

Chapter 5



The Government: Functions and Scope

In a mixed economy, apart from the private sector, there is the government which plays a very important role. In this chapter, we shall not deal with the myriad ways in which it influences economic life but limit ourselves to three distinct functions that operate through the revenue and expenditure measures of the government budget.

First, certain goods, referred to as **public goods** (such as national defence, roads, government administration), as distinct from **private goods** (like clothes, cars, food items), cannot be provided through the market mechanism, i.e. by transactions between individual consumers and producers and must be provided by the government. This is the **allocation function**.

Second, through its tax and expenditure policy, the government attempts to bring about a distribution of income that is considered 'fair' by society. The government affects the personal disposable income of households by making transfer payments and collecting taxes and, therefore, can alter the income distribution. This is the **distribution function**.

Third, the economy tends to be subject to substantial fluctuations and may suffer from prolonged periods of unemployment or inflation. The overall level of employment and prices in the economy depends upon the level of aggregate demand which is a function of the spending decisions of millions of private economic agents apart from the government. These decisions, in turn, depend on many factors such as income and credit availability. In any period, the level of expenditures may not be sufficient for full utilisation of labour and other resources of the economy. Since wages and prices are generally rigid downwards (they do not fall below a level), employment cannot be restored automatically. Hence, policy measures are needed to raise aggregate demand. On the other hand, there may be times when expenditures exceed the available output under conditions of high employment and thus may cause inflation. In such situations, restrictive conditions are needed to reduce demand. These constitute the *stabilisation* requirements of the domestic economy.

To understand the need for governmental provision of public goods, we must consider what distinguishes them from private goods. There are two major differences. One, the benefits of public goods are not limited to one particular consumer, as in the case of private goods, but become available to all. For instance, if a

person consumes a chocolate or wears a shirt, these will not be available to other individuals. This person's consumption stands in a rival relationship to the consumption of others. However, if we consider a public park or measures to reduce air pollution, the benefits will be available to all. The consumption of such products by several individuals is not 'rivalrous' in the sense that a person can enjoy the benefits without reducing their availability to others. Two, in case of private goods anyone who does not pay for the good can be excluded from enjoying its benefits. If you do not buy a ticket, you are excluded from watching a film at a local theatre. However, in case of public goods, there is no feasible way of excluding anyone from enjoying the benefits of the good (they are non-excludable). Since non-paying users usually cannot be excluded, it becomes difficult or impossible to collect fees for the public good. This is what is called the 'free-rider' problem. Consumers will not voluntarily pay for what they can get for free and for which there is no exclusive title to the property being enjoyed. The link between the producer and the consumer is broken and the government must step in to provide for such goods. Public provision, however, is not the same as public production. **Public provision** means that they are financed through the budget and made available free of any direct payment. These goods may be produced directly under government management or by the private sector.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In section 5.1, we present the components of the government budget to bring out the sources of government revenue and the avenues of government spending. In section 5.2, we discuss the issue of government deficit, when expenditures exceed revenue collection. Section 5.3 deals with fiscal policy and the multiplier process within the income expenditure approach described earlier. Government borrowing to cover deficits leads to debt accumulation – what the government owes. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the debt issue.

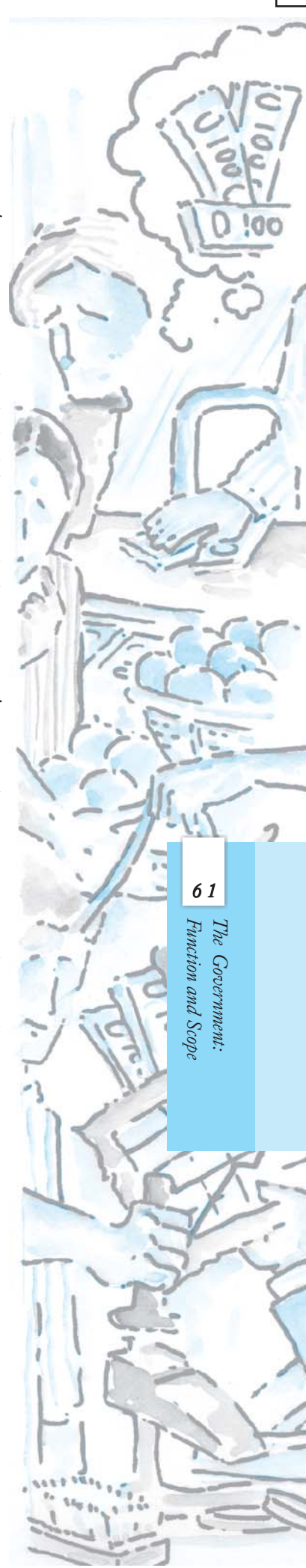
5.1 COMPONENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT BUDGET

There is a constitutional requirement in India (Article 112) to present before the Parliament a statement of estimated receipts and expenditures of the government in respect of every financial year which runs from 1 April to 31 March. This 'Annual Financial Statement' constitutes the main budget document. Further, the budget must distinguish expenditure on the revenue account from other expenditures. Therefore, the budget comprises of the (a) Revenue Budget and the (b) Capital Budget (Refer Chart 1).

5.1.1 The Revenue Account

The Revenue Budget shows the current receipts of the government and the expenditure that can be met from these receipts.

Revenue Receipts: Revenue receipts are divided into tax and non-tax revenues. Tax revenues consist of the proceeds of taxes and other duties levied by the central government. Tax revenues, an important component of revenue receipts, comprise of direct taxes – which fall directly on individuals (personal income tax) and firms (corporation tax), and indirect taxes like excise taxes (duties levied on goods produced within the country), customs duties (taxes imposed on goods imported into and exported out of India) and service tax. Excise taxes are the single largest revenue earner contributing 35.7 per cent of total tax revenue in 2003-04. Other direct taxes like wealth tax, gift tax and estate



duty (now abolished) have never been of much significance in terms of revenue yield and have thus been referred to as 'paper taxes'. Two new taxes—the fringe benefits tax (on those benefits enjoyed collectively by the employees) and on cash withdrawals from banks over a certain threshold in a day—were introduced in the budget for 2005-06. The share of direct taxes in gross tax revenue has increased from 19.1 per cent in 1990-91 to 41.3 per cent in 2003-04. There has been a reduction in the share of indirect tax revenue, falling from 78.4 per cent in 1990-91 to 57.9 per cent in 2003-04.

