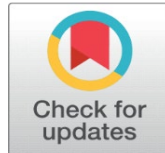
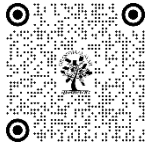


A SYSTEMATIC FAILURE OF PUBLIC POLICY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Public Policy is whatever a government does or doesn't. Any country's development or the lack of it is directly correlated to its public policy. This fact is understood by every political party coming to power. Yet, India hasn't reached that stage of development that it was expected to after nearly 75 years of independence. This research paper endeavours to identify the various reasons behind this failure which looks more systematic than incidental

Keywords: Public Policy, Development, Government, Politicians, Policy Makers

1. INTRODUCTION

India's retarded development despite a huge demographic dividend, a massive repository of natural resources even after so many years of independence has given rise to a question and answer ensuing debate on the failure of public policy in the country. India's case seems to be befitting with Thomas Dye's definition of Public Policy that it is "whatever a government chooses to do and not to do."¹ In India it looks more like an act of omission on the part of ruling parties than an act of commission with respect to the public policy process.

The Public Policy process entails the following steps²-

- Agenda setting
- Policy formulation
- Legitimation
- Policy implementation
- Policy evaluation

The governmental wings involved in the policy process are the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary.³ Non/Extra- governmental institutions participating indirectly in the public policy process are primarily the media and civil society groups. The role of the aforesaid institutions would be discussed vis-a-vis all steps of the public policy process to understand the failure of it.

"It is commonplace for policy failure to be attributed to poor implementation. Politicians, officials, and members of the public often find it convenient to blame those responsible for putting policy into practice, rather than examining the policy design or political context itself."⁴ However, the very foundation of the process i.e. Policy formulation is something that has several lacunae in India. "Policy formulation in India often suffers from a lack of rigorous analysis, weak stakeholder consultations, and poor coordination between ministries. These gaps contribute to inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the final policy outcomes."⁵ Numerous thinkers on Public Policy like Herbert Simon, Charles Lindblom, David Easton and many others have elaborated on the various choices a policy maker might exercise while formulating a public policy. All their theories are based on the grounds the choices are exercised in reality, as compared to the ideal one i.e. choosing the most rational policy. In the case of India it seems that choosing the most rational policy doesn't seem to be the preference. The most befitting theory in India's case seems to be the 'Power Approach' to policy making. The demographic dividend of India which if in fact could have been truly democratic in spirit would have arrested this tradition but it has on the other hand become beneficial to the politicians during and after the elections. They don't need to be sound in terms of policy making because that is hardly a topic of attention for the majority of the electorate. The elite are themselves a party in the policy formulation. The middle class are too busy in climbing the socio-economic ladder and the bottom-most rung of the society is myopic, gullible and easily satiable. The result of it is that an incremental approach is being used by the policy makers wherein they like to play safe and old wine in new bottle continues to be sold. Apart from the inertia to modify policies in accordance with the need of the hour, another hesitation on the part of policy makers is to cause any such effect which might shake their foundation. For instance, it is a well established fact that education and health are two most significant sectors for any country because they have a ripple effect on the entire demography. "Investments in education and health yield high returns not only for individuals but also for society as a whole. Improvements in these sectors have multiplier effects—reducing poverty, improving productivity, and promoting sustainable development."⁶ Yet, these two sectors are being systematically ignored by way of making weak policies and even weaker implementation. The policy makers are aware that educated and healthy demography will eventually be politically aware and alert too and then would no longer be a victim of mere eyewash done by the politicians. If infrastructurally the nation may witness a sea change, it is difficult to digest that the same cannot be replicated in such critical sectors like education and health, despite a demand from the recipients of the benefits. If the private sector may offer world class facilities in schools and hospitals created by them and if government schools in a city like Chandigarh remain coveted, it is clearly an act of omission on the part of the government.

The very beginning of policy making in case of India seems to have gone wrong. "India's post-independence policy-making was heavily top-down, driven by a centralized bureaucracy with limited public participation. This technocratic approach, inherited from colonial governance structures, often failed to accommodate grassroots realities and democratic aspirations."⁷ Not denying the fact that the forefathers of a new nation tried to chalk out a plan that they found the best, the fallacy has been in not modifying as per the demand of the situation. From being totally a state-controlled economy to not fulfilling even its regulatory role properly, the masses have become a victim of an absentee government and crony capitalism. Another two significant pillars of the economy viz industry and agriculture also have borne the effect of this failure heavily. With a massive and diverse agricultural land, if we are far from surplus in agricultural export and contradictorily if some of our people still sleep hungry, it is nothing short of a colossal lapse in the policy. "India bypassed the traditional manufacturing-led path to development and jumped directly into services, particularly IT. This unusual trajectory has led to jobless growth, where millions of youth remain unemployed even as industries like IT struggle to find skilled workers."⁸ Again, a simple solution of promoting the underdeveloped manufacturing sector and skilling the youth seems to only find a mention only in political manifestos and later in policy documents.

All the aforesaid examples make one reach to only one conclusion that it is a deliberate state of omission on the part of the government to keep the country underdeveloped so that the rift between the powerful and the powerless, the elite and the non-elite never gets dissolved. The politicians, the bureaucrats and the capitalists are hand-in-glove in keeping a nation restricted to meet its capacity.

Another as critical as ignored step in the policy making process is policy monitoring and policy evaluation. This doesn't seem very surprising because in a case where the policy formulators are below par in their capacity and are cognizant of it, policy monitoring becomes nothing more than a farce. More so this is done by them on the pretext of being short of human and financial resources. Policy evaluation again is rarely done or improperly done or if at all done, is nothing short of a post mortem and even that is not put in use for future action.

India therefore seems to have got stuck in a vicious cycle where the political parties in connivance with each other are keeping the masses underdeveloped so that they don't rise to become a revolution and till the time, masses do not become aware of their political responsibility, a revolution would be far fetched.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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