

# The Role of Bureaucracy in the Public Policy Making: A Review

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## **Abstract**

*Etymologically, the term “policy” comes to us from Greek, Sanskrit, and Latin languages. The Greek and Sanskrit root polis (city-state) and pur (city) evolved into the Latin politia (State) and later, into the Middle English policie, which referred to the conduct of public affairs or the administration of Government. The etymological origins of policy are the same for two other important words: police and politics. This is one of the reason why many of the modern languages, for example German and Russian, have only one word (politik, politika) to refer both to policy and politics. A policy is a blue print which guides the Government for the achievement of desired goals. It may be defined as a public need assuming importance and as far as possible, appropriately assessed for its actual fulfillment. It involves an identified and definite public problem and the preparation of State to meet it in particular style. It conceives a line of action to achieve a certain result negative or positive and to refrain from acting on a specific issue or matter. Policy as a rule is the product of extensive study and intensive analysis of available data and information. Therefore, it is apparently believed to be superior function confined to the top layer of administration.*

**Keywords:** *policy making process, India, bureaucracy, political executive.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The essence of public administration is policy making. Policies are vital for planning a course of action. They supply necessary guidelines which help in planning, implementing and realizing desired objectives and in keeping the activities of the objective within a prescribed frame work of action. Policies thus give meaning and form the objective. Although public policy has been a major concern of social scientist and the general public for a long time, there is considerable disagreement over what public policy is and what it is not. There are two standard definitions of public policy-one broader and one narrower. The narrower definition of public policy focuses on direct impact of specific governmental decision, the more comprehensive definition includes the governmental and non-governmental factors influencing those decisions. The word ‘bureaucracy’ was coined in the 18th century to refer to “a State dominated by appointed officials”. Max Weber, whose name is closely associated with bureaucracy, has emphasized its indispensability for the rational attainment of the goals of an organization. He has advocated modern bureaucratic form of organization as it is based on legal-rational authority. In fact, it is the legal rational character of the bureaucracy that is supposed to determine the overall form and content of organizations in the present context. The rules, regulations, procedures, written documentation, impersonal norms, neutrality, anonymity, nonpolitical criterion of selection, training –all are expected to contribute to the strength of legal-rational framework of organization. After independence, the Indian Government, both at

the Center and the State, adopted policies for ensuring economic development and social justice for meeting the rising expectation of masses. This led to the increase in the size complexity of the Government operations and greater responsibility upon the shoulders of senior administrator as they have to respond positively to the process of economic development and social change. This resulted in the expansion and consolidation of formal powers in the hands of bureaucracy. Besides, it has left substantial discretionary powers with them as the rules and regulations are not extensive and elaborate enough to cover all matters. Moreover, it created significant competence and expertise and in turn increase the effectiveness of the role of public officials who became experts on the problems. The observation of C.P. Bhambri on this aspect is worth to be noted which says: “from limited Government we have moved to the era of “big Government.” ...though “big Government” is a universal phenomenon but in the developing countries it assumes special significance. “Big Government” assumes “big bureaucracy” it is truism to say that the greater the area of public policy, the greater is the role of implementation and service agencies”.

### **POLICY MAKING PROCESS IN INDIA**

Policy making is a vital function of Government. The process of policy making begins with the ideas and opinions people have about the actions they want the Government to undertake. When the Government undertakes such a commitment, it has the legal authority to do something that individuals cannot do. The governmental and administrative processes comprise of a vast mass of a decisions made almost daily. A policy decision involves action by some line official or body to reject, alter or accept a preferred policy alternative. If positive, it takes the shape of legislation or the issuance of an executive order. Indian democracy is based on Rule of Law. Top level policy making has to be translated into detailed and explicit laws, rules and regulations and the process of law before the implementation. As the State assumes the welfare approach trade, commerce and industry sector emerged as vital sector of policy making. Constitution of India allows the State to exercise monopoly in certain sector of trade and commerce; State control a substantial part of banking which affects private business as well. Decision making in this sector rest with top bureaucrats to a great extent subjected to only broad policies laid down by the present Government. In a vast country like India growth problem combined with welfare approach is multifaceted and requires cooperation of various authorities. In a welfare State, administrator has to perceive coordinated policy approach to satisfy all the facets of a program and promote the principle of social justice. In performing these entire tasks, a professional policy coordinator turns as a policy maker with a transition stage of policy guide.