The redistribution objective is sought to be achieved through progressive income taxation, in which higher the income, higher is the tax rate. Firms are taxed on a proportional basis, where the tax rate is a particular proportion of profits. With respect to excise taxes, necessities of life are exempted or taxed at low rates, comforts and semi-luxuries are moderately taxed, and luxuries, tobacco and petroleum products are taxed heavily.

Non-tax revenue of the central government mainly consists of interest receipts (on account of loans by the central government which constitutes the single largest item of non-tax revenue), dividends and profits on investments made by the government, fees and other receipts for services rendered by the government. Cash grants-in-aid from foreign countries and international organisations are also included.

The estimates of revenue receipts take into account the effects of tax proposals made in the Finance Bill¹.

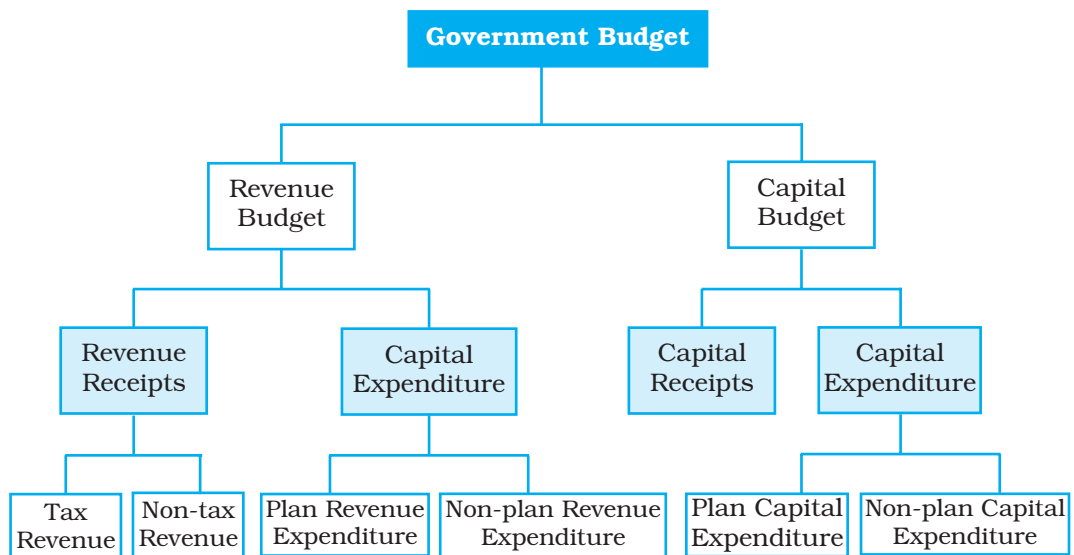


Chart 1: The Components of the Government Budget

Revenue Expenditure: Broadly speaking, revenue expenditure consists of all those expenditures of the government which do not result in creation of physical or financial assets. It relates to those expenses incurred for the normal functioning of the government departments and various services, interest payments on debt incurred by the government, and grants given to state governments and other parties (even though some of the grants may be meant for creation of assets).

¹A Finance Bill, presented along with the Annual Financial Statement, provides details of the imposition, abolition, remission, alteration or regulation of taxes proposed in the Budget.

Budget documents classify total revenue expenditure into **plan and non-plan expenditure**. Plan revenue expenditure relates to central Plans (the Five-Year Plans) and central assistance for State and Union Territory Plans. Non-plan expenditure, the more important component of revenue expenditure, covers a vast range of general, economic and social services of the government. The main items of non-plan expenditure are interest payments, defence services, subsidies, salaries and pensions.

Interest payments on market loans, external loans and from various reserve funds constitute the single largest component of non-plan revenue expenditure. They used up 41.5 per cent of revenue receipts in 2004-05. Defence expenditure, the second largest component of non-plan expenditure, is committed expenditure in the sense that given the national security concerns, there exists little scope for drastic reduction. Subsidies are an important policy instrument which aim at increasing welfare. Apart from providing implicit subsidies through under-pricing of public goods and services like education and health, the government also extends subsidies explicitly on items such as exports, interest on loans, food and fertilisers. The amount of subsidies as a per cent of GDP has been falling from 1.7 per cent in 1990-91 to 1.66 per cent in 2002-03 to 1.45 per cent in 2004-05.

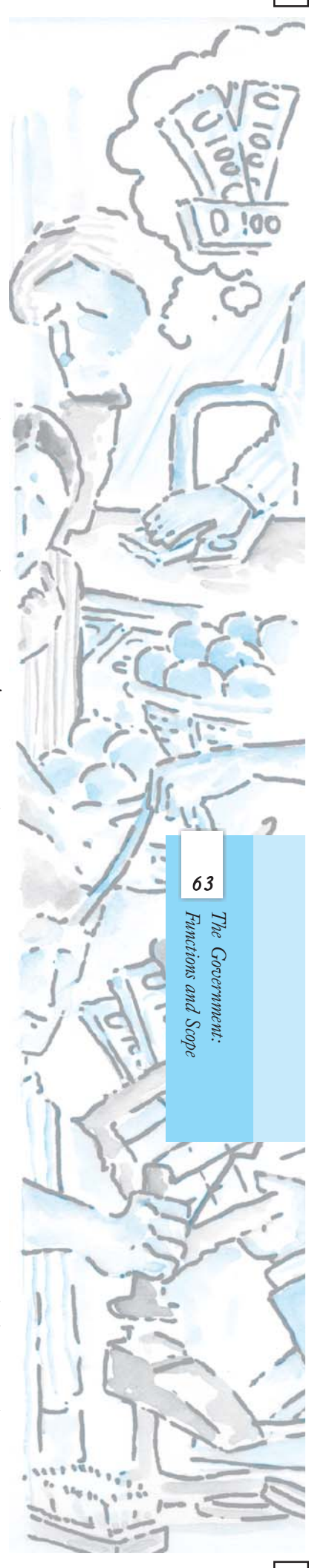
5.1.2 The Capital Account

The Capital Budget is an account of the assets as well as liabilities of the central government, which takes into consideration changes in capital. It consists of capital receipts and capital expenditure of the government. This shows the capital requirements of the government and the pattern of their financing.

Capital Receipts: The main items of capital receipts are loans raised by the government from the public which are called market borrowings, borrowing by the government from the Reserve Bank and commercial banks and other financial institutions through the sale of treasury bills, loans received from foreign governments and international organisations, and recoveries of loans granted by the central government. Other items include small savings (Post-Office Savings Accounts, National Savings Certificates, etc), provident funds and net receipts obtained from the sale of shares in Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs).

