

Freebies Politics in India and Its Political, Economic, and Psychological Impact on Voters

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ABSTRACT

The culture of freebies is nothing new. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru won the first Lok Sabha elections in 1952 with a sizable majority. The practice of political parties offering free rations and midday meals in schools to entice votes began in the 1960s. Later, in the 1980s, the parties pledged to offer free televisions, sarees, chappals, and other items to entice voters during elections. These days, political parties have made promises to provide free electricity and water, pension plans for the elderly and widows, financial aid to the underprivileged, financial support for women and farmers, free bus travel for women, the distribution of laptops, smartphones, and bicycles, the regulation of contract workers, loan forgiveness, etc. In this essay, I will discuss the political, economic, and psychological effects on voters of these gifts. The democratic spirit is harmed by this culture, which also burdens taxpayers' wallets and encourages laziness.

Keywords: Sizeable, entice, underprivileged, regulation.

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I. Introduction

After China, India has the second-highest population in the world. Representatives from many political parties run in elections at the federal, state, and local levels in the largest democracy in the world. Through the Universal Adult Franchise, the people directly elect all of the representatives. They are all therefore responsible to the public. Political parties are now following a new trend known as "Freebies," in which they make direct promises to win over voters.

Freebies are defined as gifts offered without demand in Webster's Dictionary.

Freebies are defined by Cambridge Dictionary as "anything that is provided to you without charge, especially to pique your interest in or support for something."

Freebies are things that are offered or given away without expense. These pledges were made with a specific population in mind, including women, people with disabilities, members of BPL, Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and Scheduled Tribes.

Today, gifts are used by all political parties to entice votes. They pledge to provide 15 lakhs in bank accounts, waive loans, provide free power and water, provide monthly allowances to women, the unemployed, and the crippled, provide free bus service for girls, control the use of contract workers, and distribute free meals and cylinders. Even the current administration tried to entice voters by offering them free products. This demonstrates how poorly the government functions, which is why it uses "freebies" as a tool to win over voters. It is unfortunate that even after 75 years of independence, political parties still woo voters with freebies rather than announcing development policies that would give young people jobs, high-quality education, eradicate poverty, protect women, and expand the economy while also giving their citizens a platform where they could compete with those from developed nations.

Late Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalithaa established this culture of freebies. She made free saree, TV, cooker, smartphone, washing machine, and bicycle promises. She founded Amma Canteen to offer Tamil Nadu residents free food. Following that, freebies are used by all political parties to entice votes. In order to win over voters, Arvind Kejriwal, the founder of the Aam Admi Party and the current chief minister of Delhi, pledged to offer free water, electricity, and transportation to women among other things during the 2015 Assembly election in north India. The Supreme Court said Parliament may not be able to solve the problem of

irrational freebies offered to lure voters. The court suggested that there is a need for an apex body consisting of members from NITI Aayog, Finance Commission, RBI, ruling, and opposition parties for suggestions on how to control freebies offered by political parties.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF FREEBIES CULTURE IN INDIA

- To boost the number of kids enrolled in schools, the late CM K Kamraj proposed the idea of free food and education for schoolchildren between 1954 and 1963.
- C.N. Annadurai, the founder of D.M.K., offered 4.5 kg of rice for 1 rupee through the Public Distribution System in 1967. After winning, he put the plan into action, but eventually abandoned it because of the cost.
- Aside from free television and rice valued at Rs. 2 per kilogram, the DMK also promised free gas stoves, 2 acres of land for the homeless, maternity support, and Rs. 1000 for all impoverished women during the 2006 Assembly elections.
- AIADMK also pledged to give away free chappals, bicycles, saris, dhotis, and other items to the underprivileged. Plans from Tamil Nadu were imitated by numerous states, including Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, etc.
- In the present day, national and regional parties use freebies as a tool to entice voters ahead of elections, such as the free distribution of laptops, mobile phones, and bicycles to students, the waiver of loans, the free distribution of electricity and water, the payment of monthly stipends to the underprivileged, women, farmers, the disabled, and the unemployed, the regulation of contractual employees, the free distribution of cylinders, and the provision of free bus rides for women.

