdrop of the pandemic and the book has 14 chapters which examine the normative and the empirical. Section I looks at the empirical framework has 6 chapters and Section II is India specific has 8 chapters. The theoretical frameworks, models and approaches are examined in Section I and in Section II the normative impact of some of the sectoral policies have been examined.

Prof Rumki Basu introduces the subject of **COVID-19 pandemic as a once in a century crisis** event where the whole world is sailing in the same boat in fighting the challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a period when strengths and the fragilities of the governance capacity systems have been severely tested necessitating an imperative rethink on the public policies of the State. In India, the challenge of saving lives and then saving livelihoods was a policy question the Government faced. The dependence of the public on the State capacity which is heavy even in normal times became so much more onerous in the crisis situation that India had never faced before. She presents the view that benefits of good governance can be best brought about in democracies where a notion of good governance defines citizen entitlements. One major lesson the COVID crisis has brought forth is that in the darkest hour of the crisis, India rediscovered the necessity of the state and public action. The Indian experience has been one where scrutiny of public policies was widely seen

The chapter "**Theoretical Framework and Dynamics of Public Policy**" by C.Sheela Reddy presents the incrementalist and the rational paradigms of public policy. The third approach is the strategic planning approach combines the strong features of incrementalism and rationalism. Globalization and the information age have been fundamental in altering the balance of power between the state, markets, civil society and actors in governance. The new

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concepts of information age are e-Governance, good governance, minimal government, reinventing government and public-private partnerships. These represent a process of state transformation. The citizen is the kingpin of administration and public policies must aim at upholding citizen interests. The chapter “**Policy Making**” by A.Venkatraman discusses the multidisciplinary and inter-disciplinary challenges in policy making. The only common denominator of public policy is the public.

The chapter “**Public Policy Communication**” by Dipankar Sinha says communication is the essence of public policy both as a process and as a product, and public policy cannot be analyzed without an informed communication theory. In post liberalization India, information and communication technology is being publicized as the back bone of networked governance. Networking vis a vis both governance and technology is inevitable as development is determined by informational mode and constructive networks. Strategizing public policy communication as two-way process would enable open, transparent, responsible and accountable policy making through economic deregulation and political decentralization.

The chapter “**Connecting the Dots and Locating the Linkages**” by Kadloor Savitri provides conceptual perspectives on human rights, human security and public policy. The advancement of the human rights approach to development is amongst the greatest achievements of the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development. The Rights based Approach has been used to analyze the policy initiatives undertaken by the State to deliver public goods and services and thereby to alleviate the position of the poor and marginalized in the developing world. The Rights based Approach imposes certain principles as responsibility, accountability, transparency, non-discrimination and rule of law emphasizing a link between human rights and human development. Two major examples cited in this regard are the right to food as a constitutional right setting off policy actions for Mid-Day Meal Scheme and the National Food Security Act 2013 and the right to life through statutory provisions as MGNREGS.

The chapter “**Ethics and Public Policy**” by Nilesh Kumar Joshi says that the ethical approach signifies impartiality and universality and priority over other approaches. The ethical and moral dimensions of policy making are all about justice through resource allocation. The political system has remained committed to the values of freedom, democracy and participation. The gradual withdrawal of the State has raised ethical issues in accessibility to services, as was seen in the case of 2G spectrum allocation resulting in the cancellation of licenses of over 100 operators by the Supreme Court.

The chapter “**Changing Paradigms of Strategic Political Process in Public Policy Formulation and Governance**” by Debasis Bhattacharya highlights the need for bipartisan political consensus in making public policy decisions of importance like the Goods and Services Act in India. The launch of the GST in 2016 represented momentous tax reform which sought to eliminate tax terrorism and inspector raj, end black money and corruption while ensuring self-automated policing using the GST network. Further the GST council represents the spirit of cooperative federalism. This seminal reform was possible because of the unconventional multiparty political support.

