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## Promises of Prosperity: The Burden of Freebies on India's Fiscal Health

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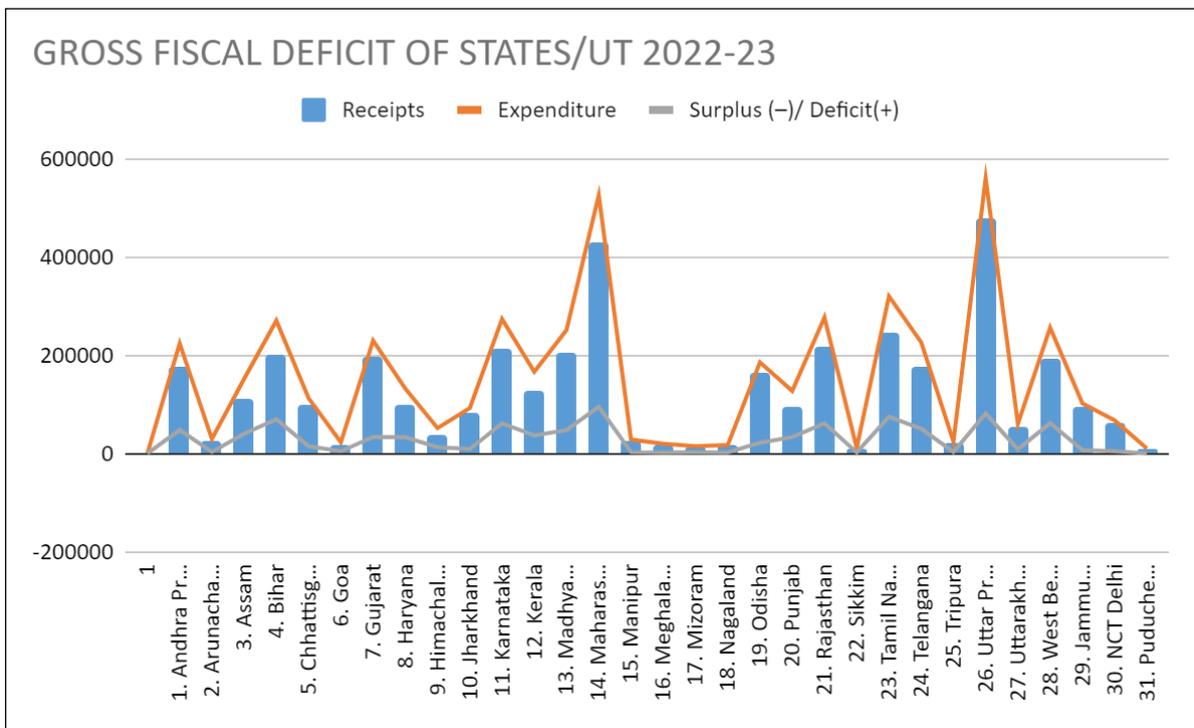
### Abstract

This research paper examines the increasing the distribution and declaration of freebies by political parties in India as a strategy to gain electoral support, analysing their detrimental effects on State's economy. While welfare schemes (subsidies) target specific vulnerable groups, whereas freebies are often discriminately offered to generate offered to general public, leading to fiscal strain. With help of trend analysis and linear regression methods, significant impact of social sector expenditure, Outstanding liabilities and subsidies on the gross fiscal deficit has been studied. The research has used secondary data from the RBI, where the paper conclude that these factors significantly contribute to fiscal imbalances. The advocates clear distinction between Subsidies and freebies to prevent economic disorder because of unchecked financial allocation towards freebies leading to inefficiencies and undermine the nation's fiscal health.