ELECTION MANIFESTO

The Latin word "Manifestum," which denotes a list of facts, is where the word "manifesto" comes from. A wide range of political concerns, welfare programmes, and pledges are included in the manifesto, including those relating to the economy, health, education, and employment opportunities. A manifesto is a written statement of an individual, group, political party, or government's aims, motivations, and beliefs. A manifesto, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is a public statement of a group's beliefs and objectives, such as political parties. It covers a political party's ideology, viewpoints, and a thorough explanation of its policies and programmes.

Elections were held for the first time in India in 1952. At that time, the major political parties made public announcements about their philosophies, plans, and policies. The manifestos of all parties, which cover policies, plans, foreign policy, and economic policy, have been issued in recent years. Political parties are now using a new strategy known as "Freebies" in which they explicitly pledge to win over voters. Freebies are things that are offered or given without expense. These pledges were made to electorates that were specifically targeted, such as women, individuals with disabilities, and poorer elements of society.

India is a multireligious, multicasite, multicultural, multilingual nation. The various sections were likewise targeted by the electoral manifesto. Religions, castes, and for People who are Below the Poverty Line, SC, ST, and OBC. The function of manifestos does not cease with the conclusion of elections; they are still used to assess the responsibility of newly elected political parties. Manifestos go through three stages:

1. **Pre-election** manifestos are created in accordance with the demands of the society, which comprises individuals of all castes, faiths, and socioeconomic status.
2. Political parties release their manifestos **during elections** using a variety of media, including newspapers, television, and social media.
3. **Post-Election**-These manifestos serve as a tool to enforce accountability for the fulfillment of election-related commitments once the results are announced.

Today's manifestos often include "Freebies" or make misleading promises in an effort to win over supporters from various social groups. The genuine issues voters face, such as unemployment, inadequate educational opportunities, poverty, overpopulation, women's safety, riots in communities, terrorism, environmental protection, etc., are all ignored by all political parties. All political parties are working hard to win over voters by promising freebies such as millions of jobs, financial aid for girls and young people who are unemployed, and waivers of farmer debt. Distribute bicycles, laptops, and mobile phones to students. Free coaching for Competitive Exams and for IELTS or TOFEL, free electricity and water and regulation of Contractual Employees.

Manifestoes in different Countries

- Party manifestos provide a thorough overview of their platforms and programs. The **American Manifesto** covers topics such as immigration, the environment, health care, and foreign and domestic politics. Two months before elections, the manifestos are released.
- Manifestos encompass policies, initiatives, and the associated budget in **European nations**.

- The **Election Commission in Bhutan** requires political parties to submit a copy of their manifesto. Manifestos are released to the public following Election Commission clearance.
- The **Federal Electoral Institute in Mexico** will register and validate a candidate's electoral platform. The underlying themes of these platforms include social, political, and economic challenges. The platform must be verified and the registration must be certified in order to nominate candidates.

Punjabi and UP manifestos for the 2022 Assembly elections

UTTAR PRADESH

- Loan Waiver: UP will be debt-free by 2025; 300 units of free energy will be provided to consumers in rural areas; students will receive free laptops and bicycles.
- Free girls' education from kindergarten through graduate school; distribution of pressure cookers to BPL women; free electricity for irrigation of farms.
- Samajwadi Pension Scheme; 18000 per year for the elderly, the needy, and women in BPL families; free gas cylinders for the women; and 1500 per month pension for widows and women.
- Free tutoring for candidates for the UPSC, UPPSC, NDA, CDS, and JEE. Free tablets and cell phones.