Under Article 77(3) of the Indian Constitution, the Government has framed Rule of Business for its conduct. The Rule of Business govern the procedure for decision making within the ambit of these rules, policy decision are taken by the Council of Ministers, particularly by Cabinet. Policy and administration are intimately related and are an integral part of executive Government. It may be said that policy decisions are decisions made by public officials that authorize or give direction and the content to a public policy action. A decision may be taken formally or informally if it is to be implemented. Union Cabinet on 3 October 2008 gave a nod for payment of Productivity Linked Bonus (PLB) equivalent to 73 days wages to the eligible

non-gazette railway employees for the financial year 2007-2008. It also gave its approval for rising the age of superannuation of ICMR scientists from 60 to 62 years to enable the Council to retain the service of experienced scientists and attract talented scientists to join the Council, thereby bolstering medical research activities in the country. This policy decision by the Union Cabinet was not placed before Parliament for approval. Indeed, it may be said that some important decision on policy is often taken informally. Cabinet makes use of the Committee system to facilitate decision making in specific areas like Cabinet Committees on political affairs, economic affairs, minorities' welfare, trade and investment and ad hoc Committees which are constituted to investigate and report on specific issues as and when the need is felt. A vast number of decisions are of course, taken by individual ministers within the ambit of the rules for the business of the Government, and these are fully authoritative decisions on behalf of the Government. The actual functioning of the Cabinet system largely depends on the leadership style of the Prime Minister and, in recent times, the holders of this office have tended to be the principal decision makers supported by their independent Secretariat over a period of time the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), headed by a secretary has tended to become a super ministry of officials who are accountable only to the Prime Minister. In addition, the Prime Minister often enlists the support of experts as advisor to assist him in the discharge of his policy making functions in certain areas e.g. science and technology. In some ways the National Development Council (chaired by the Prime Minister and the inter alia comprising Central Government Ministers and the Chief Ministers of the State Government) is the highest policy making body in the country. It is, in effect, a forum for arriving at a consensus on major policy issues. The other "super" policy making body is the Planning Commission which too is chaired by the Prime Minister.

Technically speaking, most of the decisions in various matters involving policy issues of less importance are taken by the administrative Secretaries or Committees of the Secretaries, some of which serve as a Cabinet Committee. The Secretary to Government heads the Government departments and other subordinate officials, are vested, in particular matters, with delegated authority. For the conduct of Government business, there are large volumes of departmental rules of procedure and of guidance in the making of decisions in each particular agency. In a complex system a vast number of social, political, economic and administrative forces influence the choice of a policy. The election manifesto of the political party in power, civil service organization, international bodies and many other institutions, all these have functions bearing directly or indirectly on the policy making. Thus, with in the constitutional area, these institutions and factors may, and frequently do, exercise a profound influence on a government policy. Thus, public policy making is a highly complex process which, in reality, does not constitute an identifiable sequence of events. As Lindblom rightly points out, policy making is "an extremely complex analytical and political process to which there is no beginning or end, and the boundaries of which are most uncertain". The Parliament is emerged by the Indian Constitution with the function of representing the people in making policies through the passing of laws. In India, all basic policies have to be determined by the legislative enactment, although legislation also permits more specific policy making by the executive branch of the Government within the legislative and constitutional framework, and the review functions of

the judiciary. Vast majority of policies approved and sanctioned by the Parliament are initiated by the Cabinet members, having been planned within the Secretariat of the department concerned after consultation with affected interests.

