

Simplifying public policies for a larger public without losing focus

By Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao,
Primepost, March 27, 2022

Despite proliferation of public channels of communication of a variety in recent years and their access to many more people cutting across the divisions, it cannot be said today that we are more sensitive of public policies or actively involved in their implementation. How come?

Why there is no evidence that even public leaders within and outside legislatures are familiar fully with many contentious policies and programmes and the ground realities. What is interesting is that deliberations in legislatures are often abrupt and disjointed as if they are not sensitive of pros and cons or their implications or concerned enough to pursue. Such a vacuum could be an explanation for abrupt public policies and hardly any deliberations on core of the issues. News media could equally be blamed for this vacuum and dilemma. Examples recently are too many.

Decline in public discourse

A visible result of such a trend is decline in public discourse and escalation in personalised animosities all across not only between political pleaders. This conclusion is what I reached after I did field research over the decades on the process of development, functioning of democracy and efficacy of governments. This is what I reflected in my Over a dozen books. But neither of the books despite elaborate backup have evoked response perhaps because most of the books involve political parties and the govts. who are generally not enthusiastic to change unless it has some connection to electoral prospects.

Against this background, I started writing a regular column for the PrimePost nearly two years ago. So far I had written over sixty columns on contentious and contemporary topics. In the process I realised how the mainstream media is divided, backing and rallying around mostly the powers of the day as an easy and beneficial option. The column I wrote last fortnight on changing face of villages with specific example has prompted impressive response and raised concern more than the research earlier or the books I wrote . This confirms my impression that it is better to focus on columns on Contentious issues as a priority.

Gandhi endorsed the idea of public libraries

A casual review brings out that public policies had better track of acceptance, chance of implementation and make a difference where public libraries and public reading had extensive presence and network until recently. Their decline signals decline in policies losing their public centrism. That was how libraries were part of freedom movement and Mahatma Gandhi too endorsed the idea. In fact, schools too were but next only to public libraries in taking forward the national ideas. That was how Liberal outlook in people and movement for independence gained momentum. Idea of setting a public library of a widowed women who never went to school 1930s in my own village, Mudunuru, is one such example. Parallely a mobile cyclostyle

machine had become the source to print in the nights in sugar fields. My father was the operator and responsible then both for taking the pamphlet paper and for activating public libraries. That was how Mudunuru became a nodal point of freedom movement in this part of the country. That was how the first Act in India on public libraries was adopted in 1948 itself by the then Madras Government. No wonder Jawaharlal Nehru described library and school as modern temples of India same way as the irrigation and power projects like Bakranagal or Nagarjun sagar were viewed.

Putting things in larger perspective

Writing columns in public platforms are more likely to remind and put the themes in larger context. The examples include the two articles I wrote on PK phenomenon, about the idea of simulations polls that the govt was trying to test out or the caution called for in adapting a population policy by the UP government. These are three examples how the arguments have sunk into the right quarters for a more logical consideration of those in decision making. They either stalled the foray or sidelined for a reconsideration. On the other hand, the Next Big Changer of Elections with a comprehensive argument and even specific alternative proposition for electing people's representatives has not been taken note of. May be I have hit the nail on the core of all pervasive malice. We now need to see whether the Rejuvenating the Republic idea that I have followed up with the book on the subject with a couple of columns, will help a rational choice of the next President of the country. Elections come and go like seasonal rains. But independent libraries and schools remain eternal pathways for future and sustain too. They sow ideas, evoke potential in people and build capacities too.

(Dr. N Bhaskara Rao is a longstanding public policy analyst.)

<https://www.primepost.in/simplifying-public-policies/>