

The Right to Information Act 2005: Objectives, Features and Empowering Citizens in India

Dr.Aijaz Sultana

Associate Professor of Political Science, Government City College (A), Nayapul, Hyderabad.

ABSTRACT

The Right to Information Act (RTI) stands as a beacon of transparency and accountability in democratic societies, empowering citizens by providing them access to government information. Enacted in India in 2005, the RTI Act has significantly transformed the governance landscape. This abstract explores the Act's impact on society, emphasizing its role in empowering citizens, enhancing transparency, and reducing corruption. By allowing citizens to scrutinize government actions, the RTI Act has become a potent tool in the fight against corruption, promoting clean governance. However, challenges such as delayed responses and lack of awareness persist. Addressing these challenges through awareness campaigns, efficient processes, and stricter penalties is crucial to realizing the Act's full potential. As citizens become more aware of their rights and the government becomes more responsive, the RTI Act continues to play a pivotal role in shaping a more just and accountable society.

Keywords: RTI; Empowerment; Transparency; Corruption; Accountability; Awareness

INTRODUCTION

In a democratic society, transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of good governance. The Right to Information (RTI) Act, enacted in 2005 in India, stands as a pivotal legislation that empowers citizens by providing them access to government information. This act has played a crucial role in fostering transparency, reducing corruption, and enhancing civic participation. This article explores the significance of the RTI Act, its impact on society, and the challenges faced in its implementation. The RTI Act was enacted to promote transparency and accountability in the functioning of public authorities. It allows citizens to request information from public authorities, thus ensuring greater accountability and reducing the information gap between the government and the governed. The Act applies to all states and Union territories of India, except Jammu and Kashmir. One of the most significant achievements of the RTI Act is its empowerment of ordinary citizens. It enables them to seek information on various government

activities, decisions, and expenditures. Citizens can now hold public officials accountable, leading to a more responsive and responsible government.

Enhancing Transparency:

The RTI Act has significantly enhanced transparency in government functioning. It has paved the way for a more open and accessible government, where citizens can access information related to policies, decisions, and public spending. This transparency acts as a deterrent against corrupt practices and ensures that public resources are utilized efficiently.

Reducing Corruption:

By allowing citizens to scrutinize government actions, the RTI Act has become a potent tool in the fight against corruption. The fear of public scrutiny has compelled public officials to act more responsibly, thereby reducing the opportunities for corrupt practices. The Act has empowered citizens to expose corruption and demand accountability, making it a valuable instrument in promoting clean

governance. Corruption in India has become the most perplexing issue. It covers not only lower level but also upper level where ministers and bureaucrats are involved. Many cases of corruption where ministers are involved have been referred to the CBI for inquiry and action.³⁰ Secrecy and lack of information create breeding ground for corruption and abuses of power. By promoting transparency and accountability Right to information curbs such abuses.³¹ Corruption is a process, which perpetuates poverty and harms the poor. It creates an environment of distrust between the people and government, which impinge upon the development and jeopardize democratic governance. Under the RTI regime, there is unprecedented transparency in the working of public departments. As a result, there is better understanding of the decision making process and greater accountability of government. This has led to reduction in corruption in country.³² The Prime Minister of India has felt that there is corruption both at political and administrative level. In 2007 when Indian Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh addressing the IAS probationers of 2006 stated that “the barriers of administrative and political corruption should be tackled by the upcoming bureaucrats and quality of governance be improved at all levels to build an India ‘worthy of our dreams’. If there are barriers, there are barriers in our country, in our good governance, in our governance processes. It is a fact that there is lot of corruption, both at the political level and at the administrative level. We must take it head on.”³³ Hoshiar Singh and Mandir Singh, the higher authority to control the corruption from, Dr. Man Mohan Singh government has rightly remarked that “No drive against corruption can succeed unless or until the government itself is firmly committed to the task of weeding out dishonest and corrupt officials, irrespective of ranks and status. The punishment for corruption should be exemplary; the least should be dismissal from service.³⁴ So RTI is vital tool, and a potent weapon in the hands of a common people to fight against corruption. The RTI makes the government very smooth, transparent, accountable, participative to the very common people. At the end we say RTI makes a path to the people by whom he connects to the government and changes governance to the good governance.

Objectives of Right to Information Act 2005

The RTI Act’s main vision is to empower the nation’s people. To accomplish this, the nation’s leader must seek to enhance openness and accountability in government activity, eliminate corruption, and enable democracy to truly operate in the residents’ favour. People who are better educated are more organised and ready to maintain a constant eye on the tools of administration and make the government more answerable to the public. This Act is a significant leap toward better informing the citizens of a nation about the government’s operations. The Objectives of the right to information act 2005 are as follows.

- ❖ To guarantee that individuals have access to information.
- ❖ To encourage information transparency.
- ❖ To encourage administration transparency.
- ❖ To avoid arbitrary administrative decisions.
- ❖ To make sure that public governance is accountable.
- ❖ To keep corruption at bay.

Well-informed citizens are critical to a democracy’s success.

To make the Govt and its agents answerable to the public they govern. Make the govt more receptive, to put it another way.

Features of Right to Information Act 2005

Below are all the features of the Right to Information Act 2005:

People can examine government records and operations and request each detail from the government under the right to information Act.

You can get data from every Govt, including the state and federal governments, the Panchayati Raj, and even from some other state or federally managed, controlled, and sponsored entity.

A minimum of one official has been appointed as a public information officer (PIO), which receives application forms and provides the details requested by the public.