PUNJAB

- No electricity bill; women's monthly stipend of 2000; senior citizens' pension of 3100;
- There are 10 lakh government jobs and 10 lakh private sector jobs. Students receive free 1 GB of data each day, contract workers are subject to regulation, and women and students are given free bus rides.
- Rs 1,000 monthly stipend for women over the age of 18.
- Free cooking gas cylinders for 8 homemakers each year, free tutoring for IELTS and TOFEL, and, free coaching for IAS, Medical, and IIT students.

Some political parties believe that an electoral manifesto is unnecessary.

Election manifestos are "**hollow promises that are never achieved**," claims the Bahujan Samaj Party.

The Election Commission needs to issue rigorous laws and regulations. The election commission should endorse the manifestos of various political parties, just like in Bhutan and Mexico. The election commission should have the authority to revoke a party's registration for its symbol if it uses giveaways in its manifestos. To preserve the nation's democracy, the Supreme Court must issue strong directives. Implementing the rules strictly will aid in resolving the nation's current issues.

The people of the country deal with a number of issues. However, our political parties are busily luring voters with freebie promises. India's major problems include:

1. Increased Population

India has the second-highest population in the entire planet. According to **World meter Elaboration of UN data**, India has 140 crore people as of today. India has 17% of the global population. Pollution, excessive use of natural resources, inadequate access to better healthcare, and poverty are all caused by overpopulation. In densely populated places, diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV spread more quickly.

2. Inadequate Education

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on many children. The possibility for online learning was made possible by the two-year closure of schools. However, a significant number of pupils have quit school as a result of the "Digital Divide." Even teachers lack the technical expertise to instruct pupils online, and there is no student accountability during exam time. This ruined the careers of the students.

There is a significant migration of pupils from private to public schools. Private school enrollment for students aged 6 to 14 has dropped from 32.5% in 2018 to 24.4% in 2021. According to the **Annual Status of Education Report**, two-thirds of all registered students have cell phones, while the other students do not have access to them.

3. Unemployment

Unemployment is a state in which a person actively seeks employment but is unsuccessful in doing so. **The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** estimates that India's unemployment rate will be 8.10% in February 2022. Millions of individuals have lost their employment as a result of COVID-19. As a result, crime and suicide rates rose. COVID is to blame for the high inflation rates and the inability of millions of people to meet their fundamental requirements.

4. Corruption

One of India's major problems is corruption, which obstructs the nation's progress toward prosperity. India is ranked **85th out of 180 nations** in the **Transparency International Index** for Corruption. India has Asia's

highest rates of corruption and use of personal connections to acquire public services, **Transparency International survey**.

In India, the rate of bribery is 39%, while 46% of people receive public services through personal connections. —**Global Corruption Barometer**.

5. Poverty

India has the second-highest population in the world. Over two thirds of the nation's population were living in poverty. According to the **World Bank**, the pandemic has caused India's poor population to more than double, from 60 million to 134 million, in just one year. The wealth divide between the affluent and poor is very wide. Poor people are unable to meet their fundamental requirements as a result of excessive inflation.

6. System of Health Care

The second-most populous democratic nation in the world is unable to offer basic medical services. India is now a major destination for medical tourists seeking affordable, high-quality care from countries in the middle east, Africa, South America, and Europe. However, those living in rural and small towns cannot access these services. The majority of the issues in rural India are caused by a lack of resources, which is a current big worry. The lack of improved medical facilities in the villages, towns, and cities under Covid resulted in the deaths of thousands of people.

7. Women's Security

In India, where women are revered as deities, safety for women is a crucial problem. Due to more women being exposed to every pitch, violence against women has multiplied. The male-dominated culture uses a variety of techniques to demonstrate its dominance over women.

According to a **National Crime Record Bureau report**, the majority of cases of crime against women were classified as "cruelty by husband or his family," "attack on women with the aim to outrage her modesty," "kidnapping & abduction of women," and "rape."