## **ROLE OF POLITICAL EXECUTIVE**

### **Cabinet**

To Lindblom, the influence of ‘proximate policy maker’, or those who occupy formal offices prescribed by the political community as authoritative is of critical importance. In Government the proximate policy makers are the Cabinet members who shape and determine the public policies. The Cabinet draws power from various sources. For Jennings the Cabinet is the core of the constitutional system. It is the Cabinet who decides the policies which are to be placed before the Parliament for its approval. Cabinet draws its powers from the Constitution itself. The second source of Cabinet power flows from ‘the principle of unity’. The Cabinet acts as a collective unit. The principle of collective responsibility enables the Cabinet to expect that its decision will be implemented and defended publicly by the individual ministers. To Mackintosh, “it is essential for a strong Government to show a united front in the face of criticism”. The third source of Cabinet power is the Central Secretariat and its Committees. The Cabinet is able to control and co-ordinate the work of the executive through the Cabinet Secretariat and its Committees. Cabinet is served by the Cabinet Secretariat headed by the Cabinet Secretary. It prepares the agenda for its meetings, takes minutes, circulate decision and supervise the implementation of the Cabinet decision by the concerned ministries and other executive agencies. Sir Ivor Jennings writes, in Britain, “each minister, whether or not in the Cabinet receive the Cabinet conclusions and it is his responsibility to instruct his department as to the decisions taken in so far as they need department action”. The party systems in Cabinet Government strengthen the position of executive to control the parliamentary majority.

The Cabinet Secretary has to play varied roles. He must keep tab on urgent problems in socio-economic and political aspects, on bottlenecks in the implementation of Government program, on issues that the Prime Minister should know urgently and matters requiring his decisions. Cabinet Secretary as the head of civil services presides over the Chief Secretaries’ conference and the Committee of Secretaries. He attends all meeting of the Cabinet and its Committees. The Cabinet Secretary often prepares the agenda for Cabinet meetings, takes minutes, circulates decisions and follows them up to see that action has been taken in the departments. The role of the Cabinet Secretary is crucially important in the policy making process. At the Centre, the Cabinet Secretary plays a significant role in processing major policy matters. He consults the concerning Secretaries appropriately, discretely checks out the views of individual ministers, and taking all factors into account, comes up with a policy prescription to cover the situation, which goes through the Cabinet.

### **Prime Minister and his Office**

President of India is the nominal head of the State and the Prime Minister along with his Council of Ministers acted as the real executive in the parliamentary system of Government.

Prime Minister is the crucial element in the decision making process. S.R. Maheshwari, has observed that, “the Prime Minister (of India) always enjoys a special position in the realm of policy making and other ministers play varying levels of subordinate roles”. As the head of the Cabinet, Prime Minister influences public policy significantly. Prime Ministers are assisted by Prime Minister's Office set up in 1947. It emerged as a strong policy making organ under the Prime Ministership of Lal Bahadur Shastri who appointed some experts from the civil service to advise him on economic affairs. After that the Prime Minister's Office has emerged as powerful policy making organ in the Government of India.

### **Secretariat- Department and Ministry**

The role of the Secretariat is to advice the political executive. The officers manning the Secretariat are to analyze each policy issue or individual proposal dispassionately and freely, and render opinion to the political executive without fear or favor. Integrity, impartiality, fearlessness, precedents, and experience in administration are the basis on which noting on files are made by the echelons in the Secretariat. Decision making in Government requires consultation within the department, with related departments and ultimately leading up to a final view by the minister concerned. Where the matter is of relatively larger importance, after interdepartmental consultations, the issue is taken up before the Cabinet for a final decision. In all of these, the opinions of various officials are recorded in a file which is seen by others concerned, leading up to a decision. It is utmost importance that the system should nurture and maintain the ability of the official to express his views freely and independently without any pressure. It does not matter, if he is overruled, but the official has the right to make his point without being under duress.