**Keywords:** Freebies, Welfare Schemes, Fiscal Deficit, Economic Impact, Electoral Promises

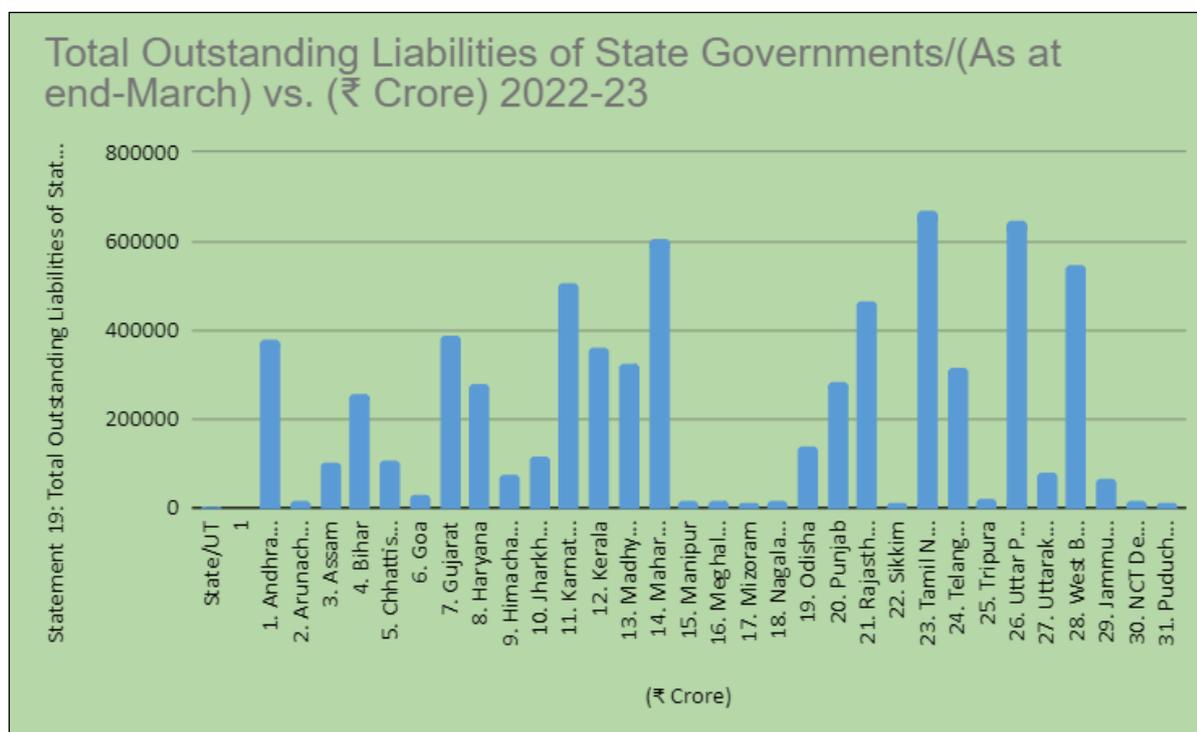
### Introduction

Freebies by the political parties have been a most sought-after weapon to pull any crowd towards that party. Any election these days without freebies is unthinkable. Though certain sections of society benefit from freebies, it negatively impacts the state and the entire economy since it aggravates the fiscal deficit. Often welfare and the freebies schemes are used invariably but in reality, there lies a vast difference between the two. The former targets that section of society that needs help and is already mentioned in the Union Budget or State Budget and government programs while the latter is given as free of cost to increase vote bank by gaining common people's support. A mammoth chunk of Government revenue is earned through direct and indirect taxes through which the government pays off its fixed contractual commitment or obligations or any intermittent expenses. Therefore, whenever any freebies schemes are announced indirectly the money used comes from the taxpayers. The downfall of the Sri Lankan economy has been a strong testament to how freebies can have a deleterious impact on any economy.