Capital Expenditure: This includes expenditure on the acquisition of land, building, machinery, equipment, investment in shares, and loans and advances by the central government to state and union territory governments, PSUs and other parties. Capital expenditure is also categorised as plan and non-plan in the budget documents. Plan capital expenditure, like its revenue counterpart, relates to central plan and central assistance for state and union territory plans. Non-plan capital expenditure covers various general, social and economic services provided by the government.

The budget is not merely a statement of receipts and expenditures. Since Independence, with the launching of the Five-Year Plans, it has also become a significant national policy statement. The budget, it has been argued, reflects and shapes, and is, in turn, shaped by the country's economic life. Along with the budget, three policy statements are mandated by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003 (FRBMA). The Medium-term Fiscal Policy Statement sets a three-year rolling target for specific fiscal indicators and examines whether revenue expenditure can be financed through revenue receipts on a sustainable basis and how productively capital receipts including market



borrowings are being utilised. The Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement sets the priorities of the government in the fiscal area, examining current policies and justifying any deviation in important fiscal measures. The Macroeconomic Framework Statement assesses the prospects of the economy with respect to the GDP growth rate, fiscal balance of the central government and external balance².

5.1.3 Measures of Government Deficit

When a government spends more than it collects by way of revenue, it incurs a budget deficit³. There are various measures that capture government deficit and they have their own implications for the economy.

Revenue Deficit: The revenue deficit refers to the excess of government's revenue expenditure over revenue receipts

$$\text{Revenue deficit} = \text{Revenue expenditure} - \text{Revenue receipts}$$

The revenue deficit includes only such transactions that affect the current income and expenditure of the government. When the government incurs a revenue deficit, it implies that the government is dissaving and is using up the savings of the other sectors of the economy to finance a part of its consumption expenditure. This situation means that the government will have to borrow not only to finance its investment but also its consumption requirements. This will lead to a build up of stock of debt and interest liabilities and force the government, eventually, to cut expenditure. Since a major part of revenue expenditure is committed expenditure, it cannot be reduced. Often the government reduces productive capital expenditure or welfare expenditure. This would mean lower growth and adverse welfare implications.

Fiscal Deficit: Fiscal deficit is the difference between the government's total expenditure and its total receipts excluding borrowing

$$\text{Gross fiscal deficit} = \text{Total expenditure} - (\text{Revenue receipts} + \text{Non-debt creating capital receipts})$$

Non-debt creating capital receipts are those receipts which are not borrowings and, therefore, do not give rise to debt. Examples are recovery of loans and the proceeds from the sale of PSUs. The fiscal deficit will have to be financed through borrowing. Thus, it indicates the total borrowing requirements of the government from all sources. From the financing side

$$\text{Gross fiscal deficit} = \text{Net borrowing at home} + \text{Borrowing from RBI} + \text{Borrowing from abroad}$$

Net borrowing at home includes that directly borrowed from the public through debt instruments (for example, the various small savings schemes) and indirectly from commercial banks through Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR). The fiscal deficit of the central government, after declining from 6.6 per cent of GDP in 1990-91 to 4.1 per cent in 1996-97 rose to 6.2 per cent

²The 2005-06 Indian Budget introduced a statement highlighting the gender sensitivities of the budgetary allocations. Gender budgeting is an exercise to translate the stated gender commitments of the government into budgetary commitments, involving special initiatives for empowering women and examination of the utilisation of resources allocated for women and the impact of public expenditure and policies of the government on women. The 2006-07 budget enlarged the earlier statement.

³More formally, it refers to the excess of total expenditure (both revenue and capital) over total receipts (both revenue and capital). From the 1997-98 budget, the practice of showing budget deficit has been discontinued in India.

in 2001-02 (Table 5.1). Under the constraint imposed by the FRBMA, the fiscal deficit as well as the revenue deficit have fallen to 4.1 per cent and 2.5 per cent respectively in 2004-05 (provisional figures). The increasing share of the revenue deficit as a proportion of the fiscal deficit (which was 49.4 per cent in 1990-91 but has increased to 79.7 in 2003-04) indicates the rapid decline in the quality of the deficit.

Table 5.1: Receipts and Expenditures of the Central Government

(As per cent of GDP)	1990 -91	2000 -01	2001 -02	2002 -03	2003 -04
1. Revenue Receipts(a+b)	9.7	9.1	8.8	9.4	9.6
(a) Tax revenue(net of states' share)	7.6	6.5	5.9	6.5	6.8
(b) Non-tax revenue	2.1	2.7	3.0	3.0	2.8
2. Revenue Expenditure	12.9	13.2	13.2	13.8	13.1
(a) Interest payments	3.8	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.5
(b) Major subsidies	1.7	1.2	1.3	1.7	1.6
(c) Defence expenditure	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.6
3. Revenue Deficit(2-1)	3.3	4.0	4.4	4.4	3.6
4. Capital Receipts(a+b+c)	5.6	6.3	7.1	7.4	7.5
(a) Recovery of loans	1.0	0.6	0.7	1.4	2.4
(b) Other receipts(mainly PSU disinvestment)	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.6
(c) Borrowings and other liabilities	4.6	5.6	6.2	5.9	4.5
5. Capital Expenditure	4.4	2.3	2.7	3.0	4.0
6. Total Expenditure [(2+5=6(a)+6(b))]	17.3	15.4	15.9	16.9	17.1
(a) Plan expenditure	5.0	3.9	4.4	4.6	4.4
(b) Non-plan expenditure	12.3	11.5	11.4	12.3	12.6
7. Fiscal Deficit [6-1-4(a)-4(b)]	6.6	5.6	6.2	5.9	4.5
8. Primary Deficit [7-2(a)]	2.8	0.9	1.5	1.1	0.0

Source: *Economic Survey*, 2005-06

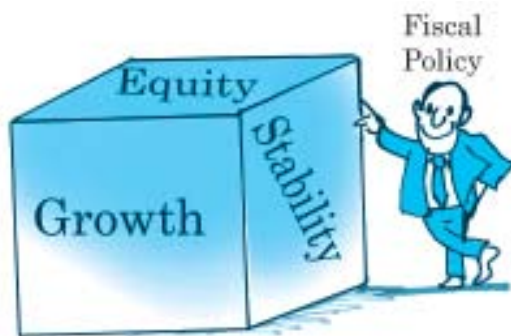
Primary Deficit: We must note that the borrowing requirement of the government includes interest obligations on accumulated debt. To obtain an estimate of borrowing on account of current expenditures exceeding revenues, we need to calculate what has been called the primary deficit. It is simply the fiscal deficit minus the interest payments

$$\text{Gross primary deficit} = \text{Gross fiscal deficit} - \text{net interest liabilities}$$

Net interest liabilities consist of interest payments minus interest receipts by the government on net domestic lending.

