

By Sidharth Mishra



While there could be lack of agreement with the Arvind Kejriwal government on most of its actions, which are often propelled by electoral considerations, there is not much scope for the criticism of its new excise policy especially on the count of lowering the age of consumption. This was probably the best option Delhi Government had in tiding over the financial crisis staring at it.

Despite we being the country of Mahatma Gandhi, let's be honest with the fact that alcohol is the biggest contributor to taxes in India with Delhi not being any different. Last year, Delhi Government had constituted a committee to come up with suggestions to increase tax revenues and more importantly stop tax evasions. One of the major recommendations of the committee has been to reduce the legal age for consumption from 25 to 21 years, bringing it at par with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

The Delhi Government in its excise policy for 2021-22, which was approved on March 23 last, has decided to accept these recommendations. This has raised the hackles of a 'sanskari' Delhi unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In its bumble-mumble, state unit president of the ruling party at the Centre, Adesh Gupta has conveniently forgotten the fact that the neighbouring states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are both ruled by the BJP.

In demonising city's new excise policy, Gupta may well could be seen acting as the agent provocateur for the governments of the neighbouring states. In the memorandum submitted to the Lieutenant Governor, the Delhi BJP has said, "Government's decision to lower the liquor consumption age to 21 years from present 25 years is unwanted. It may not be legally wrong but its morally unwanted and so be stalled."

Under the new excise policy, the biggest monetary loss would be for the bars serving liquors

Governance, Not Consumption, Which Should Be Debated

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to the 21-year-old in the suburbs of Gurgaon, Faridabad, Noida, Ghaziabad, Kundli, Bahadurgarh and the like, and not to forget the revenue loss to the respective state governments. There could not have been anything better than this archaic law going because of its inconsistencies and self-defeating rules.

For instance, a 21-year-old magistrate or a police officer could be part of the process to grant license for sale of liquor in the city. However, s/he would have to wait to turn 25 years to consume something which s/he has certified consumable in the act of official duty.

The country's law allows its citizens to vote at the age of 18, get appointed in the government at the age of 21, lead our armed forces, defend our borders at that age but be barred from having a choice to consume or not to consume alcohol.

Having supported the Kejriwal government on a section of its new excise policy, let there be a word of caution too. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government realises well that deregulating sale of alcohol would enhance its revenue collections, which otherwise has been in tatters following the failure of the government to create an environment of investment in the city.

For example, Delhi despite its great potential to be the education hub, has failed to encourage not many new investments in Delhi Government's flagship Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIPU). Policies drafted with just for an eye on the votes, and rules made to tide over financial crisis doesn't really help the cause of governance.

Despite the Delhi Government going on making a claim a day binge on its 'achievements', the fact remains that its electoral gains and political strength emanates from subsidy model of governance, which has gnawed hard at city's finances and slowed down development.

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