

# Political party funding

There is a lot of talk about the funding of political parties and the cancer of black money in our elections. It has now become accepted that black money will always be present in our electoral system and the issue cannot be resolved. Should parties which do not win a single seat be eligible to an incometax exemption? Should parties which do not contest any election be given an incometax exemption? It is well known that many of these parties are only laundries of black money. There are over 1850 registered political parties in India and their tribe is growing. Only 56 out of these are recognized as registered national or state parties. Should all of these be given a subsidy in terms of an incometax exemption.

It is worthwhile looking at the basic concept of giving incometax exemption and the argument that worthwhile activities will only take place if they are given tax exemptions. Firstly, is it desirable and necessary that more and more political parties should come up and hence the tax break? For a diverse nation like India perhaps 100 or two hundred parties could be justified, but over 1800 shows that most of them are not serious political parties. Would the nation benefit by having more than a hundred or two hundred parties? It may be argued that it would mean suppressing freedom of expression. Will freedom of expression flourish only if tax subsidies are given? I would also argue that by and large incometax exemptions become havens for corruption and arbitrariness. This applies also to the exemptions and subsidies given to trusts and corporates. Most desirable activities will take place for cause or profit and really will not depend on the existence of tax exemptions. If there is a demand and a business opportunity, business will go into it and if the tax subsidy is not given it will still pursue it. Similarly if some people wish to propagate a thought or do charity they will go forward with or without tax subsidies.

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangh has built a robust institution without any tax sops. If somebody really wishes to propagate a ideology it can be done without any tax exemptions. The state must take its revenue and undertake various measures for the welfare of all. The tax subsidy is actually a revenue loss from the poorest man in India, since the money belongs to him.

I would therefore submit that there should be no incometax exemption for all political parties. If however it is felt necessary that the poorest man must finance them, the tax exemption should be limited only to the recognized registered parties.

While on this topic, I would like to touch on a linked subject, viz. financing of the political parties and elections. It is known to everyone that the black money requirements of the political parties for running their organizations and fighting elections is a major factor in the thriving black economy of our nation. We have tried to restrict the amount of money in the election and are aware that by this hypocritical position we are all living in a collusive national lie. There will be a rare elected candidate who will have spent only the amount mandated by law. Even if an honest candidate does not wish to engage in a illegal black transaction, he gets sucked into this whirlpool.

Political parties need a certain amount of white money to show the bare minimum expenditure to run the party. This is currently obtained by some white money donations and the rest by showing cash donations of less than Rs.20000. There is a proposal to reduce this amount to Rs. 2000. This will serve little purpose since this would only result in ten times more fake entries being required to be made with fake names.

Is there a solution to all this? I believe the following measures could go some way:

1. Remove all expenditure limits on elections, or have a

much larger amount being permitted.

2. Remove all incometax exemptions for political parties. If their revenue is more than their expenditure they should pay incometax.
3. Insist that all donations to political parties or electoral candidates will only be digital or by cheque. The PAN number or Aadhar number of all donors must be taken. It would be easy to devise a standard software in which all donation entries should be made. If there are multiple entries either with a PAN number or with a Aadhar number, it would give the total amount paid by a PAN number or Aadhar number.

The government is talking about going cashless and digital. Could they go digital and cashless in this ?

I believe a better India can be obtained by designing honesty into the system.

**Shailesh Gandhi**