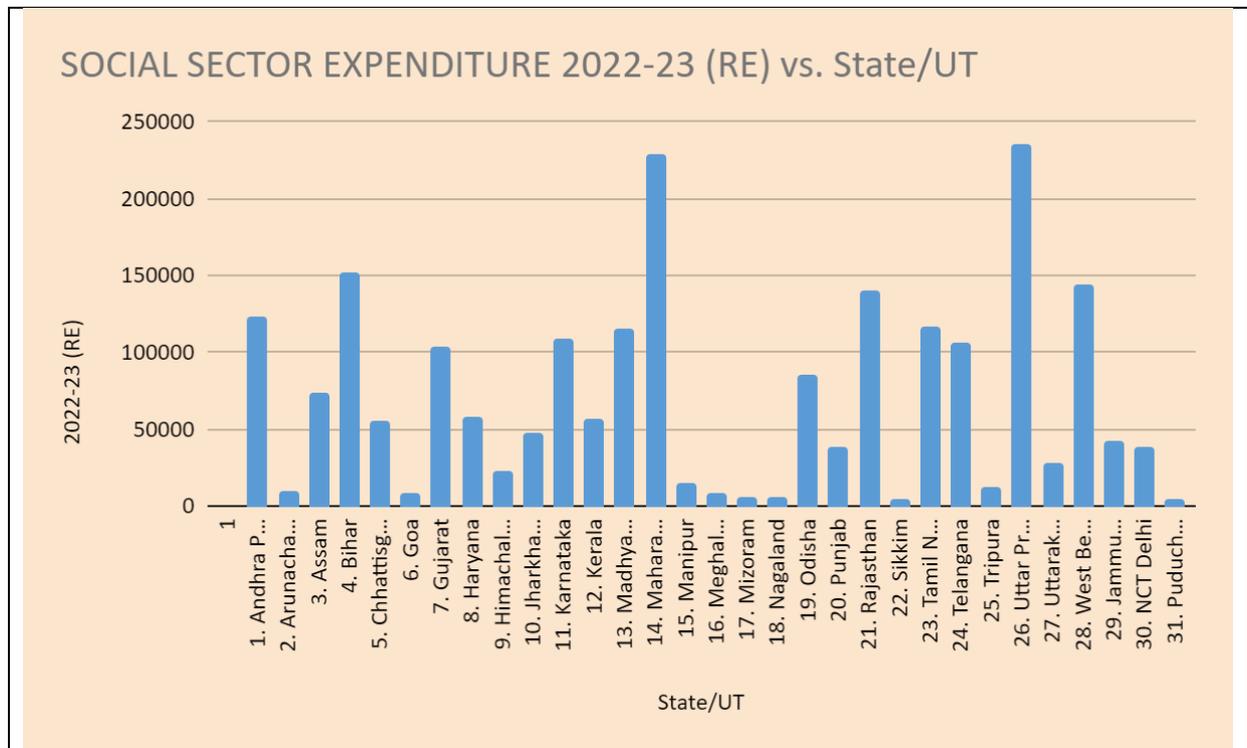
**Figure 1: Source: RBI FY 2022-23 (Revised) Gross Fiscal Deficit Indian States**

There are major significant variations in terms of receipts and expenditure in various states, with certain states Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh showing high level of both receipts and expenditures. Some states managed their finances with balanced approach, others have significant imbalances between their receipts and expenditures. The above data depicts that most of the states or regions are experiencing higher expenditures than receipts, leading to financial deficit.



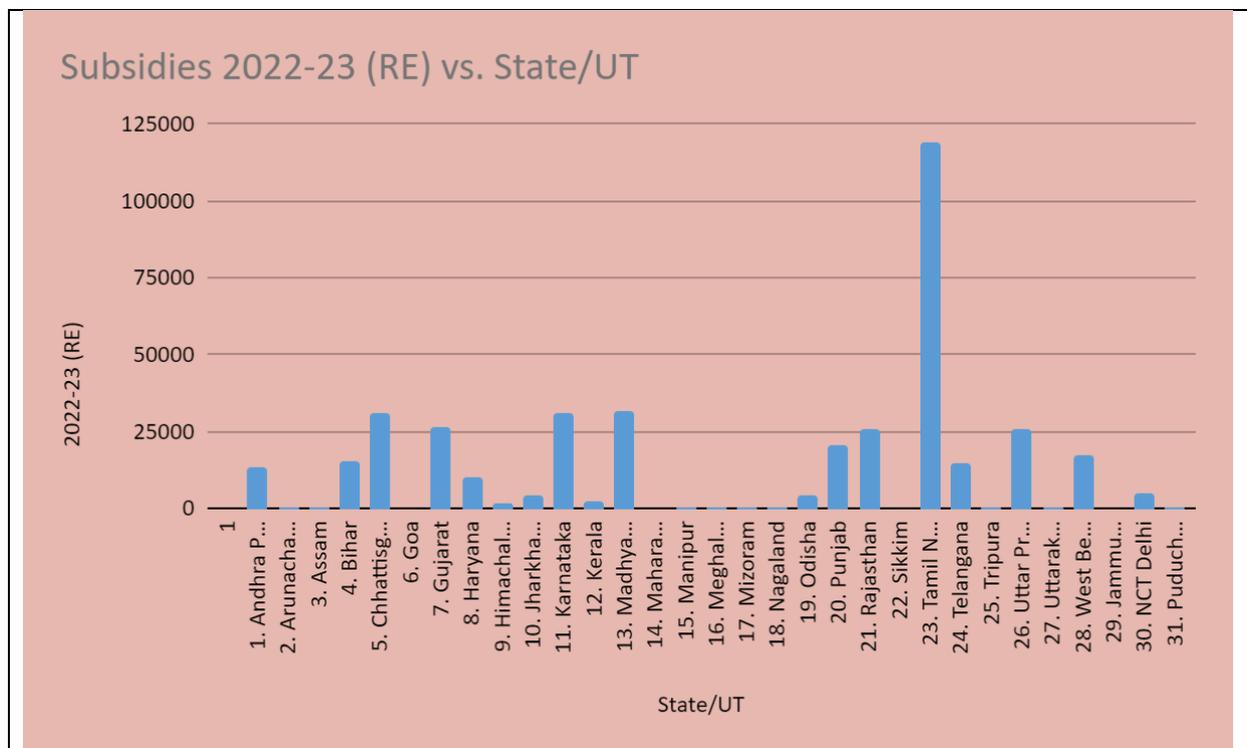
**Figure 2: Source: RBI FY 2022-23 Outstanding-Liabilities of State Governments**