5.2 FISCAL POLICY

One of Keynes's main ideas in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* was that government fiscal policy should be used to stabilise the level of output and employment. Through changes in its expenditure and taxes, the government attempts to increase output and income and seeks to stabilise the ups and downs in the economy. In the process, fiscal policy creates a *surplus* (when total receipts exceed expenditure) or a *deficit budget* (when total



How does the Fiscal Policy try to achieve its three basic objectives?

income (Y) and disposable income (YD) – the income available for consumption and saving with the households.

We take taxes first. We assume that the government imposes taxes that do not depend on income, called **lump-sum taxes** equal to T . We assume throughout the analysis that government makes a constant amount of transfers, \bar{TR} . The consumption function is now

$$C = \bar{C} + cYD = \bar{C} + c(Y - T + \bar{TR}) \quad (5.1)$$

where YD = disposable income.

We note that taxes lower disposable income and consumption. For instance, if one earns Rs 1 lakh and has to pay Rs 10,000 in taxes, she has the same disposable income as someone who earns Rs 90,000 but pays no taxes. The definition of aggregate demand augmented to include the government will be

$$AD = \bar{C} + c(Y - T + \bar{TR}) + I + G \quad (5.2)$$

Graphically, we find that the lump-sum tax shifts the consumption schedule downward in a parallel way and hence the aggregate demand curve shifts in a similar fashion. The income determination condition in the product market will be $Y = AD$, which can be written as

$$Y = \bar{C} + c(Y - T + \bar{TR}) + I + G \quad (5.3)$$

Solving for the equilibrium level of income, we get

$$Y^* = \frac{1}{1-c} (\bar{C} - cT + c\bar{TR} + I + G) \quad (5.4)$$

5.2.1 Changes in Government Expenditure

We consider the effects of increasing government purchases (G) keeping taxes constant. When G exceeds T , the government runs a deficit. Because G is a component of aggregate spending, planned aggregate expenditure will increase. The aggregate demand schedule shifts up to AD' . At the initial level of output, demand exceeds supply and firms expand production. The new equilibrium is at E' . The multiplier mechanism (described in Chapter 4) is in operation. The government spending multiplier is given by

$$\Delta Y = \frac{1}{1-c} \Delta G \quad (5.5)$$

or

$$\frac{\Delta Y}{\Delta G} = \frac{1}{1-c} \quad (5.6)$$

expenditure exceed receipts) rather than a *balanced budget* (when expenditure equals receipts). In what follows, we study the effects of introducing the government sector in our earlier analysis of the determination of income.

The government directly affects the level of equilibrium income in two specific ways – government purchases of goods and services (G) increase aggregate demand and taxes, and transfers affect the relation between

In Fig. 5.1, government expenditure increases from G to G' and causes equilibrium income to increase from Y to Y' .

5.2.2 Changes in Taxes

We find that a cut in taxes increases disposable income ($Y - T$) at each level of income. This shifts the aggregate expenditure schedule upwards by a fraction c of the decrease in taxes. This is shown in Fig 5.2.

From equation 5.3, we have

$$\Delta Y^* = \frac{1}{1-c} (-c)\Delta T \quad (5.7)$$

The tax multiplier

$$= \frac{\Delta Y}{\Delta T} = \frac{-c}{1-c} \quad (5.8)$$

Because a tax cut (increase) will cause an increase (reduction) in consumption and output, the tax multiplier is a negative multiplier. Comparing equation (5.6) and (5.8), we find that the tax multiplier is smaller in absolute value compared to the government spending multiplier. This is because an increase in government spending directly affects total spending whereas taxes enter the multiplier process through their impact on disposable income, which influences household consumption (which is a part of total spending). Thus, with a ΔT reduction in taxes, consumption, and hence total spending, increases in the first instance by $c\Delta T$. To understand how the two multipliers differ, we consider the following example.

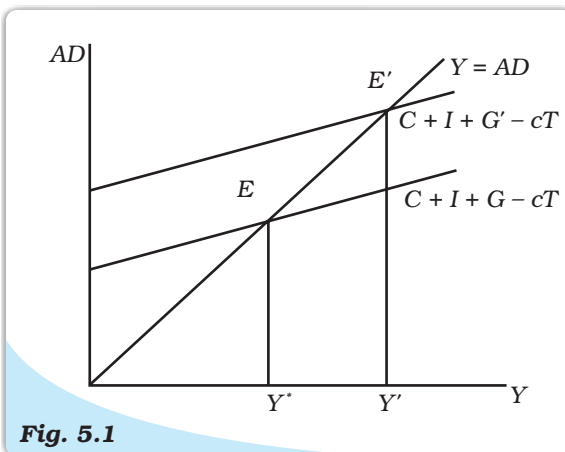


Fig. 5.1

Effect of Higher Government Expenditure

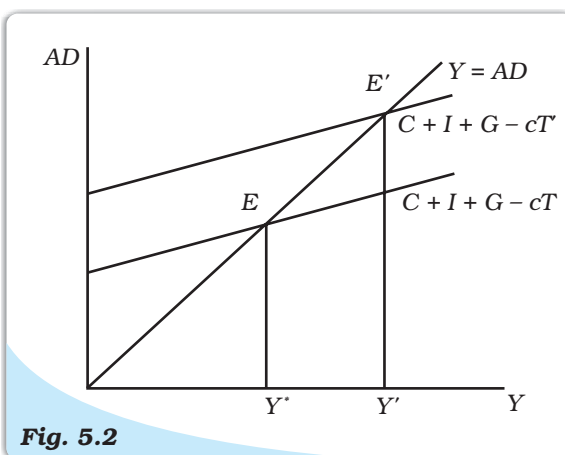


Fig. 5.2

Effect of a Reduction in Taxes

EXAMPLE 5.1

Assume that the marginal propensity to consume is 0.8. The government expenditure multiplier will then be

$\frac{1}{1-c} = \frac{1}{1-0.8} = \frac{1}{0.2} = 5$. For an increase in government spending by 100, the equilibrium income will increase by 500 ($\frac{1}{1-c} \Delta G = 5 \times 100$). The tax multiplier is

given by $\frac{-c}{1-c} = \frac{-0.8}{1-0.8} = \frac{-0.8}{0.2} = -4$.