FREEBIES' POLITICAL IMPACT ON VOTER

India is the most democratically advanced nation in the world, with universal adult suffrage used to elect all legislators for a set term. People have the power to alter the government in the next election if they are dissatisfied with how it is operating. The attention of the electorate determines whether the government in a democracy succeeds or fails. Political parties today entice voters with "Freebies." In order to win over voters, they vow to provide free power and water, monthly allowances for women, daily wage workers, and jobless people, as well as 15 lakhs in our bank accounts and the free distribution of smartphones, laptops, and other technology.

Freebies have an impact on the democratic spirit. The tendency of political parties to sway voters with false promises not only endangers democracy but also violates the Constitution's spirit. The gifts that various political parties now offer influence how people vote. They don't evaluate them according to how they perform. Political parties compete with one another to provide voters as many freebies as possible. In the **Punjab State Assembly Elections (2022)**, **Shrimoni Akali Dal (SAD)** promised to give women allowances of 2000 rupees, the **Aam Admi Party (AAP)** promised allowances of 1000 rupees, and the **Indian National Congress (INC)** promised allowances of 2500 rupees.

Aam Aadmi Party promises 300 free units for every home, a monthly stipend of Rs. 1000 for women and Rs. 3000 for young people without jobs, loan forgiveness of up to Rs. 2 Lakhs, and other things in the **Gujarat Legislative Assembly Elections** in 2022. Congress pledged to give free power for farmers, free medical care up to Rs. 10 lakhs, and a subsidy of Rs. 5 per liter for milk producers, among other things. Every household received two LPG cylinders each year from the BJP. Bhartiya Janta Party pledged to give poor women three LPG cylinders, bicycles for schoolgirls and scooters for college girls, financial aid of Rs. 25000 for all pregnant women, etc. In response, Congress pledged to give every home 300 free energy units and Rs. 1500 monthly to women between 18 years to 60 years, in **Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly Elections** in 2022.

Political parties view "freebies" as a practical method and work to influence voters' emotions. We don't have the right to inquire about how the government operates if the voters elect their representative based on Freebies offered by various parties. Freebie offers and false promises have an impact on how an election is conducted fairly. Even the Supreme Court has noted that freebies have an impact on holding free and fair elections. **The Representation of People Act of 1951** prohibits buying voters in order to influence their vote and defines corrupt political candidate behavior. Election-related giveaways are in violation of the Constitution's **Art 14** (Equality before Law), **Art 162** (State Executive power), **Art 266(3)** (Expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India), and **Art 282** (discretionary grants).

In order to make up for its failure to provide the fundamental infrastructure necessary for human development, the government offered its citizens free services in order to divert their attention from the real issues at hand.

The Prime Minister recently stated: "In our country nowadays, political parties draw people by giving out free revdi" (sweets). The development of the nation is seriously endangered by this revdi culture. Revdi culture

adherents believe that by giving out free revdis to others, they can later purchase them. Together, we must disprove this way of thinking. Politics in the nation must be divorced from the revdi culture. The "culture of subsidies" in the power sector has recently been under fire from prime ministers, who are urging states to pay their debts of Rs 2.5 lakh crore. In Indian politics, he called the culture of subsidies a "severe illness."

Only deserving candidates should be granted tickets by political parties. People should also vote for leaders who are honest, educated, and dedicated to making policy for the betterment of the country and attempting to solve major issues that voters face. The distribution of freebies to voters during elections demonstrated the failure of the government's economic policies; even the ruling government offered freebies to attract voters rather than to demonstrate the progress of their work.

FREEBIES' ECONOMIC IMPACT ON VOTERS

"There is no such thing as a free lunch," declared that freebies do not exist in economics. Everything has to be paid for with taxes, if not today or tomorrow, then the next day because someone has to pay for the freebies. When the government distributes freebies, citizens must pay for them. The poor pay for the gifts, not the rich, because the government collects taxes on everything." Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate.

India is the world's second most populous country. Two-thirds of the total population was impoverished on multiple levels. According to the World Bank, the number of poor people in India has more than doubled to 134 million in a year due to the pandemic. According to CMIE, India's unemployment rate is 8.10%, and millions of people have lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19.

