

Chapter–XIII

Audit

Statutory provision

65. Audit by tax authorities

- (1) The Commissioner or any officer authorised by him, by way of a general or a specific order, may undertake audit of any registered person for such period, at such frequency and in such manner as may be prescribed.
- (2) The officers referred to in sub-Section (1) may conduct audit at the place of business of the registered person and/or in their office.
- (3) The registered person shall be informed, by way of a notice, not less than fifteen working days, prior to the conduct of audit in such manner as may be prescribed.
- (4) The audit under sub-Section (1) shall be completed within a period of three months from the date of commencement of audit:

Provided that where the Commissioner is satisfied that audit in respect of such registered person cannot be completed within three months, he may, for the reasons to be recorded in writing, extend the period by a further period not exceeding six months.

Explanation.- For the purposes of this sub-Section, 'commencement of audit' shall mean the date on which the records and other documents, called for by the tax authorities, are made available by the registered person or the actual institution of audit at the place of business, whichever is later.

- (5) During the course of audit, the authorised officer may require the registered person,
 - (i) to afford him the necessary facility to verify the books of account or other documents as he may require,
 - (ii) to furnish such information as he may require and render assistance for timely completion of audit.
- (6) On conclusion of audit, the proper officer shall within thirty days, inform the registered person, whose records are audited, about the findings, his rights and obligations and the reasons for the findings.
- (7) Where the audit conducted under sub-Section (1) results in detection of tax not paid or such short paid or erroneously refunded, or input tax credit wrongly availed or utilised, the proper officer may initiate action under Section 73 or 74.

65.1 Introduction

- (a) Audit of records of tax payers is the bed rock for the proper functioning of a self-assessment based tax system. This provision provides for audit of the business

transactions of any registered person. It is an important tool in the tax administration to ensure compliance of law and prevent revenue leakage.

65.2 Analysis

(a) Section 65 authorizes conduct of audit by the proper officer or the Commissioner of the transactions of the registered persons only. The Commissioner may issue a general order or a specific order, to authorize officers to conduct such audit. As per the draft Assessment and Audit Rules, the period of audit under sub-section (1) of Section 65 shall be a financial year or multiples thereof. The frequency and manner for conducting such audit are yet to be prescribed. It is important to note that the said order of Commissioner must be specific to the auditee and the tax period selected for audit. Absence, error and deficiency in such orders aborts any preparatory step taken by the audit officer and preparation to respond taken by the auditee.

(b) The audit will be conducted at the place of business of the registered person or office of tax authorities. Intimation of audit is to be issued to the taxable person at least 15 days in advance in Form GST ADT-01 and the audit is to be completed within 3 months from the date of commencement of audit, which may be extended by the Commissioner, where required, by a further period not exceeding 6 months.

The Commissioner needs to record reasons in writing for grant of any such extension.

(c) During the course of audit, the authorized officer may require the registered person to afford him the necessary facility to verify the books of account and also to furnish the required information and render assistance for timely completion of the audit. As per the draft Assessment and Audit Rules, the proper officer shall verify the documents on the basis of which the accounts are maintained and the periodical returns/statements are furnished.

(d) The proper officer while conducting the audit is authorized to:

- a. Verify books & records
- b. Returns & statements
- c. Correctness of turnover, exemptions & deductions
- d. Rate of tax applicable in respect of supply of goods and/or services
- e. The input tax credit claimed/availed/unutilized and refund claimed.

(e) The provisions of section 65(5) casts an obligation on the registered person to afford necessary facility for verification of books and records, render assistance for timely completion of audit and furnish information and statements.

(f) Some of the best practices to be adopted for GST audit among others could be:

The evaluation of the internal control viz a viz GST would indicate the area to be focused. This could be done by verifying:

- (a) The Statutory Audit report which has specific disclosure needs in regard to maintenance of record, stock and fixed assets.

- (b) The Information System Audit report and the internal audit report.
- (c) Internal Control questionnaire designed for GST compliance.
 - (ii) The use of generalised audit software to aid the GST audit would ensure modern practice of risk based audit are adopted.
 - (iii) The reconciliation of the books of account or reports from the ERP's to the return is imperative.
 - (iv) The review of the gross trial balance for detecting any incomes being set off with expenses.
 - (v) Review of purchases/expenses to examine applicability of reverse charge applicable to goods/services. The foreign exchange outgo reconciliation would also be necessary for identifying the liability of import of services.
 - (vi) Quantitative reconciliation of stock transfer within the State or for supplies to job workers under exemption.
 - (vii) Ratio analysis could provide vital clues on areas of non-compliance.
- (g) On audit completion, information is required to be Provided to the registered person including the findings during the audit in FORM GST ADT-02 within thirty days of conclusion of the audit. In cases where tax liability is identified during the audit or input tax credit wrongly availed or utilized by the auditee, the procedure laid down under Section 73 or 74 is to be followed. Audit cannot conclude automatically resulting in a demand. Independent application of mind is necessary for a valid demand to be raised.