A tax cut of 100 ($\Delta T = -100$) will increase



Why is the poor man crying? Suggest measures to wipe off his tears.

equilibrium income by 400 ($\frac{-c}{1-c} \Delta T = -4 \times -100$). Thus, the equilibrium income increases in this case by less than the amount by which it increased under a G increase.

Within the present framework, if we take different values of the marginal propensity to consume and calculate the values of the two multipliers, we find that the tax multiplier is always one less in absolute value than the government expenditure multiplier. This has an interesting implication. If an increase in government spending is matched by an equal increase in taxes, so that the budget remains balanced, output will rise by the amount of the increase in government spending. Adding the two policy multipliers gives

$$\text{The balanced budget multiplier} = \frac{\Delta Y^*}{\Delta G} = \frac{1}{1-c} + \frac{-c}{1-c} = \frac{1-c}{1-c} = 1 \quad (5.9)$$

A balanced budget multiplier of unity implies that a 100 increase in G financed by 100 increase in taxes increases income by just 100. This can be seen from Example 1 where an increase in G by 100 increases output by 500. A tax increase would reduce income by 400 with the net increase of income equal to 100. The equilibrium income refers to the final income that one arrives at in a period sufficiently long for all the rounds of the multipliers to work themselves out. We find that output increases by exactly the amount of increased G with no induced consumption spending due to increase in taxes. To see what must be at work, we examine the multiplier process. The increase in government spending by a certain amount raises income by that amount directly and then indirectly through the multiplier chain increasing income by

$$\Delta Y = \Delta G + c\Delta G + c^2\Delta G + \dots = \Delta G(1 + c + c^2 + \dots) \quad (5.10)$$

But the tax increase only enters the multiplier process when the cut in disposable income reduces consumption by c times the reduction in taxes. Thus the effect on income of the tax increase is given by

$$\Delta Y = -c\Delta T - c^2\Delta T + \dots = -\Delta T(c + c^2 + \dots) \quad (5.11)$$

The difference between the two gives the net effect on income. Since $\Delta G = \Delta T$, from 5.10 and 5.11, we get $\Delta Y = \Delta G$, that is, income increases by the amount by which government spending increases and the balanced budget multiplier is unity. This multiplier can also be derived from equation 5.3 as follows

$$\Delta Y = \Delta \bar{G} + c(\Delta Y - \Delta T) \text{ since investment does not change } (\Delta I = 0) \quad (5.12)$$

Since $\Delta \bar{G} = \Delta T$, we have

$$\frac{\Delta Y}{\Delta G} = \frac{1-c}{1-c} = 1 \quad (5.13)$$

Case of Proportional Taxes: A more realistic assumption would be that the government collects a constant fraction, t , of income in the form of taxes so that $T = tY$. The consumption function with proportional taxes is given by

$$C = \bar{C} + c(Y - tY + \bar{TR}) = \bar{C} + c(1-t)Y + c\bar{TR} \quad (5.14)$$

We note that proportional taxes not only lower consumption at each level of income but also lower the slope of the consumption function. The mpc out of income falls to $c(1-t)$. The new aggregate demand schedule, AD' , has a larger intercept but is flatter as shown in Fig. 5.3.

Now we have

$$AD = \bar{C} + c(1-t)Y + c\bar{TR} + I + G = \bar{A} + c(1-t)Y \quad (5.15)$$

Where \bar{A} = autonomous expenditure and equals $\bar{C} + c\bar{TR} + I + G$. Income determination condition in the product market is, $Y = AD$, which can be written as

$$Y = \bar{A} + c(1-t)Y \quad (5.16)$$

Solving for the equilibrium level of income

$$Y^* = \frac{1}{1-c(1-t)}\bar{A} \quad (5.17)$$

so that the multiplier is given by

$$\frac{\Delta Y}{\Delta \bar{A}} = \frac{1}{1-c(1-t)} \quad (5.18)$$

Comparing this with the value of the multiplier with lump-sum taxes case, we find that the value has become smaller. When income rose as a result of an increase in government spending in the case of lump-sum taxes, consumption increased by c times the increase in income. With proportional taxes, consumption will rise by less, $(c - ct = c(1-t))$ times the increase in income.

For changes in G , the multiplier will now be given by

$$\Delta Y = \Delta \bar{G} + c(1-t)\Delta Y \quad (5.19)$$

$$\Delta Y = \frac{1}{1-c(1-t)}\Delta \bar{G} \quad (5.20)$$

The income increases from Y^* to Y' as shown in Fig. 5.4.

The decrease in taxes works in effect like an increase in propensity to consume as shown in Fig. 5.5. The AD curve shifts up to AD' . At the initial level of income, aggregate demand for goods exceeds output because the tax reduction causes increased consumption. The new higher level of income is Y' .

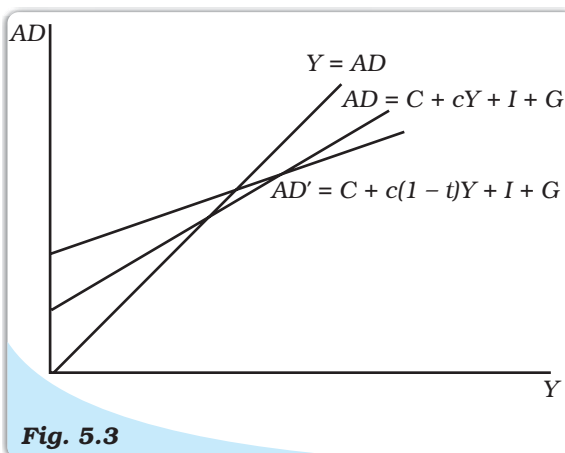


Fig. 5.3

Government and Aggregate Demand (proportional taxes make the AD schedule flatter)

