



## General Studies-2; Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability.

### Election Campaign Funding

#### Introduction

- Elections are fought with huge funds nowadays. Estimates vary, but a candidate may spend in crores in just one constituency.
- This vital issue is neglected by voters in the noise of campaigns, leaders, celebrities and media coverage.

#### Importance of the Issue

- Voters vote for candidates and political parties so that they deliver benefits to the citizens.
- If election funds are obtained from other sources, the Governments are obliged to the funders more than the voters.
- Government may take decisions that benefit the donors rather than the voters.
- Even if a rich candidate funds his own election, the focus is on recovering the investment made.
- **Campaign funding reforms is one of the biggest issues in electoral reforms worldwide.**
- Countries like the U.S., the EU and so on have a set of laws to address this issue.

#### Situation in India

- Transparency in funding is absent after the introduction of Electoral Bonds.
- Now citizens cannot know who is funding the political parties.
- In spite of the Central Information Commission (CIC) ruling, all political parties have refused to submit themselves to the transparency that comes with Right to Information.

- Limits on funding are also not well defined.
- As per reports maximum percentage of the funds go to just one party. This does not allow for a level playing field.
- **PILs have been filed in the Supreme Court to make the Electoral Bonds completely transparent so that voters know where political parties are getting their funds from.**

### International Practice

- In the U.S, every citizen has the option of letting a small part of his taxes be used for election funding.
- In U.S. and the EU countries, voters know where political parties are getting their funds from.

### Way Forward

- **Make all election funding completely transparent so that voters know who is funding whom.**
- Prevent private interests from unduly influencing elections or Governments. This is done by a set of rules on limiting funding.
- Have a more level playing field so that good politicians and parties with less funds also stand a chance of competing in elections.
- Voters must gather relevant information about the candidate, funding, spending and so on. The official websites of political parties and the Election Commission have such information.
- Voting for any candidate or party that spends too much should be considered very carefully. It may go against the voter's own interest.
- Another long-term solution is to fund political parties or candidate with small donations of ₹10 to ₹500.
- If the money is raised from voters then the winner will work for the people.
- Such large-scale experiments have succeeded in hundreds of panchayat elections where elections were won by spending one hundredth of the other candidates.