



The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

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Editor-in-Chief – Prof. (Dr.) Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

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RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

INTRODUCTION

The Right to Information Act was introduced in the year 2005 by United Progressive Alliance (UPA- I) under the leadership of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. It is a reformative law which was introduced to cater the needs of a united yet diversified democracy which people look up to. India is the largest democracy in the world. A democracy is deemed as successful only when people decide as to how they wish to be governed. A good democracy need to consider all the aspects and cater to the needs of people, their aspirations and demands. For a democracy to be representative, shaping public opinion is a crucial aspect. Right to information Act was introduced with the aim to answer the queries, doubts and question which shall arise in the minds of the public. It not only empowers the citizens to keep a check on government but also fosters the very spirit of a democracy and constitutionalism. The Indian Constitution guarantees every citizen the Right to freedom of speech and expression, which is further substantiated by the application of such Fundamental Right of Right to Information. It was laid down by the Supreme Court in the case of *Raj Narain V. State of Uttar Pradesh*, AIR 865,1975; that Right to Information is a guaranteed Fundamental Right under Article 19(1) (a) of Part III of the Constitution. It is thus an important law which empowers the citizen to keep a check on the administration and functioning of the Government.

ANSWERABILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Although it has long been proud to be the largest democracy, India has evolved into one that is transparent, communicative, and participatory since the Right to Information Act of 2005 was passed. The fundamental goal of freedom of speech and expression is to allow all individuals to freely form and share their opinions with others. All things considered, the people's right to know is the essential idea at play here. For a democracy to be successful, the government has to be answerable and accountable for its functioning to the people who have given the responsibility to such government to govern the people. The RTI Act has increased people's participation and has encouraged the citizens to be well aware and vigilant. A framework for fostering citizen-government partnerships in implementing public welfare projects is provided under the RTI Act. Through information availability and including impacted groups in project design and execution, the RTI act has encouraged citizen participation. Government personnel are encouraged to engage in corrupt acts when there is a lack of accountability and openness. Efficiency in policy-

making, service delivery, and administrative decision-making is encouraged by RTI. It entails choosing the right initiatives to accomplish government goals.

INTRICACIES AND APPLICATION

The procedure for filing an application for RTI is simple. Any citizen of the country including OCI's (Overseas Citizens of India) and PIO's (Persons of Indian Origin) card holders can initiate an application for RTI. However, legal entities or companies, association which cannot be deemed as '*citizens*' cannot ask for information under the RTI Act. The citizen initiating the information must send an application and a demand draft, banker's cheque or Indian Postal Order for Rs. 10/- (Rupees ten), payable to the public authority's accounts officer as the information-seeking fee. Moreover, there is no specific format for initiating information under the Act and the information seeker to provide an explanation for their request. Any citizen wishing to acquire information under the Act should submit a written request in English, Hindi, or the official language of the area in question to the Public Information Officer of the relevant public authority. The application needs to be short, precise and exact. As stated in the Fee Rules, he must pay the application fee at the time the application is submitted.

The Government provides documents, files and samples which may suffice the information for which RTI was filed. When the RTI is received by the concerned authority, it is to be answered by the Public Information Officer (PIO) and Assistant Public Information Officer (APIO). The same must be done within the stipulated period of 30 days. And in case they fail to answer the same within 30 days, then PIO is held responsible to pay a penalty of minimum ₹250 per day which may extend to ₹25000.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, within the framework of India's democracy, the Right to Information Act (RTI) of 2005 is a groundbreaking and empowering piece of law. By empowering people to actively engage in governance and hold the government responsible for its actions, the RTI Act is essential to maintaining the survival of democracy. By giving people the freedom to look for information, the Act promotes an atmosphere in which the government's operations are transparent, supporting the principles of democracy and constitutionalism. The Act has prompted citizens to be watchful and knowledgeable in addition to making India a more transparent and communicative democracy. In summary, the Right to Information Act has made India a more open, accountable, and participatory country, while also empowering the people of the biggest democracy in the world. The Act, which is a pillar of democratic values, is still vital in determining the nature of the relationship between the government and its people and in promoting an informed and involved electorate.