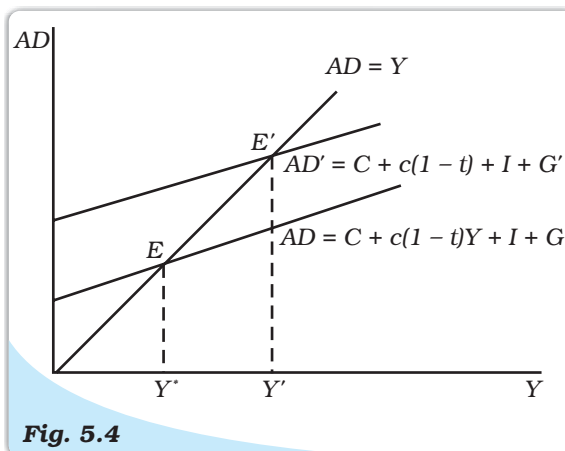


Fig. 5.4

Increase in Government Expenditure (with proportional taxes)

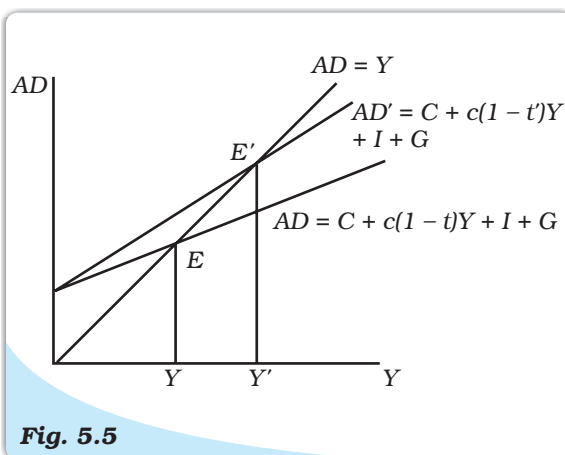


Fig. 5.5

Effects of a Reduction in the Proportional Tax Rate

EXAMPLE 5.2

In Example 5.1, if we take a tax rate of 0.25, we find consumption will now rise by 0.60 ($c(1-t) = 0.8 \times 0.75$) for every unit increase in income instead of the earlier 0.80. Thus, consumption will increase by less than before. The government expenditure multiplier will be $\frac{1}{1-c(1-t)} = \frac{1}{1-0.6} = \frac{1}{0.4} = 2.5$ which is smaller than that obtained with lump-sum taxes. If government expenditure rises by 100, output will rise by the multiplier times the rise in government expenditure, that is, by $2.5 \times 100 = 250$. This is smaller than the increase in output with lump-sum taxes.

The proportional income tax, thus, acts as an **automatic stabiliser** – a shock absorber because it makes disposable income, and thus consumer spending, less sensitive to fluctuations in GDP. When GDP rises, disposable income also rises but by less than the rise in GDP because a part of it is siphoned off as taxes. This helps limit the upward fluctuation in consumption spending. During a recession when GDP falls, disposable income falls less sharply, and consumption does not drop as much as it otherwise would have fallen had the tax liability been fixed. This reduces the fall in aggregate demand and stabilises the economy.

We note that these fiscal policy instruments can be varied to offset the effects of undesirable shifts in investment demand. That is, if investment falls from I_0 to I_1 , government spending can be raised from G_0 to G_1 so that autonomous expenditure ($C + I_0 + G_0 = C + I_1 + G_1$) and equilibrium income remain the same. This deliberate action to stabilise the economy is often referred to as **discretionary fiscal policy** to distinguish it from the inherent automatic stabilising properties of the fiscal system. As discussed earlier, proportional taxes help to stabilise the economy against upward and downward movements. Welfare transfers also help to stabilise income. During boom years, when employment is high, tax receipts collected to finance such expenditure increase exerting a stabilising pressure on high consumption spending; conversely, during a slump, these welfare payments help sustain consumption. Further, even the private sector has built-in stabilisers. Corporations maintain their dividends in the face of a change in income in the short run and households try to maintain their previous living standards. All these work as shock absorbers without the need for any decision-maker to take action. That is, they work automatically. The built-in stabilisers, however, reduce only part of the fluctuation in the economy, the rest must be taken care of by deliberate policy initiative.

Transfers: We suppose that instead of raising government spending in goods and services, government increases transfer payments, \bar{TR} . Autonomous spending, \bar{A} , will increase by $c\Delta\bar{TR}$, so output will rise by less than the amount by which it increases when government expenditure increases because a part of any increase in transfer payments is saved. The change in equilibrium income for a change in transfers is given by

$$\Delta Y = \frac{c}{1-c} \Delta TR \quad (5.21)$$

or

$$\frac{\Delta Y}{\Delta TR} = \frac{c}{1-c} \quad (5.22)$$

EXAMPLE 5.3

We suppose that the marginal propensity to consume is 0.75 and we have lump-sum taxes. The change in equilibrium income when government purchases increase by 20 is given by $\Delta Y = \frac{1}{1-0.75} \Delta G = 4 \times 20 = 80$. When taxes increase by 30, equilibrium income will decrease by 90 because $\Delta Y = \frac{-0.75}{1-0.75} \Delta T = -3 \times 30 = -90$. An increase in transfers of 20 will raise equilibrium income by $\Delta Y = \frac{0.75}{1-0.75} \Delta TR = 3 \times 20 = 60$. Thus, we find that income increases by less than it increased with a rise in government purchases.

5.2.3 Debt

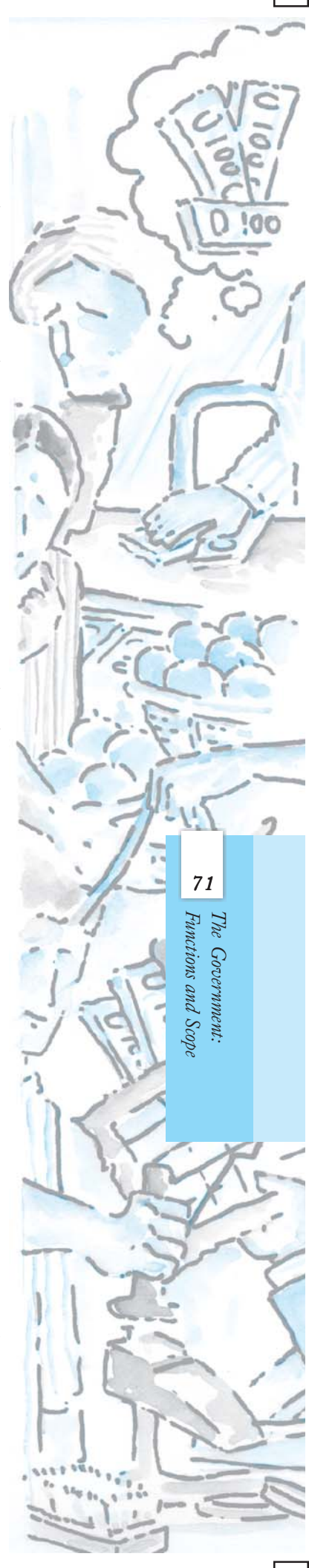
Budgetary deficits must be financed by either taxation, borrowing or printing money. Governments have mostly relied on borrowing, giving rise to what is called government debt. The concepts of deficits and debt are closely related. Deficits can be thought of as a *flow* which add to the *stock* of debt. If the government continues to borrow year after year, it leads to the accumulation of debt and the government has to pay more and more by way of interest. These interest payments themselves contribute to the debt.