### **Parliament and policy making in India**

The Parliament is the repository of the sovereignty of India. The Indian chambers are modeled on the British pattern, with the Lok Sabha (lower House) comprising directly elected representative and Rajya Sabha (Upper House) composed of representatively indirectly elected by the State Assemblies, and with some other distinguished persons nominated by the Government. Together, the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are the supreme decision-making bodies, with power even to amend the Constitution. The Parliament is ultimately responsible for good governance; this includes power to enact new legislation, mandating the executive and to approve Government spending through the ‘budget’ – this is the foremost debating forum where public policies are debated, and also where the executive is taken to account. In the realm of public policies, Parliament or legislatures are the keystone of democratic Government out they are the keystone of democratic governance and they are critical in securing Government accountability. Being a stable and vibrant democracy, Parliament of India has played a very significant role in nation building and democratic governance. Principle of accountability makes the Government responsible for their actions. Governance incorporates two distinct but intimately intermixed dimensions: One is political (and relates to the commitment to good governance) and the other is technical (and relates to the issue of efficiency and public management). Both must be addressed, without political commitment little can be achieved even with efficient public administration and without an efficient public

administration, no government can be effective, however benevolent.

### **Judiciary and Policy Making**

An independent and impartial judiciary play a very important role in smooth functioning of a political system. The three wings of any Government are the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Legislature makes laws of land; executive is mainly concerned with the enforcement of laws and administration and judiciary guarantees justice and act as the custodian of the Constitution. A written and rigid Constitution cannot ensure a sufficient restrain on parliamentary majorities unless accompanied by an independent body (through judicial review) that can test the constitutionality of laws passed by the national legislature. If Parliament itself is the arbiter of the constitutionality of its. In our constitutional scheme the judiciary alone has been entrusted with the power and duty to test the constitutional validity of legislative provisions and the validity of administrative actions. The superior courts empowered to declare a Statute ultra vires the Constitution and to nullify an executive action as unconstitutional. These powers of judicial review are given not with a view to make the judiciary a supreme body superior to other wings of the constitutional frame work, but to ensure a system of check and balance between the legislature and executive on one hand and judiciary on the other. The mechanism has been devised to function in such a way that the unconstitutional actions of one of the wings are corrected by the other and vice versa. It is not the purpose of judicial review to criticize legislative or executive actions, as the opposition is expected to fulfil this function in a democratic polity. On the contrary, the judiciary's role is to review executive and legislative actions and declare whether those actions confirm with the dictates of the Constitution of India. Justice A. S. Anand remarked: "The legislature, the executive and the judiciary are three coordinate organs of the State. All the three are bound by the Constitution. The minister representing the executive , the elected members of Parliament representing the legislature and the judges of the Supreme Court and the High Court representing the judiciary have all to take oaths prescribed by the Third Schedule of the Constitution . All of them swear to bear to faith allegiance to the Constitution. When it is said therefore that the judiciary is the guardian of the Constitution, it is not implied that the legislature and the executive are not the equally to guard the Constitution. For the progress of nation, however, it is imperative that all the three wings of the State function in complete harmony.

### **BUREAUCRACY AND PUBLIC POLICY**

A country may govern by any system; the existence of bureaucracy is a prerequisite to run the State's affairs smoothly. In developing countries, bureaucracies have emerged as a key element, in a politico-administrative process. Government policies are the outcome of continuous interaction between various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Individual minister or Cabinet is responsible for policy making in a democratic society, and bureaucracy is mainly concerned with the task of implementation of the policies laid down by the Government with full commitment, and assist political leaders in policy making rather than to initiate policy proposals. Bureaucracy is an administrative organization consists of appointed official, hierarchically organized and governed by set of rules and conditions of their service, and recruit to serve their political master by using their administration capabilities to analyze

the proposed policies and advise him about the implementation methods and possible difficulties. But in reality, they exercise much more power in policy formulation than the formal description of their responsibility suggests.

