The Need to Move away from Clientelism

What is the issue?

The poor perceive the state as an arbitrator of their well-being but today's political parties resort to unsolicited freebies to attract them.

What is clientelism?

- Clientelism is a political or social system based on the relation of client to patron with the client giving political support to a patron (as in the form of votes) in exchange for some special privilege or benefit (freebies).
- It is a populist measure that differs from welfarism.
- Welfare initiatives include Targeted PDS, providing social security, quality education, fair employment, affordable healthcare, decent housing, protection from exploitation and violence, etc.
- Freebies, on the other hand, create limited private benefit for the receiver and do not contribute towards strengthening public goods/facilities.

How did the freebie culture originate?

- The origin of freebie culture in India can be traced to the Tamilnadu politics.
- They have a key place in our Indian election manifesto
- Kanyshree for girls, Krishak Bandhu for framers, free washing machines, phones, laptops, grinders, bicycles and free transportations are instances where freebies are showered on voters before the polls.

How are freebies supported by the political parties?

- The freebie culture started with some outlines such as it would help to enhance the capacity of poor people, to reduce the poverty and to empower the target beneficiaries.
- Political leaders have justified freebies citing social justice as it aids those at the bottom of the pyramid.
- Parties argue that Rs.1 per kg rice, free gas stoves, maternity assistance of Rs.1,000 for all poor women for six months have helped human development indices at the cost of economic growth.
- Certain assistances like community canteens employ thousands of women

contributing to women empowerment.

What are the criticisms of freebies?

- Freebies question the state's financial status contributing to huge fiscal debt.
- The role of freebies to avail good governance is questionable. For example, distributing laptops does not serve the purpose of increasing the quality of education.
- The social, political and economic consequences of freebies are very short-lived in nature.
- Freebies are not the sustainable solutions. For instance, free electricity, free water, farm loan waivers, etc. have not contributed to increased productivity.
- Freebies culture paves way to corrupt practice because of the involvement of middle man.
- Freebies violate the constitutional mandate of extending benefits for public purpose and instead create private benefits.
- Providing freebies is to treat people like subjects, whereas citizens are entitled to constitutional guarantees.

What was the judicary's view on the freebie culture?

- The Supreme Court gave a ruling in favour of offering of freebies stating that freebies are not corrupt practice as it is mentioned in election manifesto.
- *In S. Subramaniam Balaji v. Govt. of Tamil Nadu* (2013), the court said that "Although, promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as 'corrupt practice' under Section 123 of Representation of People Act, the distribution of freebies influences the people shaking the root of free and fair elections."
- In 2021, The Madras High Court expressed its strong displeasure over the way in which political parties were competing with each other to garner votes by offering freebies.

References

1. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-need-to-move-away-from-clientelism/article37200567.ece
2. https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/state-editions/in-freebie-culture--voter

-s-choice-is-manipulated.html