Perspectives on the Appropriate Amount of Government Debt: There are two interlinked aspects of the issue. One is whether government debt is a burden and two, the issue of financing the debt. The burden of debt must be discussed keeping in mind that what is true of one small trader's debt may not be true for the government's debt, and one must deal with the 'whole' differently from the 'part'. Unlike any one trader, the government can raise resources through taxation and printing money.

By borrowing, the government transfers the burden of reduced consumption on future generations. This is because it borrows by issuing bonds to the people living at present but may decide to pay off the bonds some twenty years later by raising taxes. These may be levied on the young population that have just entered the work force, whose disposable income will go down and hence consumption. Thus, national savings, it was argued, would fall. Also, government borrowing from the people reduces the savings available to the private sector. To the extent that this reduces capital formation and growth, debt acts as a 'burden' on future generations.

Traditionally, it has been argued that when a government cuts taxes and runs a budget deficit, consumers respond to their after-tax income by spending more. It is possible that these people are short-sighted and do not understand the implications of budget deficits. They may not realise that at some point in the future, the government will have to raise taxes to pay off the debt and accumulated interest. Even if they comprehend this, they may expect the future taxes to fall not on them but on future generations.

A counter argument is that consumers are forward-looking and will base their spending not only on their current income but also on their expected future income. They will understand that borrowing today means higher taxes in the future. Further, the consumer will be concerned about future generations because they are the children and grandchildren of the present generation and the family which is the relevant decision making unit, continues living. They would increase savings now, which will fully offset the increased government dissaving so that national savings do not change. This



view is called **Ricardian equivalence** after one of the greatest nineteenth century economists, David Ricardo, who first argued that in the face of high deficits, people save more. It is called 'equivalence' because it argues that taxation and borrowing are equivalent means of financing expenditure. When the government increases spending by borrowing today, which will be repaid by taxes in the future, it will have the same impact on the economy as an increase in government expenditure that is financed by a tax increase today.

It has often been argued that 'debt does not matter because we owe it to ourselves'. This is because although there is a transfer of resources between generations, purchasing power remains within the nation. However, any debt that is owed to foreigners involves a burden since we have to send goods abroad corresponding to the interest payments.

Other Perspectives on Deficits and Debt: One of the main criticisms of deficits is that they are inflationary. This is because when government increases spending or cuts taxes, aggregate demand increases. Firms may not be able to produce higher quantities that are being demanded at the ongoing prices. Prices will, therefore, have to rise. However, if there are unutilised resources, output is held back by lack of demand. A high fiscal deficit is accompanied by higher demand and greater output and, therefore, need not be inflationary.

It has been argued that there is a decrease in investment due to a reduction in the amount of savings available to the private sector. This is because if the government decides to borrow from private citizens by issuing bonds to finance its deficits, these bonds will compete with corporate bonds and other financial instruments for the available supply of funds. If some private savers decide to buy bonds, the funds remaining to be invested in private hands will be smaller. Thus, some private borrowers will get 'crowded out' of the financial markets as the government claims an increasing share of the economy's total savings. However, one must note that the economy's flow of savings is not really fixed unless we assume that income cannot be augmented. If government deficits succeed in their goal of raising production, there will be more income and, therefore, more saving. In this case, both government and industry can borrow more.

Also, if the government invests in infrastructure, future generations may be better off, provided the return on such investments is greater than the rate of interest. The actual debt could be paid off by the growth in output. The debt should not then be considered burdensome. The growth in debt will have to be judged by the growth of the economy as a whole.

Deficit Reduction: Government deficit can be reduced by an increase in taxes or reduction in expenditure. In India, the government has been trying to increase tax revenue with greater reliance on direct taxes (indirect taxes are regressive in nature – they impact all income groups equally). There has also been an attempt to raise receipts through the sale of shares in PSUs. However, the major thrust has been towards reduction in government expenditure. This could be achieved through making government activities more efficient through better planning of programmes and better administration. A recent study⁴ by the Planning Commission has estimated that to transfer Re1 to the poor, government spends Rs 3.65 in the form of food subsidy, showing that cash transfers would lead to increase in welfare. The other way is to change the scope of the government by withdrawing from some of the areas where it

⁴"Performance Evaluation of the Targeted Public Distribution System" by the Programme Evaluation Organisation, Planning Commission.

operated before. Cutting back government programmes in vital areas like agriculture, education, health, poverty alleviation, etc. would adversely affect the economy. Governments in many countries run huge deficits forcing them to eventually put in place self-imposed constraints of not increasing expenditure over pre-determined levels (Box 5.1 gives the main features of the FRBMA in India). These will have to be examined keeping in view the above factors. We must note that larger deficits do not always signify a more expansionary fiscal policy. The same fiscal measures can give rise to a large or small deficit, depending on the state of the economy. For example, if an economy experiences a recession and GDP falls, tax revenues fall because firms and households pay lower taxes when they earn less. This means that the deficit increases in a recession and falls in a boom, even with no change in fiscal policy.