Since British period, the bureaucracy plays a very important role in administration and was established to serve its foreign masters. Its main objective was to maintain law and order and collection of revenues, but after independence the role, expectations and actual performance of bureaucracy has changed to a great extent. As the State has become a welfare State, it had to be transformed as a tool of socio-economic change and undertake new responsibilities and tasks and emerged as a machinery of a welfare State. Despite environmental change after independence, the British model continues to influence bureaucracy. The ideal administrator in India is still viewed “as the gifted lay man, who moving frequently from job to job within the service, can take a practical view of any problem, irrespective of subjective matters, in the light of his knowledge and experience of the Government machinery.

Civil service is controlled by the political executive in parliamentary democracies, there is a pervasive belief in India that the role of bureaucracy is not restricted to policy implementation but bureaucracy is also actively engaged in policy making as well. Bureaucracy plays a very important role in policy making by collecting data, analyzing and processing the data in explicit term that can be used in policy formulation by political executive. The importance of the role is concerned with the ends and not merely means. It is now widely accepted that the old politics administration dichotomy was an artificial one and that the higher civil servants exercise a great deal of influence on policy because of their administrative knowledge, performance and closeness to political power.

Bureaucracy plays various roles during the policy process in different situations. R.B. Jain observed that “at certain stage of its operations the bureaucracy performs what is known as surveillance functions, while at other stages it is the diagnostic function finding precise source of maladies. At certain stages, it performs what can be called the antenna function i.e. keeping track on what is required by the Government at particular junctures. And at other time, it may perform the function of policies and providing prospective orientation to policy option. In formulation of policy proposals, the civil service assists the executive. The civil servants possess long experience and expertise to their credit which is effectively used in assisting the executives in framing policy drafts and also in the implementation of policies.

A senior IAS officer has said that the main duty of the civil servant is to present before the minister clear options for a decisions. This task should follow the highest standards of objectivity without being influenced by his individual views or preferences. The civil servants have a significant role in policy making and implementation. Though the function of policy making is thus described as one of the most important function of Government. The policy making and implementation do not lead to just a single act of administration or Government, but rather they support a course of action, perhaps over a long time. The policy decisions provide a sense of direction to administrative action.

Policy is very essential in administration which gives a concrete shape to the political and social objectives. In modern Government, civil services has come to be equated with administration

and for practical purposes, this is not an erroneous equation. Traditionally, the function of administration has been assumed to be implementation of public policy, the making of policy was the essential task of the sovereign representatives of the people. The political executive forms the policies and civil servants execute these policies and programs. The main function of policy maker is to establish the enterprise goals and guiding the organization to the accomplishment of its mission objects. The functions of policy making cannot actually be vested exclusively at any one point or level in the Government whenever, there is action affecting the public, there is policy making.

The policy may be good or bad for public. Some policies are designed to serve the public good, in a general sense and resolve issues and problems which the society as a whole face. However, not all policies register impact evenly upon the populace which they do not regard as their problem in particular. The view of public policy is one which sees a particular facet or project that becomes the focus of the evaluative judgment. The civil servants have only advisory role in policy making. In the Indian political system, it is recognized that the civil servants must render sound advice to the political bosses on policy matters because; they have lack of technical knowledge and competence in the field of administration. Moreover, the civil servants are in continuous contact with public and at the same time they are in

profession of information which is essential to making and implementation of policy. Some scholars have a wrong perception about the role of bureaucracy in policy making is to buttress, legitimize and implement policy determined by elected political elites, rather than to initiate policy. Bureaucracy's role in policymaking is highly dependent on the relation dynamics of political executive and permanent executive and determined by some normative and operational condition. Though policy making is a function of political executive, the higher civil service influences the policy proposal significantly throughout the process by advising the minister and makes a detail scrutiny to the policy proposal to make it technically feasible. The level of bureaucratic commitment to a policy is responsible for success or failure of policy: political values and ideologies may hamper the commitment of a bureaucrat towards a policy and act as an important variable in policy making. Modern public administration recognizes the combined effort of both political and administrative components in the realm of public policy making. As Carl Friedrich has observed: "Public policy, to put it flatly is a continuous process, the formation of which is inseparable from its execution. Polity and administration plays a continuous role in both formation and execution, though there is probably more politics in the formation of policy, and more administration in the execution of it, insofar as particular individual or groups are gaining or losing power or control in a given area, there is politics, insofar as officials act to propose action in the name of public interest, there is administration." Irritates with continuous interference of political masters at the stage of execution of programs and trying to influence the process irrationally. Being the representative of the people, politician assumes that only they are concerned with public interest. Administrative responsibility of the political executive is bound up with the notion of a public interest that is to be protected by administrators as a kind of trust for unorganized citizens. Administrative responsibility in a modern democratic State rests on two criteria: technical knowledge and popular support. Clearly certain complex problems demands technical solution, which do not

