

Role of Right to Information Act in Strengthening Administrative Transparency: A Cross Sectional Review

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Abstract

With the establishment of India's independence, a new and inalienable feature of the democratic system was also established in the constitution of India. This democratic system also provided information to the citizenry and transparency of information. In the view of the Right to Information Act, 2005 was established to create transparency and accountability in the governance system. This also protected the government from exploiting citizens and reducing corrupt activities. The RTI Act 2005 became a milestone step in the foundation of the country's democratic, responsive, and transparent system. The RTI act helped in the transformation from governance to good governance with the involvement of its citizens. Through the RTI Act, citizens got the right to access to information and participation in governance. The RTI act serves the idea that people are served by their representatives and not ruled by their representatives.

Keywords: Right to Information, Good Governance, Transparent System, Responsive Government, RTI Act, 2005

Introduction

The RTI statute enables citizens to request information and a small number of records, such as papers, opinions, and emails, which are made available by public authorities in printed or electronic form. To give the country's citizens more authority and make the government more open, responsible, and efficient, the RTI Act was passed on October 12th, 2005. The statute gives citizens the authority to request information or specifics regarding the actions the government does on their behalf. It is obvious that greater tyranny, corruption, and abuse of power resulted from the secrecy, lack of transparency, or lack of accountability in government procedures. The RTI legislation opens the door to information and exposes people to how the government functions, resulting in better and more effective administration. The RTI was

essential for analyzing the effects of good governance, accountability, and transparency in the nation. The RTI Act builds the groundwork for a brighter future, and since it was passed, all citizens of the nation now have the same ability to request the information that was previously only available to legislators. The individual citizen must be acknowledged as the monarch of the state in order to establish what democracy truly means. Every citizen has access to the Right to Information Act, which they can utilize to get information (Punam, 2019 and Rani, Singh, 2018).

The primary cause of the corruption escalation was a lack of systemic openness. The creation of the right-to-information legislation increased transparency in government operations and increased political accountability. The statute held the relevant authorities accountable in the eyes of the public in addition to forming educated public opinion. The right to information law's primary goals were to transform the governance structure and provide a direct line of communication between the government and the populace. The statute offers open communication and a genuine chance to interact with the government. The Right to Information Act was adopted after a protracted political struggle, and the act's historical foundation may be used to assess its value. Public involvement requires freedom of information. Democracy relies on the consent of the governed, and that consent is dependent upon the state keeping the populace informed about its affairs and granting them the right to participate. Only when the public is informed about the actions and policies of the government is it actually able to participate in the democratic process. Understanding why choices are made and communicating them to the public may increase support and lessen misconceptions and unhappiness. Additionally, individual lawmakers are better equipped to carry out supervision (Agrawal, Deora, 2016 and Gopi. 2016).

The British administrative system was created with colonial interests in mind, and this is where India's administrative structure derives its origins. This organisational structure was strict and time-consuming. In essence, the system was created to uphold law and order and collect money. Such a system has no connections between the populace and the government and makes the latter accountable for not fully understanding the requirements of its constituents. It also opens the door for dishonest behaviour and constraint in decision-making. The characteristic of Indian administration became its crooked bureaucratic structure. The government initially implemented a strong act right to information as a measure to purge the Indian administrative system in order

to eliminate or mitigate these unethical practises. Due to a number of factors that contributed to the act's effective implementation, the RTI Act's implementation was not simple. India's civil society was instrumental in promoting a strict right to information law and emphasising the importance of an information economy in the nation. It is also true that top-level political commitment is necessary for the act's execution. Most public administrators are forced to operate in a clandestine environment since openness goes against their training and way of thinking. The RTI legislation is now bringing about significant changes to India's governmental structure. Gradually, the culture of secrecy, indifference, and scant responsibility is changing. People say that the main shift brought about by RTI is that public officials now recognise that the Indian public may hold them responsible for their wrongdoings (Agrawal, 2012 and Islam, 2015).

Literature Review

Research claims that the RTI Act permits anybody to ask for information from any public authority, regardless of whether that authority is controlled by the new government or gets a large amount of financing from it. In addition, the Act defines information as any material, regardless of format, including documents like records, memos, emails, opinions, press announcements, orders, contract reports, paper samples, and data stored electronically. To access information, a person must make a written request in Hindi, English, or the official language of the area in which the application is being made. Citizens may also receive assistance from the national or state public information officers in writing and submitting requests. A public body is required to provide the person with the requested information within 30 days of receiving the request. If a person's life or freedom depends on the information, it must be given within 48 hours. Certain information is excluded from disclosure, notably data relating to the security and integrity of the country. A citizen may also file an appeal or a complaint if they are unable to get the information within the given time. The highest penalties for a government employee who refuses to provide the information is 25,000 rupees, with a daily fee of 250 rupees (Kumar, 2014 and Pandey, Mishra, 2016).

According to studies, e-governance support was built to make the Right to Information Act more effective and beneficial for the public. All residents now have the right to access information thanks to the new legislation. The objective was to encourage accountability and openness in how public authorities operate. The e-governance program places a strong emphasis on all public

authorities keeping all their data in an index format that supports the right to information. The effort also required the government to make sure that all records were digitized and accessible to the public via the internet or other computerized resources so that they could be easily accessed. The statute features an intriguing modification that calls for proactive information sharing from public agencies. It stipulates that every public authority must make it a point to take steps to inform the public as much as possible on a regular basis using a variety of communication channels, including the Internet, in order to reduce the public's reliance on other resources to obtain information. A significant step towards ensuring that the country's development process is participative is the RTI statute of 2005. People must utilize the act as a tool to force openness and accountability to ensure that it is implemented effectively. It is essential to emphasize the significance of this deed (Singh, 2016 and Sharma, 2014).