Summary

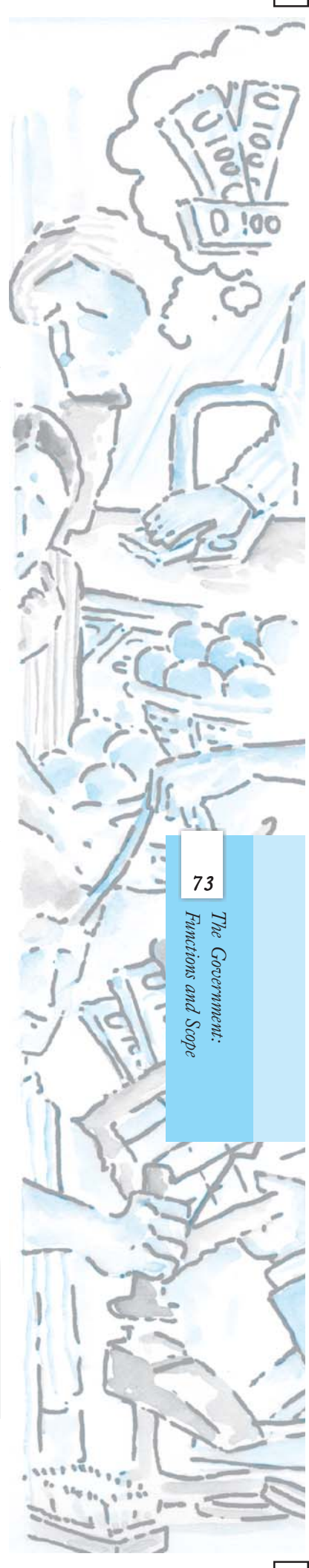
1. Public goods, as distinct from private goods, are collectively consumed. Two important features of public goods are – they are non-rivalrous in that one person can increase her satisfaction from the good without reducing that obtained by others and they are non-excludable, and there is no feasible way of excluding anyone from enjoying the benefits of the good. These make it difficult to collect fees for their use and private enterprise will in general not provide these goods. Hence, they must be provided by the government.
2. The three functions of allocation, redistribution and stabilisation operate through the expenditure and receipts of the government.
3. The budget, which gives a statement of the receipts and expenditure of the government, is divided into the revenue budget and capital budget to distinguish between current financial needs and investment in the country's capital stock.
4. The growth of revenue deficit as a percentage of fiscal deficit points to a deterioration in the quality of government expenditure involving lower capital formation.
5. Proportional taxes reduce the autonomous expenditure multiplier because taxes reduce the marginal propensity to consume out of income.
6. Public debt is burdensome if it reduces future growth in output.

Key Concepts

Public goods
Automatic stabiliser
Discretionary fiscal policy
Ricardian equivalence

Box 5.1: Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003 (FRBMA)

In a multi-party parliamentary system, electoral concerns play an important role in determining expenditure policies. A legislative provision, it is argued, that is applicable to all governments – present and future – is likely to be effective in keeping deficits under control. The enactment of the FRBMA, in August 2003, marked a turning point in fiscal reforms, binding the



government through an institutional framework to pursue a prudent fiscal policy. The central government must ensure inter-generational equity, long-term macro-economic stability by achieving sufficient revenue surplus, removing fiscal obstacles to monetary policy and effective debt management by limiting deficits and borrowing. The rules under the Act were notified with effect from July, 2004.

Main Features

1. The Act mandates the central government to take appropriate measures to reduce fiscal deficit and revenue deficits so as to eliminate the revenue deficit by March 31, 2009 and thereafter build up adequate revenue surplus.
2. It requires the reduction in fiscal deficit by 0.3 per cent of GDP each year and the revenue deficit by 0.5 per cent. If this is not achieved through tax revenues, the necessary adjustment has to come from a reduction in expenditure.
3. The actual deficits may exceed the targets specified only on grounds of national security or natural calamity or such other exceptional grounds as the central government may specify.
4. The central government shall not borrow from the Reserve Bank of India except by way of advances to meet temporary excess of cash disbursements over cash receipts.
5. The Reserve Bank of India must not subscribe to the primary issues of central government securities from the year 2006-07.
6. Measures to be taken to ensure greater transparency in fiscal operations.
7. The central government to lay before both Houses of Parliament three statements—Medium-term Fiscal Policy Statement, The Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement, The Macroeconomic Framework Statement along with the Annual Financial Statement.
8. Quarterly review of the trends in receipts and expenditure in relation to the budget be placed before both Houses of Parliament.

The Act applies only to the central government. Though few states like Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh have enacted fiscal responsibility legislations, the objective of fiscal consolidation, growth and macroeconomic stability will not be achieved if all the states do not participate. However, though there has been an effort by the government to widen the tax net and ensure better compliance, there have been fears that welfare expenditure may get reduced to meet the targets mandated by the Act.

Exercises



1. Explain why public goods must be provided by the government.
2. Distinguish between revenue expenditure and capital expenditure.
3. 'The fiscal deficit gives the borrowing requirement of the government'. Elucidate.
4. Give the relationship between the revenue deficit and the fiscal deficit.
5. Suppose that for a particular economy, investment is equal to 200, government purchases are 150, net taxes (that is lump-sum taxes minus transfers) is 100 and consumption is given by $C = 100 + 0.75Y$ (a) What is the level of equilibrium income? (b) Calculate the value of the government expenditure multiplier and the tax multiplier. (c) If government expenditure increases by 200, find the change in equilibrium income.
6. Consider an economy described by the following functions: $C = 20 + 0.80Y$, $I = 30$, $G = 50$, $TR = 100$ (a) Find the equilibrium level of income and the

autonomous expenditure multiplier in the model. (b) If government expenditure increases by 30, what is the impact on equilibrium income? (c) If a lump-sum tax of 30 is added to pay for the increase in government purchases, how will equilibrium income change?

7. In the above question, calculate the effect on output of a 10 per cent increase in transfers, and a 10 per cent increase in lump-sum taxes. Compare the effects of the two.
8. We suppose that $C = 70 + 0.70Y^D$, $I = 90$, $G = 100$, $T = 0.10Y$ (a) Find the equilibrium income. (b) What are tax revenues at equilibrium income? Does the government have a balanced budget?
9. Suppose marginal propensity to consume is 0.75 and there is a 20 per cent proportional income tax. Find the change in equilibrium income for the following (a) Government purchases increase by 20 (b) Transfers decrease by 20.
10. Explain why the tax multiplier is smaller in absolute value than the government expenditure multiplier.
11. Explain the relation between government deficit and government debt.
12. Does public debt impose a burden? Explain.
13. Are fiscal deficits necessarily inflationary?
14. Discuss the issue of deficit reduction.

Suggested Readings

1. Dornbusch, R. and S. Fischer, 1994. *Macroeconomics*, sixth edition, McGraw-Hill, Paris.
2. Mankiw, N.G., 2000. *Macroeconomics*, fourth edition, Macmillan Worth publishers, New York.
3. *Economic Survey*, Government of India, various issues.