The above chart (Figure 2), shows the total outstanding liabilities for various Indian States and Union Territories, as of the end of March 2022-23. Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh have the highest outstanding liabilities, exceeding ₹ 5,00,000 crores each. Other states with significant outstanding liabilities include West Bengal, Karnataka and Gujarat, exceeding ₹ 3,00,000 crores each. Smaller states and Union territories like Mizoram, Sikkim, and Goa have much lower outstanding liabilities, indicating lower financial obligations compared to larger states.



**Figure 3: Source RBI State Finances AY 2022-23 Social Sector Expenditure of Indian States& UT**

The above bar chart (Figure 3), depicts the financial allocations and expenditure across the Indian states and Union territories for AY 2022-23. States like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh exhibit the highest financial estimates, exceeding ₹ 1,50,000 crores, which reflects their larger economies and higher demands for development due to larger population. States like Karnataka, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu are exhibiting relatively larger economic bases and fiscal requirements.



**Figure 4: Source RBI State Finances AY 2022-23 Subsidies of Indian States& UT**

The Figure 4 depicts the subsidies allocated to various states and UTs for fiscal year 2022-23. The state Tamil Nadu shows highest subsidy allocation, significantly surpassing other states. Other states such as Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have spent considerable amount, although much lower than Tamil Nadu.

India is an overpopulated country and political parties are offering free electricity, water, and food subsidies to influence

the voters and create a burden on the country's finances. This type of misallocation of funds leads to a series of consequences for both the government as well as the public. Freebies are not new.

It has been seen in some states like

- J Jayalithaa, the then Chief Minister of the AIADMK promised and distributed free sarees, pressure cookers, television sets, and washing machines in Tamil Nadu in 1990s.

Odisha where the ruling party BJD (Biju Janata Dal) is

- providing BPL (Below Poverty Line) rice for just rupee 1 per kg (under Odisha Food Security Scheme (SFSS)), which makes the youth of the country more vulnerable and dependent on the government and their unwillingness to work and contribute toward the GDP of the nation. People are becoming lethargic and less responsible towards the resources they are getting as a subsidy and schemes like

- Life insurance schemes i.e., around 7 lakhs per family and 5 lakhs per woman in each family.

Similarly, in recent times congress won the Karnataka state election by offering a bundle of freebies like:

- Gruhalaksmi where every female head of the family will receive Rs 2,000 a month.

- Yuvanidhi under which every unemployed diploma holder will receive Rs 1,500 per month, and graduates Rs 3,000 a month.

- Shakthi where women would also get to travel for free in the buses run by the state government and,

- Gruhajyoti scheme where every family would be provided 200 units of power for free.

- In Anyabhagya scheme free supply of 10 kgs of rice per capita per month for all BPL card holders, of which 5 kgs are currently being supplied by the Government of India under NFSA.

Again, Trinamool Congress (TMC) led West Bengal offered series of freebies like:

- "Kanyashree" provides financial assistance to school girls from 13 years to 19 years for education and empowerment.

- "Rupashree" where girls will receive cash assistance of Rs. 25000 for their marriage.

- "Lakshmi Bhandar" offering cash assistance of Rs. 1000 to SC/ST women and Rs. 500 to every other as a mark of women empowerment.

- Grants were given to registered Durga Puja Committee for the past few years.

The BJP government in UP manifesto 2022, had promised free cylinders and scooty for women, free electricity for farmers and 2 crore tablets for the students. Similarly, BJP-led Himachal Pradesh government also announced free electricity and 50 percent discount for women on the deeply in debt public transport. The BJP also announced free drinking water and free travel to women commuters in Metro and city buses during Hyderabad municipal polls, along with free power to all houses using less than 100 units per month.

