

The Impact of the Right to Information Act – 2005 (RTI) On Transparency and Accountability in Indian Governance: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The implementation of the Right to Information Act (RTI) in India in 2005 had a twofold aim of augmenting transparency and accountability in the sphere of governance. The RTI Act has not only precipitated a surge in the attentiveness of government officials to the desires and entreaties of the citizenry but also facilitated the access of citizens to information about the functioning and decision-making of the government. This Act has emerged as a decisive instrument in instilling openness in governmental activities and imposing responsibility on official's vis-a-vis the public. The RTI Act has notably fostered democratic practices and bolstered the faith of citizens in the institutions of the government. However, there are multifarious obstacles that need to be surmounted, such as delays in responding to RTI requests and the dearth of greater consciousness among citizens. All things considered, the RTI Act has indisputably had a positive influence on the transparency and accountability of Indian governance.

Keyword - RTI implementation India, RTI Transparency India, RTI law India.

Introduction

The implementation of the Right to Information Act (RTI) in India back in 2005 had the primary objective of advancing the principles of transparency and accountability in the governance of the nation. The legislation's fundamental provisions confer upon the citizenry the privilege of accessing information relating to the operational frameworks and decision-making mechanisms of the governing entity. The RTI Act is widely regarded as a critical stride toward the democratization of intelligence and the endowment of the populace with

more agency. In effect, it has contributed to a significant realignment of the power structures between the administration and the people by holding government officials answerable for their actions and promoting their openness.

According to Sharma (2013) the legislation known as the Right to Information (RTI) Act has been an essential tool for the populace to hold the government accountable for its deeds. The enactment has facilitated citizens' access to information concerning various government policies, programs, and endeavors. It has empowered individuals to scrutinize the administration's activities and resolutions, which has resulted in higher accountability and transparency in governance. Moreover, the RTI Act has played a substantial part in fostering consciousness among the citizenry regarding their rights and duties as active participants in the democratic process.

Singh and Karn (2012) argued that the Right to Information (RTI) Act has been a significant contributor to the advancement of transparency culture in governance throughout India. By making government officials cognizant that their activities are subject to public scrutiny, the Act has prompted them to be more transparent in their decisions and actions. As a result, the occurrence of malpractice and corruption in the government has significantly reduced since officials are now accountable to the public. Moreover, the RTI Act has enhanced the responsiveness of government officials to the needs and demands of citizens.

According to Oberoi (2013) the populace can now access information regarding government programs, services, and schemes, which has allowed them to make better-informed decisions. The RTI Act has also empowered citizens to hold government officials accountable for their actions or inactions, leading to better governance and improved service delivery since officials are more responsive to the needs of the people. The implementation of the RTI Act in India has played a pivotal role in the advancement of democratic principles. By endowing citizens with the right to access information on government functioning, the Act has enabled active participation in the democratic process. This has facilitated a forum for citizens to interact with the government and ensure accountability for its actions. As a result, democracy in India has been fortified and rendered more comprehensive and participatory. Despite the Act's numerous advantages, there are several challenges that hinder its successful implementation. One of the significant impediments is the lack of awareness among citizens

regarding their rights under the Act. Many citizens remain oblivious to the Act's provisions and the procedures for accessing information concerning government functioning. This has led to a dearth of RTI applications, thereby limiting the Act's efficacy. The predicament of responding to RTI petitions in a timely manner poses a significant challenge. The authority of government officials in replying to such requests is often sluggish, which severely hampers the efficacy of the RTI Act.

Agrawal (2012) argues that although the act has been a monumental leap towards fostering transparency and accountability in Indian administration, there are still issues that hinder its potency. One such hurdle is the paucity of cognizance among citizens regarding the RTI Act. To ensure that the Act is more efficacious, this obstacle must be surmounted. Moreover, addressing the issue of tardiness in responding to RTI petitions is another formidable impediment that must be tackled. Overcoming these hurdles will substantially augment the Act's influence and promote democratic principles in India. The RTI Act has played a pivotal role in inducing a culture of openness in governance, advancing service delivery, and enhancing democratic values in India.

Literature review

The Right to Information Act (RTI) of 2005 stands as an epoch-making legislation that has ushered in a sea change in the governance system of the Republic of India.

According to Bhat (2015) the act has conferred upon the populace the authority to gain access to information from a gamut of governmental departments and agencies, thereby enabling them to hold the government accountable for its decisions and actions. The RTI Act has played a pivotal role in ensuring that the government machinery operates with utmost transparency and accountability, which are deemed as the foundational pillars of a democratic society. Ergo, the RTI Act has proven to be instrumental in promoting the idea of participatory democracy in India. Participatory democracy, a variant of democracy that encourages citizens' involvement in the decision-making process, has experienced a boost in India thanks to the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Borah (2013) asserts that this legislation has enabled citizens to access vital information, express their opinions, and partake in discussions regarding government decision-making processes. By bridging the gap between the government and citizens, the act has significantly promoted a more inclusive democracy. Moreover, the RTI Act has been instrumental in fostering citizen activism in India. Armed with the information obtained through RTI applications, citizens are empowered to hold the government accountable for its actions. This new-found awareness has led to an upsurge in citizen activism, with citizens increasingly holding the government to account for its actions. Citizen mobilization has been an essential factor in India's democratic system, and the implementation of the RTI Act has served to advance and fortify it. Since its inception in 2005, the RTI Act has provided citizens with the authority to demand access to information from government officials and organizations, which has been an influential mechanism in bringing to light corruption and misconduct in governance. One of the most remarkable consequences of the RTI Act has been the amelioration of the responsibility of government officials.