The chapter “**Promoting Quality Policy Research in India**” by Ramabrahmam Ivaturi and Ramya Chitrapu deals with Evidence Based Policy Making emerging as a sine qua non for policy making across the world. One of the major challenges of making EBPM a reality is the availability and accessibility of data. The authors present examples of how EBPM based on budgetary allocations and utilization can help enhance the efficacy of policy making in school

education and higher education. The EBPM has been examined in the context of the utilization pattern of education cess levied since 2004 to create a dedicated fund whose proceeds are spent on two programs – Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid-Day Meal Scheme financed by the Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh. The EBPM can significantly enhance the efficiency of policy making in India.

The chapter “**State and Public Policies in India**” by Baljit Singh Mann deals with the transformation in the nature of the State from liberal to neo-liberal, interventionist to regulatory has posed a threat to welfare credentials. The public character of public policy is potentially seen as a casualty of globalization. The author holds the view that a neo-liberal policy regime can leave behind marginal peasants, tribals, farmers and unskilled workers and the Indian state cannot afford to ignore these sections of society in formulation of public policy.

The chapter “**ICT Applications in Land Records Administration in India**” by Ravinder Kaur and Venkatamallu Thadaboina presents the thrust of government to adopt information and communication technology in public sector management and public service delivery. The National e-Governance Plan comprises of 27 Mission Mode Projects, , e-Office, e-district, e-panchayat, CSC, pensions etc at the central, state and local government levels with the objective of improving service delivery to citizens. The Digital Land Records Modernization program (DILRMP) launched in 2016 envisages computerization of all land records, survey, and sub-registrar offices. Capacity building of Revenue officials has been pursued across the country.

The chapter “**Policy and Practices of Decentralization of Elementary Education in India**” by Madhumita Bandyopadhyay deals with the initiatives for improved governance of education with the functioning of community-based organizations especially the school management committees. The New Education Policy 2020 speaks of a school complex management committee for robust governance, monitoring and oversight, encouraging the local community to participate in school education. The author says that more efforts are needed to involve the SMCs as partners and ensure genuine community participation.

The chapter “**Recent Transition in India’s Public Health Policy**” by Sidharth Mukerji deals with the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. The chapter also covers another scheme the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana as a scheme that provided universal health insurance coverage with an insurance cover of Rs. 30,000/ BPL family of 5 members with cashless delivery. Some of the State Health Insurance Schemes include the Aarogyasri and Yashashvini. The National Health Agency established as an attached office of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has been mandated to implement the PMJAY scheme. The NHA has collaborated with MeITY to build technology platforms. The chapter also covers the success story of Kerala in handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

The chapter “**Emotive Policy in a Political Democracy**” by Pratip Chattopadhyay presents a case study of Kanyashree in West Bengal. The program launched by the Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare of Government of West Bengal has received appreciation from the United Nations is aimed at reducing underage marriage and adolescent school dropout among girls. This was achieved by providing scholarship named ‘Swami Vivekananda Merit cum Means Scholarship Scheme’. State wide networks were formed using NGO’s to improve scheme implementation.

The chapter “**Efficacy of MGNREGS in Achieving SDG’s**” by Moitri Dey explores the efficacy of the policy to achieve SDG targets using MGNREGS. The MGNREGS is the first ever law internationally to guarantee wage employment on an unprecedented scale. The MGNREGS has been identified as a core of the core policy adopting technology/ direct benefit transfer and geo-tagging, verification of job cards to ensure completed assets since the inception of the program are placed in public domain. The MGNREGS represents an important instrument to end poverty.

The chapter “**The Indian State, Democracy and the Citizen**” by Rumki Basu says that the pandemic has shaped public discourse on key issues of public policy and India has seen and understood the centrality of state power in this time of the pandemic. Livelihoods, public health, jobs, social security benefits, income support to ordinary citizens in times of distress are key public policy challenges addressed by the State which need short term and long term policy interventions.

The book is timely and is a thoroughly enjoyable read.

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