In this study we are going to explore whether fiscal policy get affected due to subsidies including other factors also. The study will try to prove it empirically with the of statistical tool. The Study is both qualitative as well as quantitative, as we don't have published data related to freebies.

## Literature Review

- Every citizen likes to enjoy free goods and services. In the name of freebies, a certain section of society benefits at the cost of taxpayers. In this context, the Cloward Piven strategy (1966) holds strong. The theory postulates if the welfare system in any economy is overloaded with welfare enrollment drives it generates constraints on the State and Central Budget leading to a catastrophic economy.

- Singh, B. P. (2016) examined freebies and good governance [1]. The study freebies can attract a vote bank but in long it creates huge constraints on State finance by increasing the debt liabilities in the name of subsidies and freebies. It also highlighted how subsidies act as silent thieves.

- Sharma and Sarma (2022) probed the differences between Legitimate versus Distortionary Freebies. This article justified how legitimate freebies have a significant positive impact on the well-being of the disadvantaged sections of the population on the other hand, distortionary freebies have an unfavourable impact on fiscal health, resource utilisation, and resource allocation and can misrepresent economic development.

- Ghosal Tunir et al (2023), explored the interplay between the populist discourse and the politics of handouts and uncovered the nuance on welfare spending and income inequality [2]. The article strongly criticized the political parties' unnecessary spending in the name of welfare funding to gain voters' confidence. India in the post-liberalization era has drained all public funds as a measure of welfare.

- Singh Saurabh (2023) elucidated that countries cannot run on freebies. Somewhere or someone it has to be paid. The strong lessons from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Venezuela's economies paved a way for learning that government should not encourage freebies as it creates a grave impact on tax payers.

- Pudur Arun (2023) cautioned in his study how freebies destroyed a well-performing nation, Venezuela. Venezuela was considered the third largest tourist destination countries in the world. Forbes in 1992 declared it to be the third richest country. The then government implement freebies and kept on making everything free one after the other gradually leading to an adverse impact on the impact. He also cited how the current opposition parties in India like Aam Admi Party (AAP), Congress, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Trinamool Congress (TMC) are following the path of freebies and adding extra pressure on Government treasury.

- Karlapudi Preethi & Dr. Gaddam Naresh Reddy (2021), concluded that the government is spending on unnecessary freebies schemes which are adding to government debt [3]. The government is borrowing money to pay off the debts,

resulting in punishment with higher taxes on the present tax-payers and future generations for current beneficiaries and hampering the economic growth in the long run.

- Zoya Mateen (2022) revealed the harsh reality of freebies schemes in India are bleeding the national economy dry [4]. Not only are the poor aided under different schemes but businesses are also getting help from the Government through tax-cuts and loan write-offs which will ultimately burden the taxpayers.
- Vaishnavi Mungale (2022) published an article in Maharashtra Economic Development Council, stating that the government should encourage investment in the development projects that will generate employment instead of spending on freebies which will dent the country's economy in the long run [5].
- Based on the recent Sri Lankan crisis, the Reserve Bank of India (2022) served a report on State finances: A risk analysis demonstrated the fiscal risk faced by the State governments of India. The fall in own tax revenue, a high share of committed expenditure, and increasing subsidy burdens have extended the state government finances which was already aggravated by COVID-19. New sources of risks have surfaced in the form of rising expenditure on non-merit freebies, expanding contingent liabilities, and the soaring overdue of DISCOMs.
- Vanshika Arora (2022) explored the freebies culture and how it inflates social and economic adversities. The study emphasized that freebies in the long run becomes economically unsustainable leading to high rate of inflation which leads to persistent rise in goods and services and debt burden on the government. Due to COVID-19 the economy had already detorted further rising fiscal deficit accentuated the problems of state and central government.
- Ajit Kumar (2024), highlighted two aspects in his study, i.e., freebies and budget, stating that the government of India is trying to cut down resource's allocation in the name of social security schemes and instead target for growth advancement in the middle class [6]. The study concluded that the distortionary freebies are very much creating fiscal imbalance in the economy and distorting the allocation of national resources.
- Surabi (2024) uncovered how the economics of election freebies works. The slews of freebies like loan waiver, higher cooking gas subsidy, financial assistance to women, laptops and smartphones to students etc. announced by various state governments to win the confidence of common people has incredibly affected the financial position of the state.
- Rohan Bavadekar (2022) examined the cause of Discom failures and its failed efforts to recover the cost pulling down towards losses and distress [7]. The past freebies are still a burden on the present electricity generation board and if they continue to distribute electricity for free, then Discom will be in a state of emergency to shut down. The loan waiver announcement at the time of elections also caused problems in the banking sector and will soon convert into loss making business.

