

## Right to Information - As A Tool of Empowerment for Common Man



### Medical Science

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#### ABSTRACT

*Right To Information- As a Tool of Empowerment for common man.*

*The Right to Information Act (RTI) is an Act of the Parliament of India "to provide for setting out the practical regime of right to information for citizens" and replaces the erstwhile Freedom of information Act, 2002. The Act applies to all States and Union Territories of India except Jammu & Kashmir.*

We all pay taxes. This money is taken from us with an assurance from the government that it will be used for our well-being. But nothing happens. Where does this money go? There is no water to drink in a country which has large number of water resources. The condition of the road is pathetic; the government hospitals have no medicines in their stock, during rainy season the drainage system doesn't work properly. Likewise every department is deeply involved in corruption. We often have to pay bribes in our interaction with government- be it getting a license, passport, ration card, registering an FIR etc. sometimes even if bribe is not asked for, our work is still not done due to complacency of public officials and bureaucrats which results in our harassment and loss in cognitive energy.

So far people were helpless and could only curse the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the system and be a mute spectator. But now we have the right to question the government, inspect their work, inspect their files, takes copies of government documents and make them answerable for every question shot at them. The parliament of India has passed a law which makes the common man of the country the ruler in real sense. This law is known as Right to Information.

The Right to Information Act passed in India in 2005 in order to set up a structure whereby citizens can request information in a consistent manner and a reasonable amount of time.

The Right to Information Act 2005 provides access to information for citizens of India, which is under the control of public authorities. It promotes transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. It extends to the whole of India except the state of Jammu & Kashmir. In order to ensure greater and more effective access to information, it was decided to repeal the Freedom of Information Act, 2002, and enact another law for providing an effective framework. To achieve this object, the Right to Information bill was introduced in the parliament and was passed by the Lok Sabha on 11 May, 2005 and by the Rajya Sabha on 12<sup>th</sup> may 2005 and it received the assent on 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2005. It came on the Statue Book as 'the Right to Information Act, 2005'.

The act empowers every citizen to ask any question from the government or seek any information, take copies of any government document, inspect any governmental work and takes samples of materials of any governmental work.

The Act covers the whole of India except Jammu & Kashmir, where Jammu & Kashmir Right to Information Act is in force. It is applicable to all constitutional authorities. Including the executive legislature and judiciary; any institution or body established or constituted by an act of Parliament or a state legislature. It is also defined in the Act that bodies or authorities established or constituted by order or notification of appropriate, government including bodies "owned, controlled or substantially

financed" by government, or non-Government organizations "substantially financed, directed or indirectly by funds" provided by the government are also covered in it. Private bodies are not within the Act's ambit directly.

Under the Act, all authorities covered must appoint this Public Information Officer (PIO). Any person may submit a request to the PIO for information in writing or through electronic means. The applicant is not required to disclose any information other than his name and contact particular to seek information.

The Right to Information Act, passed in the Indian Parliament in the year 2005 has proved to be a landmark for good governments and in helping common people, especially the poor and underprivileged, get their dues from the government. The act has emerged as the most potent tool to empower ordinary citizens to combat state corruption and to play an important in participatory democracy. Drafted by civil society itself, the law is unique in the sense that it has been the result of year of struggle by civil society, NGO's and media.

The Right to Information Act is an effective tool to control corruption, make government accountable, and curb the arbitrary use of power. The world over, country after democratic country, has recognized the need to keep their citizens informed about the way government takes decisions. In our country we have the Right to Information Act. The spirit of the Act can be best summarized by stating that without informed citizens there is no democracy. It recognized that in a democracy citizens are the masters and servants cannot deny information to their masters. In fact, servants act as trustees and hold the information belonging to their masters. But due to lack of information among the masters, the servants have behaved like masters and the masters simply accepted this treatment.

