

Event: Public Policy Priorities for India in the Post Covid Era

Organized by: Civil Society of Department of Political Science

Date: February 26, 2021

Number of Participants:87

Civil society is a crucial segment of Department of Political Science which aims at amplifying students' knowledge on various contemporary issues. In commitment to its objectives, society conducted seminar on 26th February 2021, 'Public policy priorities for India in the post covid era' in a virtual mode. The event was enlightened by Prof. Rumki Basu, Head of the Department of Political Science, JMI. The event began with emphasizing that year 2020 was the turning point where issues such as governmental capacities and role of public policy occupied the center stage. Even though we are operating in globalization era, every problem is still a national problem and states have to keep its citizens in mind while addressing crises. Highlighting the lockdown during pandemic, speaker stressed how it was looked as lives vs livelihood issues, where first lockdown was implemented to save the lives then attempt was made to save the livelihood and both these issues were serious public policy issues. Pointing towards revamping health system as another necessity which the ruling regime had to address, she argued providing laborers and workers with food and transport was also contemplated as government's responsibility especially in case of unorganized sector. Therefore, to develop government capacities is crucial not only in crises but also in normal time.

Further discussing, speaker stated, since 2020 India has changed in influential ways ever since confronted with such serious multidimensional crises in history. In this context, public health system emerges as a crucial factor not only in determining strength of country but also in reviving economy which has again shifted to state initiatives. Government launched stringent lockdown in March 2020 for three months with other measure to control pandemic and came to attain the heights. Since Indian citizens were not looking at the private sector for any services be it food or medicines. The centrality of the state was acutely reflected in the health care system. This expanding role of state required new ways of doing work whether it is video meeting of prime minister, arogya set app, to deployment of people for contact tracing, the state was realigning priorities. The lockdown reflected that state could use its capacities to implement its objectives. Soft democracy like India can turn hard if needed to have expected outcomes. Besides, this

lockdown would not have been successful if citizens have not complied with the state directives as their participation is important for successful policy implementation.

Some of the public policy challenges that India facing is climate change, human development, infrastructure, which need to be priorities for rebuilding the relationship of faith and trust between state and citizen. If we examine federal practices today, post covid 19, we need to understand the context in which policies are made in India. As, pandemic has reflected the necessity of having state and center coordination. We cannot undermine the role of state against the pandemic and in post covid period, state should push the structures and take the bold reforms, towards SDG which are essential for good governance and the way towards true welfare state in India. What is required is to convert public needs into public entitlements as hallmark of good government is what it does for its citizens. It is essential to plan nation's future, enhance state's capacity which can be the only way to be substantive democracy. Pandemic has played a pivotal role in shaping key issues of public policy. As a consequent of which issues such as job, education, with social security etc. are to be prioritize in public policy making and implementation because this governs the citizen state relationship.

The speaker emphasized on various ways to bring the state back on track, on the path of recovery. Public policies should be so framed which helps state overcome losses and restraints suffered due the pandemic and by which the economy of the country could be revived. The primary emphasis was that policies and structures should be striving towards a welfare architecture where planning should be focused on managing the resources in an optimum manner. A need for systematic planning, proper utilization of human resources in the form of skill mapping of our work force is the need of the hour. In the same context, she further elaborated on the education sector. Where the revised New Education Policy with its focus and goals revolving around critical thinking, experiential learning, integrated pedagogy, and inclusive digital education holds great potential. The policy is centered around reforming the critical tenets of access, equity, infrastructure, governance, learning and education. Some other aspects which she suggested were proper implementation and reinforcement of labour laws in private and informal sector, structural reforms for growth, managing the migrant crisis and proper regulation of market reforms along with technological sophistication to mention a few. The guiding theme could be self-reliance.

The speaker also emphasized that, how democratic public policy making has to mold itself according to the changing demands and exigencies of the time, without compromising on the democratic spirit or to be precise, 'prioritization is prima facie.' Pandemic has forced to rethink the relation between citizen welfare as a moral imperative along with balancing of the procedural and substantive aspects of democracy. State citizen relations have to emanate from the idea of welfare state, which has to focus on aspects like livelihood, public health, jobs, social security benefits, income support, making the country a true substantive democracy in terms of citizen entitlement. State's role had to magnify to keep up with the exigencies of the time. State power is becoming important to make changes such as proper governance, proper channelization of finances, containing lack of political will and bureaucratic sabotage. Policies have to be framed keeping in consideration short term goals and long-term vision, which requires a consensus that had been forged democratically.

Consensus requires a gradual approach, for which instrumentalism is the need and not a radical outlook. She ended her talk, by bringing in discussion on Francis Fukuyama, and how he has compared the Chinese model and the Indian model of governance. According to Fukuyama the Chinese model of governance might seem to deliver in the public domain as its autocratic but it is not sustainable. He has very strongly supported the Indian democratic model as it is more sustainable and morally superior in the twenty first century. This was followed by Dr. Pillai giving closing address by emphasizing on state and its apparatus as instrumental in taking a proactive role, and how privatization needs to be balanced with state intervention. He explained how the state has to transform itself accordingly for a proper implementation of SDG's. This was followed by the questions posed by the students which revolved around, circumstances within India considering the covid times, how to formulate a single accommodative policy, for all states to implement, the questions were also centered around national health protection scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana, Aayushmaan Bharat along with structural reforms that are needed after pandemic.