## Aims & Objectives

This study aims to understand:

- Trend of Social Sector expenditure, Subsidies and Out-standing Liabilities
- Impact of Social Sector Expenditure, Subsidies and Outstanding Liabilities on Gross Fiscal Deficit
- Improper allocation of financial resources through freebies and subsidies, its impact on economic issues.

## Hypothesis of the Study

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant impact of social sector expenditure on Gross Fiscal Deficit.

$H_{A1}$ : There is significant impact of Social Sector Expenditure on Gross Fiscal Deficit.

$H_{02}$ : There is no significant impact of Subsidies on Gross Fiscal Deficit.

$H_{A2}$ : There is significant impact of Subsidies on Gross Fiscal Deficit.

$H_{03}$ : There is no significant impact of Outstanding Liabilities on Gross Fiscal Deficit.

$H_{A3}$ : There is significant impact of outstanding liabilities on Gross Fiscal Deficit.

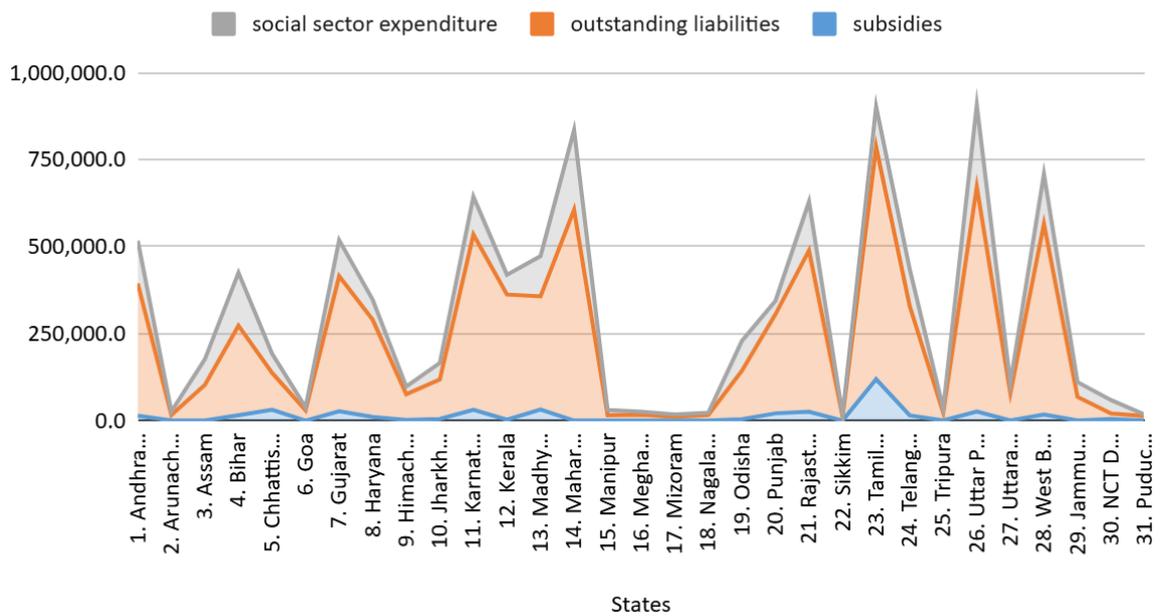
## Research Methodology

The Universe of study consists of 31 Indian states and Union territories for the year 2022-23 for Social Sector Expenditure, Subsidies, Outstanding Liabilities and Gross Fiscal Deficit. In order to achieve the objective of study, relevant data (secondary) is gathered from RBI (State finances) website, for data interpretation.

To measure the significant impact of Social Sector expenditure, Subsidies and Outstanding liabilities on Gross Fiscal Deficit, 31 Indian States and Union Territories for the year 2022-23 are taken into account. For measuring the significant impact of Social Sector expenditure, Subsidies and Outstanding Liabilities on Fiscal Deficit, statistical test i.e.; Linear regression is applied.

## Trend Analysis of Social Sector expenditure, Outstanding Liabilities and Subsidies:

## subsidies, outstanding liabilities and social sector expenditure



**Figure 5:**

The Figure 5 compares three financial metrics for various states: Social Sector Expenditure (grey), Outstanding Liabilities (orange) and Subsidies (blue).