Rampant corruption prevailing in the country forced the law makers to understand that there is no way the country can become better without the servants favouring good governance. Under these circumstances, the preamble of Right to Information Act highlights, containing corruption, improving transparency and making governments accountable by empowering citizens to get information. It lays the foundation for a better tomorrow. In fact, every citizen who is the master has now the same power to obtain information which only the legislatures had so far. The single aspect alone should create a new group who will demand good governance.

The RTI Act, recognizes held in any form should be made available to citizen. The only requirement is that the information should be in public invest. As far as the information held by the Government including personal information, the Act allows one to get such information without even giving any reason as to why you need the information. The RTI Act not only helps the citizens but also the whistle-blower and to recognize whether a

particular person is a genuine whistle-blower or not, all one has to do is see files handled by hi earlier. In this way, supporting a whistle-blower is a much easier task today. But as whistle-blower do not announce about their own activities, opinion of individuals should be collected and likely whistle blowers list should be prepared. The very fact of preparation of whistle-blower's list itself allows more information to come regarding whistle-blower's.

For many who indulge in corruption, giving up corrupt practices may be difficult as giving up smoking for some. While a chronic smoker rejects counseling to give up smoking, a very corrupt person does not make efforts to give up his corrupt practices. Luckily, RTI is a tool which can expose and embarrass a corrupt person. The embarrassment should be so acute that he should feel shy to be seen in public. Unfortunately today it is not happening. To start with, we should recognize the honest and embarrass the corrupt. It is in this way that RTI could become a stick to beat the corrupt with.

The reluctance of so many member countries to enshrine that right to access information is surprising considering open government offers the key to deepening democracy and quickening development that the commonwealth is so desperately seeking. The Right to Information lays the foundation to build good governance, transparency, accountability and participation, and to eliminate the scourge of corruption upon the poor. As such, it should be embraced.

Every Indian should be ashamed when India is graded year after year as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Corruption cannot be rooted out by just one person, every citizen is responsible to combat corruption. The RTI act can be used as a tool a attack the roots of corruption. There will forever the corruption at the lower levels as long as its seeds are sown at the highest levels. The RTI Act can be used to expose these seeds of corruption which in turn can curb corruption at the lower levels. By fighting corruption we should be making our own tomorrow better.

Today, in addition to this Act, we have the benefit of internet. Also most of the youth today do not bribe to get jobs. Even if small number of such people who can handle technology effectively are motivated to fight corruption, it can do wonders. Such optimism was unthinkable only a few years back. The RTI act, young people and internet can really bring in the real freedom to everybody. This was unlike during Mahatma Gandhiji's time when he had to move from place to place to mobilize people and use communication methods which were very primitive. So we are at a distinct advantage as we are empowered by the RTI Act along with technology.

The RTI Act, is a revolutionary weapon in the hands of public which makes a common man up to date by informing him his role in government's decision making process but this act also needs greater clarity and articulation to meet its intended objectives and protect citizen's right of privacy.

There is no doubt that the RTI Act enables common man to make a difference. The enactment has enabled records, which highlight deficiencies in working of government departments in India. Struggle by citizens to get transparency and public accountability from the government is gradually shown results and would lead to ushering in a new era of democratic governance. The success of RTI Act in India depends upon these non-government initiatives. Without pressure from outside the government, officers would prefer to avoid the quantum jump in their public accountability.

At the end of the day, transparency and accountability in public administration require sustained efforts of the citizens. If the citizens show apathy towards the public issues and only indulge in arm-chair criticism of the government, the problems of mal-administration would continue. On the other hand, transparency laws which enable access to public record, lead to democratic participation by the citizens. RTI Act enables effective democratic participation by citizens and sustained struggle is required to overcome the historical baggage of highly centralized governance where citizens do not effectively participate.

At no point of time would it be possible to state that public administration has reached perfection. In vast organizations, check and balances are needed to correct the aberrations. RTI Act in India is a vital addition to the existing check and balances; it may enable the citizens to keep the government officers at their toes, to demand improved performance,

The Right to Information Act is definitely a step forward towards modern democracy and it would go a long way to bring responsibility, transparency and accountability in functioning of all public institutions and departments in the country.

## REFERENCE

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