

A Deliberation on Indian Think Tanks: Impediments to their Contribution

In Policy Making

The brainstorming session, 'Think Tanks in India: Public Policy and Challenges' was organized by India Policy Foundation (IPF) and India Centre for Public Policy (ICPP) of Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH), Greater Noida at India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi. The session was organized to contemplate the role of think tanks in India's policy making. The discussion was attended by the luminaries from various academic institutions, media persons, former bureaucrats, members from the international bodies and the representatives of Think Tanks. The session was chaired by Prof. Rakesh Sinha, Hon. Director IPF and Prof. J. Shettigar, Chairperson, ICPP. Dr. H. Chaturvedi, Director, BIMTECH commenced the proceedings by inviting a debate on the definition of Indian Think Tanks, in order to evaluate the impact of think tanks on public policy, defining future trajectory and likely role of these institutions, and identifying challenges faced by the think tanks for attaining growth and excellence.

In his welcome note, Dr. H. Chaturvedi expressed his gratitude to all the dignitaries, and specified that there is no such platform in India which could bridge the gap between the India's think tank and the policy makers, therefore BIMTECH in its joint initiative with IPF is working in that direction .

Initiating the discussion, Prof. Shettigar reiterated his concern for the ineffectiveness of think tanks in India to contribute to policy level debate. He also underlined the challenges and domain knowledge. Some of the experts recognized that the absence of financial independence may be the prime cause for their ineffectiveness. Nonetheless, over time there has been an increasing role of think tanks in policy making; therefore the intellectuals should abandon biases and give their advice independently.

Mr. Chapal Mehra from Global Health Strategies presented his views and identified definition, structural issues, funding and research influence as some of the major issues. The entity is still not as effective a tool for creating popular acceptance of or giving legitimacy to regimes, both at the central and state levels. Policy formation is also highly centralized, dictated by the concerns of political agendas which leave very little space for Think Tanks in India. Dr. Abusaleh Shariff, Chief Economist of NCAER, raised issues of credibility of the organisations, the funding mechanism and the provision of appropriate space to conduct independent research. Mr. Bal Dev, Editor of Panchjanya, discussed the dominance of the elite class in Think Tanks, and called for effective field work by the Think Tanks in India to raise the voice of common man. The Think Tanks have addressed certain obstacles such as the capacity of human resources in the domains, financing of the researches by the national and international organisations, influencing the policy makers by other methods of researches or presentations, creating credibility which can be disassociated with funding, and larger issues like the absence of a defined mechanism of making the public policy. The critical instances of Nuclear Policy, Reservation Policy, Education Policy and associated Economic Policies were offered as examples during the discussion by Dr Rajendra Mangan, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Ms. P.N. Vasanti, CMS; Dr. P.K. Chaube, IIPA; Mr. Samir Saran and Mr. Nandan Unnikrishnan, ORF; Mr. Milind Chakravorty, Sharda University, Mr. Avanish

Kumar, MDI; Mr. Harsh Singh, Writer; Dr. Karl Grischow, American Foundation and many other dignitaries.

The initiative by IPF and ICPP was appreciated by the officials as there has not been any such debate on the matter by such a diverse group. IPF Hon. Director Prof. Sharma also announced that the other three debates will be held in different parts of the country and the same unbiased opinions from the stakeholders of Think Tanks and policy makers would be generated.