The culture of freebies places a financial burden on states. People pay taxes to the government to improve infrastructure, health care, public facilities, development, and the country's growth. However, taxpayer funds are used for freebies during elections. It discourages the honest taxpayer whose money is used to pay for the freebie. The state government has fewer sources of revenue than the federal government. They are perpetually in debt and rely on the central government for funds to provide basic services and other amenities. This culture of freebies has put the state's finances under strain.

SR NO.	STATES	REVENUE DEFICIT
1	PUNJAB	8622 CRORES
2	TAMIL NADU	58,692 CRORES
3	HARYANA	29194 CRORES
4	WEST BENGAL	26755 CRORES
5	RAJASTHAN	23750 CRORES
6	KERALA	16910 CRORES

Source: - Budget Documents of the State government, RBI

According to this data, the majority of states have a revenue deficit. They have fewer sources of income and a greater need for grants from centres to meet their states' basic needs. Recently, the Aam Aadmi Party won elections in Punjab with a large majority, and Bhagwant Maan was elected as the state's chief minister. During the elections, AAP promised "free 300 units of electricity." The state's current debt is 8,622 crores. The total expenditure for the distribution of 300 units of free electricity to the people of Punjab is expected to be Rs 5000 crores. AAP has also promised to provide Rs 1000 in financial assistance to women over the age of 18. The estimated cost of implementing this scheme is Rs. 15000 crores. How can any political party implement large-scale schemes when the state is already deeply in debt?

A Reserve Bank of India report titled "**State Finances: A Risk Analysis**" expresses grave concern about the financial health of states such as West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh due to their emphasis on Social Welfare and Freebies.

"While there is no precise definition of freebies, it is necessary to distinguish them from public goods, such as the Public Distribution System, Health and Education Related Schemes, Employment Guarantee Schemes, and so on." Provisions of free electricity, free water, free public transportation, loan waivers, and other freebies, on the other hand, are regarded as freebies, which may undermine credit culture, distort prices through cross-subsidization, and erode incentives for private investment and disincentives to work at the current wage rate lead to a drop in labor force participation," according to the RBI report.

Punjab is expected to be the hardest hit, with a debt-to-GDP ratio of more than 45% in 2026-2027, according to the RBI. In 2026-27, Rajasthan, Kerala, and West Bengal are expected to exceed the GSDP debt ratio by 35%. According to the RBI report, the total outstanding liabilities of four states—Punjab, Rajasthan,

West Bengal, and Kerala—were greater than the national average of 32%. Too much debt makes it difficult for states to invest in welfare programs.

Freebies announced by states in 2022-23			
State	As % of GSDP	As % of revenue receipts	As % of own tax revenue
Andhra Pradesh	2.1%	14.1%	30.30%
Bihar	0.1%	0.6%	2.70%
Haryana	0.1%	0.6%	0.90%
Jharkhand	1.7%	8.0%	26.70%
Kerala	0.0%	0.0%	0.10%
Madhya Pradesh	1.6%	10.8%	28.80%
Punjab	2.7%	17.8%	45.40%
Rajasthan	0.6%	3.9%	8.60%
West Bengal	1.1%	9.5%	23.80%

-Sources: Budget documents of the State Government, RBI

In some of the most indebted states, such as Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, freebies have exceeded 2% of GSDP. Subsidies account for 14.1%, 10.8%, and 17.8% of total revenue in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab, respectively.

The main threats to freebies are the collapse of a country's economy, such as Sri Lanka, which declared a financial emergency due to the collapse of its economy. Because there is no capital formation or future returns from freebies to the government, they put pressure on the government's budget. The burden of interest payments will increase as the deficit grows. The distribution of free goods caused economic inflation. When freebies include free power, water, and other types of consumer goods, it has an impact on environmental and sustainable growth, renewable energy, and public transportation systems. It is a general human tendency to overuse or misuse things when they are provided for free.