65.3 Comparative Review

1. The Central Excise law empowers the Central Government to make provision for verification of records of assessee. However, the GST Act itself specifically provides for audit of the registered person. In EA 2000, the Director General of Audit supervises the audit functions. Separate Audit Commissionerate have been constituted with effect from 15.10.2014 which will plan, delegate and administer the audit. The audit of the assessee is carried out through visits by 'audit groups' which consist of Superintendents and Inspectors.
2. The audit groups shall prepare the assessee master file, collect the relevant information and documents. Desk review shall be done before forming the audit plan. As planned, audit will be conducted and corrections and improvements shall be suggested to the assessee.
3. The draft audit report would be discussed and communicated to the assessee and with the details of spot recoveries and willingness of the assessee to accept the demand etc. the same shall be placed before monitoring committee. If the assessee does not accept the audit para, adjudication process will be initiated by the Jurisdictional GST Officer.

65.4 Related Provisions

Section	Description
Section 73	Determination of tax not paid, short paid, erroneously refunded or input tax credit wrongly availed or utilized for any reason other than fraud or any wilful misstatement or suppression of facts
Section 67	Determination of tax not paid, short paid, erroneously refunded or input tax credit wrongly availed or utilized by reason of fraud or any wilful misstatement or suppression of facts

65.5 FAQ

Q1. Whether audit is mandatory in case of every registered person?

Ans. No, it is not mandatory. It will be applicable only in cases where the appropriate authorities authorize the same by issue of general / specific orders.

Q2. Whether any prior intimation is required before conducting the audit?

Ans. Yes, prior intimation is required and the taxable person should be informed at least 15 days prior to conduct of audit in FORM GST ADT-01.

Q3. What is the period within which the audit is to be completed?

Ans. The audit is required to be completed within 3 months from the date of commencement of audit or within the extended period of 6 months in cases where the Commissioner is satisfied for reasons to be recorded in writing that the audit cannot be completed in 3 months.

Q4. What is meant by commencement of audit?

Ans. It means the date on which the records and documents requisitioned by the tax authorities are made available by the registered person or the actual institution of audit at the place of business whichever is later

Q5. What are the obligations of the taxable person when he receives the notice of audit?

Ans. The taxable person should afford necessary facility / information / assistance / documents for smooth conduct of audit and its timely completion.

Q6. What would be the action by the proper officer upon conclusion of the audit?

Ans. The proper office must within 30 days inform the registered person (i.e. the auditee) about his findings, reasons for findings and his rights and obligations in respect of such findings.

65.6 Case Study 1:

A notice for audit was served to M/s. ABC Ltd, on 20.02.2020. Required information was given by M/s. ABC Ltd, on 25.05.2020. The audit officers visited the place of business on 26.06.2020. What is the last date within which the audit is to be completed?

It will be 3 months from 25.05.2020, viz., 24.08.2020 or within an extended period of 6 months. The extended period would be 24.02.2021.

Statutory provision**66. Special Audit**

- (1) If at any stage of scrutiny, enquiry, investigation or any other proceedings before him, any officer not below the rank of Assistant Commissioner having regard to the nature and complexity of the case and interest of revenue, is of the opinion that the value has not been correctly declared or the credit availed is not within the normal limits, he may, with the prior approval of the Commissioner, direct such taxable person by a communication in writing to get his records including books of account examined and audited by a chartered accountant or a cost accountant as may be nominated by the Commissioner.
- (2) The chartered accountant or cost accountant so nominated shall, within the period of ninety days, submit a report of such audit duly signed and certified by him to the said Assistant Commissioner mentioning therein such other particulars as may be specified: Provided that the Assistant Commissioner may, on an application made to him in this behalf by the registered person or the chartered accountant or cost accountant or for any material and sufficient reason, extend the said period by a further period of ninety days.
- (3) The provision of sub-Section (1) shall have effect notwithstanding that the accounts of the registered person have been audited under any other provision of this Act or any other law for the time being in force.
- (4) The registered person shall be given an opportunity of being heard in respect of any material gathered on the basis of special audit under sub-Section (1) which is proposed to be used in any proceedings under this Act or rules made thereunder.
- (5) The expenses of the examination and audit of records under sub-Section (1), including the remuneration of such chartered accountant or cost accountant, shall be determined and paid by the Commissioner and such determination shall be final.
- (6) Where the special audit conducted under sub-Section (1) results in detection of tax not paid or short paid or erroneously refunded, or input tax credit wrongly availed or utilised, the proper officer may initiate action under Section 73 or 74.

66.1 Introduction

(a) Availing the services of experts is an age old practice of due process of law. These experts have done yeoman service to the process of delivering justice. One such facility extended by the Act is in Section 66 where an officer not below the rank of Assistant Commissioner, duly approved, may avail the services of a Chartered Accountant or Cost Accountant to conduct a detailed examination of specific areas of operations of a registered person.

66.2 Analysis

(a) Availing the services of the expert be it a Chartered Accountant or Cost Accountant is permitted by this section only when the officer considering the nature & complexity of the business and in the interest of revenue is of the opinion that:

- Value has not been correctly declared; or
- Credit availed is not within the normal limits.