automatically guarantee political responsibility. Popular support must be accessed through legislative communication, public opinion polls and responses of affected groups.<sup>58</sup> Thus the citizen is the ultimate source of administrative power because he is a rational consumer of public goals and services. Bureaucracy hinders the citizen to express their performances and limits public choice. Another leading scholar Morstein Marx believes that “If the bureaucracy is to act in the public interest, it must be permeated by a consciousness of both its local and its social status in the system, but at the same he does not think that a neutral bureaucracy implies as ostrich like withdrawal and isolation from the nerve center of the political process”. The civil service contributes by providing technology and advancing knowledge also responsive to clients and familiar with programs, operations and its needs. Political appointee's addresses social needs from a fresh perspective and are also responsible to political and A responsible administration is expected to use their power resources and expertise to bring about outcomes that are ‘in the public interest’. The administrator may have a different perspective which carrying out the development policies and defining the public interest. The administrations often party leadership. Both the political and permanent executive strive for the betterment of the society by introducing innovative and positive changes for the development in a fast changing society like India. A business must have an advanced perspective combined with positive attitude towards the change. It is the responsibility of the political leadership to conditions the civil service to make it operationally fit and important.

The civil service which has monopoly in policy implementation has also its great influence in policy making process. It is also due to manifold functions of the Government with limited time that makes the legislation, so that it can be effectively implemented. It is the function of civil servants to work out regulations or regulatory codes, elaborating the policy of the Government. The policy is a matter of decisions by bureaucrats and effectiveness of policy is the consequent spirit and will of the bureaucrats. Policy and administration is counterpart to each other. Louis underlines this distinction that there is and always will be difference between politics and administration, no matter if they are closely related to each other in democratic society. T.N. Chaturvedi has himself commented that the civil service in India is expected to play manifold roles. There is a need to match the role perception and role expectation so that, the role performed by the civil service is the maximum and satisfy the emergent needs of the community. Civil service is an instrument for implementation of people’s will and aspirations as expressed in the Constitution. Public policy making is the determination of general direction of publicly resolved societal issues.

The civil service has become an agency responsible for the socio- economic development of the country. The civil servants have to understand new management technique, learn the latest skill and inculcate new attitudes in consonance with the ideals of bureaucracy and our goal of development. Public policy making is concern of multi-institutional elites. Paul H. Appleby noted with concern, the politics, and administration dichotomy. He maintained that public policy making was shared by all branches of Government throughout the public bureaucracy, where a decision was finally made depending on political evaluation. The challenge for bureaucracy in India is to accept the supremacy of political leadership and adjust to the demand and requirement of political system. The bureaucrats adhere to the administrative rules,

regulations and procedure. This gives rise to tension and conflict in their relationship and difficulties in communication and does not permit them to collaborate in nation building and system maintaining activities. It is fact that where the political

leadership is weak, some sectors of administration show a trend towards the emergence of bureaucratic center of power, over shadowing democratic political institution. In such sectors, the civil service seeks to preserve its power and provides resistance to policies which are likely to reduce its power.

## CONCLUSION

Apart from some drawbacks bureaucracy play a significant role in policy making and assisting their political masters by providing frank and impartial advice. Bureaucracy influence policy making in two steps. Firstly, bureaucracy can give shape to the stated policy through the exercise of choice and judgment and administering them and secondly, they engaged in policy formulation through their suggestive, analytical and interpretative roles.

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