FREEBIES' PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON VOTERS

According to **Dan Ariely**, "People change their behavioral patterns and are more willing to comply when something free comes along. Free isn't just an indicator of price. It's a very powerful emotional trigger that's often so irresistible that it makes people lug home useless key chains and buy pants too tight just so they can get an extra pair at no cost."

The Tamil Nadu high court stated, "Freebie culture makes the people of Tamil Nadu lazy."

According to Justices **N. Kirubakaran** and **B. Pugalenti**, the freebie culture has made people lazy and has weakened the spirit of hard work. Instead of providing good quality education, job opportunities, better health facilities, and infrastructure development, the Madras High Court urged political parties to entice voters by offering freebies such as televisions, fans, mobile phones, mixer grinders, monthly allowances to unemployed, farmers, and women, smartphones, rice and pulses at very low prices, free water, and free electricity, and so on. Freebies should be considered a corrupt practice. During elections, political parties entice voters by promising Rs 1000, Rs 2000, and Rs 2500 to unemployed, women, farmers, or disabled people, among others. Recently, "Aam Aadmi Party enticed voters by promising Rs 1000 to women aged 18 or above, Shiromani Akal Dal (SAD) offers Rs 2000, and Indian National Congress offers Rs 2500". People from north and northeast India had to work in every industry, including hotels, industries, shops, and agriculture. If these cultures continue, migrant workers will own the land, and the actual owners will be forced to work for them.

Analysis of Freebies Among Voters

- If the government continues to sway voters through freebies, India may face a financial collapse similar to that of Sri Lanka. **N.K. Singh** of the Fifteen Finance Commission warned that freebies are a "quick passport to fiscal disaster."

- If political parties make policies related to poverty alleviation, quality education, employment opportunities, health and sanitation, transportation, women's safety, and infrastructure, and these policies reach the right people without leakage or corruption, people will not need freebies.
- The Election Commission should use its powers against parties that offered freebies to voters, such as deregistration of political parties, power of content, and so on.
- As advised by the Madras High Court in 2021, the government should reinvest freebie funds in job creation, health care, and infrastructure. This resulted in the country's social and economic development.
- All political parties' manifestos should be legally binding. This will limit political parties' ability to provide freebies to voters.
- There is a need to learn lessons from Sri Lanka's financial collapse, including fiscal prudence, responsible governance, and abandoning the culture of freebies.

II. Conclusion

India should learn from Sri Lanka's and Venezuela's economy collapses. Venezuela was one of the richest countries in South America until 1980, due to abundant oil. From food to public transportation, successive governments have promised freebies. Following the drop in oil prices, Venezuela experienced a food shortage and an economic crisis. The government continued to waive loan payments, which harmed the country's economy. It took years to recover from the economic downturn.

The Sri Lankan economy recently collapsed, and the people are experiencing power outages and a lack of basic necessities such as food, fuel, and medicines. For two weeks, the Sri Lankan government prohibited the sale of diesel and gasoline. To conserve resources, schools are closed and people are asked to work from home. Sri Lanka failed to pay their foreign debt interest. The main reasons for the collapse of the Sri Lankan economy are a focus on providing goods to its domestic market, which has resulted in a decline in export income. Due to a lack of foreign currency, the Sri Lankan government prohibited the import of chemical fertilizers and converted its agriculture to organic farming. To ensure the success of this mission, the government provided loans to farmers. This caused a shortage of food grains in the country, causing prices to rise. People are unable to meet their most basic needs.

There is nothing wrong with having a complex social security scheme driven by policy that aims to aid the poor to alleviate poverty. However, such a scheme requires careful planning and cannot be created right before an election.

The economist and educator Y K Alagh may have made the best comment when he said that the electorate is not a fool. It will take into account all of the gifts already given out and cast votes in accordance with its carefully considered evaluation of performance. Much hinges on the electorate's ability to see through all of this bluster.

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