Assistant public information officials are stationed throughout every district/divisional stage, receiving

inquiries for information and then appealing the PIO judgments. Section 5(1) requires them to forward the petitions to the proper authorities.

Each individual seeking information should submit a request in Hindi or English, either electronically or handwritten.

In the event that the application cannot be submitted in writing, the PIO will provide all necessary help in making the application verbally in order to reduce the request's length in composing (Section 6(1)).

If the petitioner cannot hear, blind, or visually impaired, the public body shall provide assistance to ensure that all pertinent information is available (Section 7(4)).

The petitioner is not needed to provide any justifications for seeking the information or indeed any private details aside from their contact numbers.

If the public information officer fails to provide data in a timely manner, the petitioner has the right to submit a grievance against PIO.

An ordinary man can never be refused facts that the legislative council or legislature cannot forbid.

If a public information officer fails to provide requested information underneath the Act, the public information officer may be fined Rs. 250 for each day and for each delay. According to Section 20 (2), the information commissioner can also suggest disciplinary measures against the responsible public information officer.

Importance of RTI (Right to Information Act)

RTI Act 2005 allowed the common people to know about what is happening in the country by giving them the power to question the government about their work, schemes, etc.

The act also helps farmers by providing them with solutions to their problems like soil, pest problems, etc.

It helps in solving the cases pending in the courts.

It empowers the information commission to be the highest authority of the country with the power to order any office in the country to provide information as per the provision of the RTI Act 2005

and also empowers the commission to punish the violation of the RTI.

It also helps vulnerable sections of society by helping them to know their rights.

Need for RTI Act 2005

The right to information is essential in today's world because it promotes transparency and accountability in government functions.

The weaker and vulnerable sections of society are also empowered by this RTI Act, which gives them the power to seek information about the policies that are being run for them and from which they will benefit.

The RTI Act 2005 has already revealed major corruption, such as the Common Health Game Organization and the 2G spectrum scam.

Now government officials do not discriminate against citizens based on race, caste, or sex as they know if they do something which is against civil rights. He will take action, and this is possible just because of the Right to Information Act.

Right to Information is a Fundamental Right

There are six fundamental rights included in the Indian Constitution under Articles 12 to 35, Part 3 of the Constitution. The Right to Information is a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a), which is the right to freedom of speech and expression. It was implemented in 2005. All UPSC aspirants must prepare through RTI UPSC notes shared in this article to score well in the upcoming exam.

Empowerment:

To ensure development in the local fields and peoples participation power must be decentralised. This is also called empowerment of people. Before enactment of Right to Information Act, participation in political and economic processes and the ability to make informed choices has been restricted to India. As a consequence, commoners remain ignorant of various schemes and are unable to resist when their rights become causality. At the same time, people remain ignorant in terms of the ways and means through they can obtain their entitled rights from the concerned departments legally. According to French philosopher Michel Foucault,

power is derived from knowledge and information is the basic component of knowledge. So, in this age of technology driven information revolution, empowerment means access to information. The first thing any tyrannical government does is to restrict the people's access to the resources of information and monopolize over it while the principle of good governance demands free flow of information. Concentration of information inevitably leads to centralisation of power.²⁹ Now with enactment of Right to Information act people can participate in decision making process and it enables the citizens to know about the government decisions. The Right to Information act empowering people by removing unnecessary secrecy surrounding in decision making process of the government.

Challenges and Way Forward:

While the RTI Act has been a transformative force, it is not without challenges. Delayed responses, lack of awareness, and instances of misuse are some of the issues faced in its implementation. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from the government, civil society, and citizens.

Firstly, there is a need for continued awareness campaigns to educate citizens about their rights under the RTI Act. Workshops, seminars, and outreach programs can be organized to inform people about the process of filing applications and the kind of information they can access.

Secondly, public authorities must streamline their processes to ensure timely responses to RTI requests. Training programs for government officials can be conducted to familiarize them with

the Act's provisions, ensuring a more efficient and responsive system.

Lastly, there should be stricter penalties for non-compliance and deliberate withholding of information. This would act as a deterrent and ensure that public authorities adhere to the principles of transparency and accountability.

CONCLUSION:

The Right to Information Act has undeniably transformed the relationship between the government and its citizens. By promoting transparency, empowering citizens, and curbing corruption, it has strengthened the democratic fabric of the nation. However, to fully realize the Act's potential, it is imperative to address the challenges and work collaboratively towards a more transparent, accountable, and participatory governance system. As citizens become more aware of their rights and the government becomes more responsive, the RTI Act will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping a more just and accountable society.

The major goal of this Act is to give the public the authority to ask questions about how government machinery works, to encourage effectiveness and accountability in government activities, to control fraud, as well as to enable democracy to function for our residents. The Act prohibits the Govt. from becoming misled in the respect that it creates the impression that the Govt. and its related branches are acting in the best interests of the general population. The objectives of the right to information act 2005 are very clear that all should have access to the information.

REFERENCES:

1. Awasthi, Shailendra Kumar. *The Right to Information Act, 2005 (Act no. 22 of 2005)*. Allahabad: Dwivedi Law Agency, 2008.
2. Joseph, V. (2001). Right to Information on a Broad Canvas. *The Indian journal of public administration*: vol. xivii. No.2. p.269.
3. Pande, Suchi. *Right to Information Act, 2005: A primer*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 2007.
4. Kumar, Niraj. *Bharat's handbook on Right to Information Act, 2005*. 2nd ed. New Delhi: Bharat Law House, 2009
5. India. *The Right to information Act, 2005: A non-technical exposition*. [New Delhi: s.n.], 2006.