A study revealed that accountability, a crucial democratic idea, aims to keep tabs on how those in positions of authority behave. Access to the information that the interested parties deem important is required in order to have transparency, which is fundamental. Even at the most fundamental levels, RTI has made it possible for democracy to thrive, and transparency has helped accountability grow. The democratization process looks like this. Due to its fundamental, enabling, and ever-evolving characteristics as well as its effectiveness in challenging circumstances, RTI has emerged as a seed right. The fundamental nature of the freedom of information legislation obliges those in positions of authority to account for their actions since control over resources and power is typically accompanied with corruption. Under the category of democratization, the RTI Act offers to provide citizens with the resources they need to pursue justice. People from many backgrounds have used RTI to collect data for a range of purposes and to settle conflicts. The typical individual may analyze various anti-democratic views and behavior at numerous levels of social interaction by requesting information and getting access to it. Citizens' rights are upheld, and they have access to a fair system (Ghosh, 2018).

Research claims that there is a bi-directional relationship between accountability and democratic decentralization. The technique is necessary to increase citizen participation in national government. There is a problem with accountability when decision-making power is transferred from the people to the government, and there is a need for a mechanism to hold the government accountable for its deeds. A system of good governance provides a means of holding the

government accountable for its errors. Being a democratic country, India must enact this freedom of information law to ensure that the public has access to information and that the government is held responsible for its acts. The access to information act's establishment was crucial to the operation of India's democracy. With its foundation, citizens may monitor and assess how their elected officials are carrying out their duties and create objective opinions of their accomplishments. The judgement can be easily predicted using the facts at hand. The implementation of the right to information is helpful to boost citizen engagement in democracy and inspire people to participate in governmental process (Sharma, 2014).

In a study, two criteria were identified as having an impact on how effectively the RTI Act is implemented. The internal and external variables both reside inside the government, including the public. Social and political activists, civil society organisations, and news media outlets acting as watchdogs against legislation weakening RTI-type laws are examples of the external repercussions. To shield citizens from exposure to dishonest individuals when damaging information is discovered, these interventions include public interest litigation to maintain information rights and supporting the adoption of related legislation, such as whistleblower protection laws. India's RTI Act framework is a wide and dynamic system that benefits from the leadership of vigilant and active civil society organisations as well as a constituency of social activists who receive some support from the public sector and political interest groups. These teams were developing service-oriented cultures and the foundations for open governance structures like to those found in other countries. The RTI Act is operated quite differently at the national level than it is at the state and municipal levels, which has been considered to be the most effective and successful level. By improving its political will, leadership, oversight, coordination, and incentives, as well as addressing its communication issues, filling vacant administrative positions, and enhancing and expanding records management systems across the country, India could be a global leader in the RTI Act implementation process. (Relly, Rabbi, Sabharwal, Pakanati, & Schwalbe, 2020).

Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature in which data is obtained from 215 respondents who have used their Right to Information. A checklist question was used to analyze and interpret the data. In a checklist question respondents choose "Yes" or "No" for all the questions.

Table 1 Role of Right to Information Act in Strengthening Administrative Transparency

SL. No.	Role of Right to Information Act in Strengthening Administrative Transparency	Yes	%Yes	No	%No	Total
1	Right to information makes administration more accountable to people.	176	81.86	39	18.14	215
2	RTI reduces the gap between administration and people	181	84.19	34	15.81	215
3	RTI facilitates intelligent and constructive criticism of administration	179	83.26	36	16.74	215
4	Right to information increases people's participation in administration	165	76.74	50	23.26	215
5	Right to information reduces the scope for corruption in public administration.	185	86.05	30	13.95	215
6	RTI upholds the democratic ideology by promoting openness and transparency in administration.	188	87.44	27	12.56	215
7	RTI makes administration more responsive to the requirements of people.	177	82.33	38	17.67	215
8	RTI reduces the chance of abuse of authority by the public servants.	169	78.60	46	21.40	215

Table1 show that 87.44% respondents agree that RTI upholds the democratic ideology by promoting openness and transparency in administration while 86.05% respondents agree that Right to information reduces the scope for corruption in public administration. 84.19% respondents agree that RTI reduces the gap between administration and people while 83.26% respondents agree that RTI facilitates intelligent and constructive criticism of administration. 82.33% respondents agree that RTI makes administration more responsive to the requirements of people while 81.86% respondents agree that Right to information makes administration more accountable to people. 78.60% respondents agree that RTI reduces the chance of abuse of authority by the public servants while 76.74% respondents agree that Right to information increases people's participation in administration.

Conclusion

The Right to Information Act of 2005 is a weapon for battling corruption and holding various government departments, agencies, and entities responsible to the general people, according to the report mentioned above. This ends the illogical government actions that set a responsible democracy apart. By stating that it is fundamentally a practical plan describing how Indian residents may obtain information, which would inspire excellent administration, the RTI Act has generated something of a goal statement. Actually, the Act itself emphasizes the requirement for balancing and harmonizing sensitive data that is essential to India's security and economy. The public must have access to certain information in order to preserve the democratic ideal's supremacy. Government transparency and public accountability are enhanced through the right to information. It closes the gap between the populace and the executive branch. People can better understand administrative decision-making when they have the right information. It enables governmental employees to provide goods and services more successfully to the general community. It encourages frank criticism of the executive branch. The freedom to information enhances citizen engagement in politics. Inhibiting arbitrary administrative decision-making advances the public interest. The possibility of corruption in public administration is decreased by the right to Information. By encouraging openness and transparency, it upholds the fundamental principles of democratic governance. It raises the administration's receptivity to the demands of the people. It reduces the likelihood that a public employee would misuse their authority.

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