- **Outstanding Liabilities:** the chart shows consistently highest among the three metrics across almost all states, indicating the highest burden.
- **Social Sector Expenditure:** Social spending is a major budget component, quite high among all states often closely trailing the outstanding liabilities.
- **Subsidies:** Represented by blue line, the amounts are relatively low compared to other two financial metrics.

### Data Analysis and Findings Test Linear Regression Variables of the Study

#### Variables Entered/Removed<sup>a</sup>

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SocialSectorExpenditure, Subsidies, OutstandingLiabilities <sup>b</sup>		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: GrossFiscalDeficit

b. All requested variables entered.

**Table 1: Variables of the Study**

The Table 1 gives an overview of the variables included in regression analysis, where independent variables are Social Sector Expenditure, Subsidies and Outstanding Liabilities, whereas dependent variable is Gross Fiscal Deficit.

### Summary of the Regression Model

#### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.987 <sup>a</sup>	.974	.971	4789.98048

a. Predictors: (Constant), SocialSectorExpenditure, Subsidies, OutstandingLiabilities

**Table 2: Model Summary**

The table 2 gives the Summary of the Regression Model used here. The Correlation coefficient (R) is 0.987 indicates strong positive relation between dependent variable and independent variables. R2 represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (Gross fiscal deficit) which is 97.4% (0.974), suggesting excellent model fit. The value of adjusted R2 is 0.971, means model performance is highly predictive. The Std. error of the Estimate is 4789.98048, means smaller the Std. error better fit of the model to the data.

### Analysis of Variance

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20461168821	3	6820389607	297.264	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	550653912.5	24	22943913.02		
	Total	21011822733	27			

a. Dependent Variable: GrossFiscalDeficit

b. Predictors: (Constant), SocialSectorExpenditure, Subsidies, OutstandingLiabilities

**Table 3: Analysis of Variance**

The above table is the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) in the regression analysis is used to determine the statistical significance of the model. The Significant F-value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is 0.000, suggesting the regression model as a whole explains a significant portion of variance in the gross fiscal deficit.

### Coefficients of Regression Model

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	268.687	1385.599		.194	.848
	OutstandingLiabilities	.085	.011	.703	7.743	.000
	Subsidies	.125	.056	.110	2.240	.035
	SocialSectorExpenditure	.096	.031	.228	3.042	.006

a. Dependent Variable: GrossFiscalDeficit

**Table 4: Coefficients of Regression Model**

The above Table of Coefficients (B) shows that, one unit increase in the outstanding Liabilities will increase gross fiscal deficit by 0.085 units, one unit increase in subsidies increases the gross fiscal deficit by 0.125 units and one unit increase in social sector expenditure leads to an increase of 0.096 units in the gross fiscal deficit. The t-value is highest (7.743) for the outstanding liabilities, showing strongest and positive effect on gross fiscal deficit than subsidies and social sector expenditure but still having positive influence on gross fiscal deficit. The p-value for outstanding liabilities is the lowest (0.000), suggesting highly significant impact on gross fiscal deficit. The p-value of Subsidies is 0.035 at 5% significance level, showing moderately significant on Gross fiscal deficit. The p-value of Social Sector Expenditure is 0.006 at 1% significance level, showing strong positive relationship with gross fiscal deficit.

### Results

From the linear regression test, we conclude that:

- $H_{A1}$ ,  $H_{A2}$  and  $H_{A3}$  are accepted and
- $H_{01}$ ,  $H_{02}$  and  $H_{03}$  are rejected.

All the three independent variables – Outstanding Liabilities, Subsidies and Social Sector Expenditure – have statistically significant positive impact on Gross fiscal Deficit. Outstanding liabilities have the strongest influence on Gross fiscal Deficit, followed by Social Sector Expenditure and Subsidies.

Hence, its empirically proved that Subsidies have positive significant impact on Gross Fiscal Deficit.

### Conclusion

Often the line between freebies and welfare schemes (subsidies) is blurred. Freebies refer to benefits given to the individuals without distinguishing between those who in need and those who can afford to pay, while welfare schemes (subsidies) target that category those who are unable to support themselves.