It would be interesting to know how these 'subjective' conclusions will be drawn and how the proper officers determines what is the normal limit of input credit availed.

- (b) An Assistant Commissioner who nurses an opinion on the above two aspects, after commencement and before completion of any scrutiny, enquiry, investigation or any other proceedings under the Act, may direct a registered person to get his books of accounts audited by an expert. Such direction is to be issued in FORM GST ADT-03
- (c) The Assistant Commissioner needs to obtain prior permission of the Commissioner to issue such direction to the taxable person
- (d) Identifying the expert is not left to the registered person whose audit is to be conducted but the expert is to be nominated by the Commissioner.
- (e) The Chartered Accountant or the Cost Accountant so appointed shall submit the audit report, mentioning the specified particulars therein, within a period of 90 days, to the Assistant Commissioner in FORM GST ADT-04.
- (f) In the event of the an application to the Assistant Commissioner by Chartered Accountant or the Cost Accountant or the registered person seeking an extension, or for any material or sufficient reason, the due date of submission of audit report may be extended by another 90 days.
- (g) Considering the special nature of this audit, (audit having been conducted under other proceedings or under other laws) do not preclude the proper officer from exercising this option.
- (h) While the report in respect of the special audit under this section is to be submitted directly to the Assistant Commissioner, the registered person is to be Provided an opportunity of being heard in respect of any material gathered in the special audit which is proposed to be used in any proceedings under this Act. This provision does not appear to clearly state whether the registered person is entitled to receive a copy of the entire audit report or only extracts or merely inferences from the audit. However, the observance of the principles of natural justice in the proceedings arising from this audit would not fail the taxable person on this aspect.
- (i) The remuneration to the expert is to be paid by the Commissioner whose decision will be final.
- (j) As in the case of audit under section 65, no demand of tax, even *ad interim*, is permitted on completion of the special audit under this section. In case any possible tax liability is identified during the audit, procedure under section 73 or 74 as the case may be is to be followed.

66.3 Comparative Review**Law relating to Central Excise**

- (a) Similar provision exists under the Central Excise law. Unduly large proportion of credit availment considering the industry is a reason for audit. This could also be a reason for special audit under GST also. The availing or utilization of cenvat credit by reason of fraud, collusion or any willful mis-statement or suppression of facts can also be the reason for issuing notice for special audit. Under GST law, no special audit will be directed for wrong utilization of the credit, but wrong availment alone without any reason of fraud, collusion or any willful mis-statement or suppression of facts is sufficient to issue notice for special audit.
- (b) Under Central Excise law, the permission is given by the Principal Chief Commissioner or the Chief Commissioner of Central Excise. Under GST Act, the said permission is to be given by the Commissioner.
- (c) Under Central Excise law, the period within which the Chartered Accountant or the Cost Accountant should submit the audit report is not specified presently, but the maximum extended period within which the audit report should be submitted remains to be 180 days. Under CGST Act, the audit report shall normally be submitted within 90 days and the maximum further extension could be another 90 days.

Law relating to Service Tax

- (d) The authority to direct the special audit rests with the Principal Commissioner or the Commissioner.
- (e) The special audit may be initiated where person liable to pay service tax;
- (i) has failed to declare or determine the value of taxable service correctly; or
 - (ii) has availed and utilized the cenvat credit which is not within the normal limits or by means of fraud, collusion or any willful mis-statement or suppression of facts; or
 - (iii) has operations at multiple locations and true and complete picture of his accounts are not possible to get at his registered premises.
- (f) The special audit report shall be submitted within the period as may be specified by the Commissioner. The time limit of maximum 180 days is not applicable.
- (g) No provision exists regarding remuneration payable for the special audit, however, the same shall be paid by the Central Government

66.4 Related Provisions

Section	Description	Remarks
Section 65	Audit by tax authorities	The audit under Section 66 is a special audit to be conducted by a Chartered Accountant or Cost Accountant nominated by the Commissioner whereas the audit under Section 65 is a routine audit by the tax office.

66.5 FAQ

Q1. Who can serve the notice for special audit?

Ans. An officer not below the rank of an Assistant Commissioner with prior approval of the Commissioner may serve notice for special audit, having regard to the nature and complexity of the case and the interest of revenue.

Q2. Under what circumstances notice for special audit shall be issued?

Ans. If the proper officer (not below the rank of Assistant Commissioner) is of the opinion that the value has not been correctly declared or credit availed is not within the normal limits, a special audit may be ordered.

Q3. Who will conduct the special audit?

Ans. A Chartered Accountant or a Cost Accountant so nominated by the Commissioner may undertake the audit.

Q4. What is the time limit to submit the audit report?

Ans. The auditor will have to submit the report within 90 days or the further extended period of a 90 days.

Q5. Who will bear the cost of special audit?

Ans. The expenses for examination and audit including the remuneration payable to the auditor will be determined and borne by the Commissioner.

Q6. What action the tax authorities may take after the special audit?

Ans. Based on the findings / observations of the special audit, action can be initiated under Section 73 or 74 as the case may be of the CGST Act.