

***Public Enterprise Management and Privatisation*** by Laxmi Narain (S. Chand Publishers, Latest edition, 2002, 432 pages)

The ambitious title of the book, further reinforced by subtitle, "Principles and practice of Public Enterprise Management", leaves one a little confused about the nature and objectives of the book. Hence one may be, perhaps, pardoned for making a categorical statement right at the beginning of a review, that the chapters dealing with privatization probably constitute the cream of the contents; they provide a survey of the privatization policies followed in India, and meander into the practices in several other countries.

There are altogether 19 chapters, preceded by an introduction which summarily deals with alternative models of development, disposed of in a few lines, with clichés such as the 'something for nothing' view of capitalists (has the author not heard of the capitalist economist view that there is nothing called a free lunch?). The first two chapters give a historical overview of the developments which plummeted the public sector to the 'commanding heights' of the economy and also provide exhaustive statistics on its representation in the large, formal sectors. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with organizational patterns; various patterns such as departments, holding companies etc., are discussed, and diverse information such as the reason for excluding MPs from the boards of directors are also provided.

Chapter 5 to 9 may well be considered the 'heart of the matter' of this work. In chapter 5, different concepts of efficiency are discussed and the difficulties in measuring this for public enterprises are highlighted, keeping in view the social obligations imposed on them. The use of external auditors for efficiency appraisals is highlighted with a case study of Bharath Earth Movers Ltd. The next chapter deals with the measurement of profitability and performance, including those linked to the development of backward areas etc. These issues are studied for a number of sectors such as insurance, postal services and commercial enterprises. Chapters 7 to 9 deal with the relationships of public enterprises with the government itself and the consumer, and government audit procedures are also detailed, emphasizing that the scrutiny

is more on performance appraisal rather than on a hunt for lapses and faults. The recommendations of various ad hoc committees on public enterprises are also listed.

The chapters (10-16) which address the functional areas of management are purely descriptive without any analytical depth, probably due to the vast canvas at hand. The case studies provided do point out policy errors, but do not provide specific policy recommendations. Perhaps the only optimizing criteria really laid down is in the chapter on project appraisal. The brevity in dealing with key issues can be illustrated by the space provided – a page and a half – to human resource development issues in the giant Indian Oil Corporation. The discussion on worker participation in management is wound up just when reader interest has been generated.

It would have been certainly rewarding to limit the scope of the book, providing a sharper focus on selected issues. After all, the author did exercise such discretion earlier, in his book “Public enterprise in India”, published by the Planning Commission in 1974, and with a laudatory introduction by Professor Robson of the London School of Economics, in which he focuses on the annual reports of companies.

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***Maintaining Industrial Discipline : Answers to 50 Frequently Asked Questions***  
by G. P. Das Gupta, published by Responce Books, New Delhi, 2002;  
211 pages.

The author has earlier written two books on industrial discipline – *Handbook on Disciplinary Proceedings*, and *Industrial Discipline : Concepts, Laws and Cases*. His long working experience as a personal and industrial relations manager of a premier industrial establishment of the country, makes him