Freebies announced by States in 2022-23			
States	(As % of GSDP)	(As % of Revenue Receipts)	(As % of Own Tax Revenue)
Andhra Pradesh	2.1	14.1	30.3
Bihar	0.1	0.6	2.7
Haryana	0.1	0.6	0.9
Jharkhand	1.7	8.0	26.7
Kerela	0	0	0.1
Madhya Pradesh	1.6	10.8	28.8
Punjab	2.7	17.8	45.4
Rajasthan	0.6	3.9	8.6
West Bengal	1.1	9.5	23.5

Source : RBI

**Table 5**

Freebies can distort resource allocation, cause inefficiencies and can lead to fiscal burdens, empirically proved above. By distorting market prices and misallocating resources may undermine the credit culture, reduce incentives for private investments, and even dissuade people from participating in the labour market.

Freebies Announcements by political Parties due for Elections			
States	Party	Announcements by Political Parties	Amount (estimated)
HP	Party 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 300-units free Electricity to households • Rs 1,500 per month to all women aged between 18 and 60 years</li> <li>• Old pension scheme (OPS) for government employees would be restored</li> <li>• Rs 680 crore will be kept aside to promote start-ups, with Rs 10-crore corpus money would be provided, free of interest, as seed money</li> </ul>	Rs 1100 crore (3.0% of RR & 10.0% OTR)
	Party 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing bus tickets for women at 50% discount rate, under the 'Nari ko Naman' scheme, which will cost the government Rs 60 crores annually</li> <li>• 125 units of electricity to household consumers for free since July 1</li> <li>• Waive water bills in rural areas, which accounted for annual revenue of Rs 30 crore.</li> </ul>	Rs 210 crore (0.6% of RR & 1.9% OTR)
	Party 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 300 units of free electricity to households</li> <li>• To provide free treatment, medicines, tests, and operation facilities to everyone • Shaheed Samman Rashi, in which an amount of Rs 1 crore will be given to the families of the Indian Army and Himachal Pradesh Police personnel martyred on duty</li> <li>• Promised to provide Rs 1000 to every woman who is above 18 years of age under the 'Stree Samman Rashi'</li> </ul>	Rs 320 crore (1.0% of RR & 3.0% OTR)
Gujarat	Party 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rs 500/Gas Cylinder</li> <li>• 300-units free Electricity</li> <li>• Upto Rs 10 lakh medical insurance</li> <li>• Farm loan waiver upto Rs 3 lakh</li> <li>• 3000 English medium school</li> <li>• Rs 4 lakh compensation to families of COVID mortalities</li> <li>• Revise domestic/commercial power consumption tariffs and aiming to keep the rates down</li> </ul>	Rs 15000 crore (8.0% of RR & 13.0% OTR)
	Party 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rs 500 crore for protecting cows in the state under "Mukhyamantri Gau Mata Poshan Yojna</li> <li>• Rs 213 crore for 'maintenance of cows for the farmers'</li> <li>• Rs 8,300 crore worth of subsidised power for the farmers. Rs 734 crore for providing free electricity for waterworks to all gram panchayats</li> </ul>	Rs 9013 crore (5.0% of RR & 7.8% OTR)
	Party 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rs 10 lakh will be provided to every panchayat</li> <li>• A fixed monthly salary of Rs 10,000 for sarpanches and Rs 20,000 for VCEs</li> <li>• 300 units of free electricity</li> <li>• Monthly stipend of ₹1,000 for women in Gujarat above the age of 18</li> <li>• Rs 3,000 per month to unemployed youths</li> </ul>	Rs 12,023 crore (6.6% of RR & 10.5% OTR)
West Bengal	Party 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rs 60000 to 43,000 Durga Puja organizing committees in the state</li> </ul>	Rs 240 crore (0.3% of RR & 0.1% OTR)

Source: SBI Research Note: RR: Revenue Expenditure of the State, OTR: Own Tax Revenue

**Table 6**

Political parties frequently promise freebies to gain electoral advantages, which not financially suitable and could potentially strain the states' finances in future. The concern is about how immoral to use taxpayers' money to fund these free provisions, especially when then the expenditure is not aimed at economic or social development. Although there is no strict provision for the freebies which don't contribute to development, but Supreme court has initiated a re-examination of these kind of practices.

There is a very thin line between freebies and welfare-oriented subsidies. A balanced approach with clear and strict guidelines, set a limit on spending on welfare-schemes to a certain percentage of state's GDP or tax revenue, to manage fiscal risks. Properly structured subsidies can play a vital role in welfare, while unchecked freebies can strain public finances and cause adverse economic issues.

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