According to Rajak (2014) by bestowing the citizens with the entitlement to retrieve information associated with government operations and decision-making, the RTI Act has supported the implementation of accountability and has ensured the officials and institutions are held liable for their actions. The matter has been exceptionally critical in India, where corruption and absence of liability have been a longstanding hindrance to competent governance.

Mishra, Parker, Nimgaonkar, and Deshpande (2008) revealed the right to information (RTI) Act has facilitated the process of citizens accessing information on government undertakings, policies, and decisions, leading to greater public examination of governmental proceedings. Citizens can lodge RTI applications for any government activities, with public officials mandated to reply within a designated duration. This has augmented the level of transparency and accountability, making it strenuous for public officials to withhold information or engage in immoral practices without fear of being exposed. The enactment of the RTI Act has given birth to a novel culture of openness and answerability in governmental establishments. Public functionaries are now cognizant of the fact that their actions and determinations are susceptible to public examination, which has goaded them to act with more transparency and

answerability. Furthermore, several governmental institutions have established dedicated RTI units to deal with RTI applications and ensure compliance with the Act, which has further reinforced the answerability of public officials. Additionally, the RTI Act has aided in exposing government corruption and wrongdoing.

Jain (2012) said that by authorising citizens to access government-related information, the Act has facilitated the identification and investigation of corruption and wrongdoing cases. Instances of venality and abuse of authority have been exposed by means of applications filed under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. As a result, punitive measures have been taken against the public officials and establishments implicated. This not only fosters answerability but also acts as a dissuasion against prospective malfeasance and corruption. However, the enactment of the RTI Act has faced several obstacles. Some officials have displayed resistance towards the Act, obstructing information or procrastinating responses to RTI petitions. Additionally, there have been apprehensions regarding the exploitation of the Act by individuals and organizations for personal benefit.

Baviskar (2010) found that despite these obstacles, they are not insuperable, and endeavors are being made to surmount them. The implementation of the RTI Act has facilitated citizens in obtaining information pertaining to governmental policies, projects, and decisions. By lodging an RTI application, citizens can request information regarding any governmental undertaking, and it is mandatory for public officials to provide a response within a stipulated time frame. This has rendered it arduous for public officials to conceal information or partake in deceitful practices without apprehension of being exposed. As a consequence, the RTI Act has instilled a sense of responsibility in public officials and has augmented the populace's trust in the government. Furthermore, the RTI Act has assisted in uncovering acts of malfeasance and corruption within the government. By granting citizens access to information regarding the government's operations, the Act has simplified the process of identifying and scrutinizing instances of malpractice and unethical conduct. The application of the Right to Information (RTI) has exposed numerous cases of graft and authority abuse. The said disclosure has then triggered disciplinary measures against the public servants and institutions implicated in these cases. In turn, this has fostered responsibility and acted as a cautionary measure against possible future anomalies and corruption. As a consequence, the

citizenry has garnered more confidence in the administration and the credibility of its organizations. Moreover, the RTI Act has given a platform for the populace to express their thoughts and apprehensions regarding governmental resolutions. By filing an RTI application, citizens can procure information relating to government strategies, schemes, and undertakings. Some bureaucrats may not always be forthcoming with data, and some may even endeavor to impede the progression of procuring data. This may lead to postponements in obtaining data and may deter inhabitants from exercising their right to obtain data. The execution of the RTI Act is not consistent across various government departments and agencies. Some departments may exhibit disparate levels of receptivity when it comes to fulfilling requests for information, while others may demonstrate a lesser degree of responsiveness. This dichotomy can result in uneven access to information and may impede the efficacy of the Right to Information Act in promoting transparency and accountability. The Right to Information Act has faced censure for its susceptibility to abuse by certain individuals for the purpose of intimidating public officials or advancing their personal interests.

Objective

- To measure the impact of the right to information act (RTI) on transparency and accountability in Indian governance

Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature in which the data were obtained from the 209 respondents. The respondents could include citizens who have filed RTI requests, government officials, civil society organizations, media professionals and academics and researchers. A checklist question was used to analyze and interpret the data. In a checklist question respondents choose “Yes” or “No” for all the questions.

Data Analysis and Interpretations:

Table 1 The Impact of the Right to Information Act (RTI) On Transparency and Accountability in Indian Governance

SL No.	Impact of the Right to Information Act	Yes	%	No	%	Total
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	(RTI)		Yes		No	
1	The RTI Act has also helped to promote citizen participation in the governance process.	177	84.69	32	15.31	209
2	The RTI Act has empowered citizens to participate in the governance process by enabling them to make informed decisions.	193	92.34	16	7.66	209
3	The RTI Act has been successful in promoting transparency in the functioning of public authorities in India.	197	94.26	12	5.74	209
4	The RTI Act has helped to reduce corruption in the public sector by exposing corrupt practices.	186	89.00	23	11.00	209
5	The RTI Act has had a significant impact on the media in India.	163	77.99	46	22.01	209
6	The RTI Act has helped to promote a culture of transparency and accountability in India.	180	86.12	29	13.88	209
7	The RTI Act has been particularly effective in promoting transparency and accountability in rural areas.	169	80.86	40	19.14	209
8	The RTI Act has played a significant role in promoting good governance in India.	191	91.39	18	8.61	209

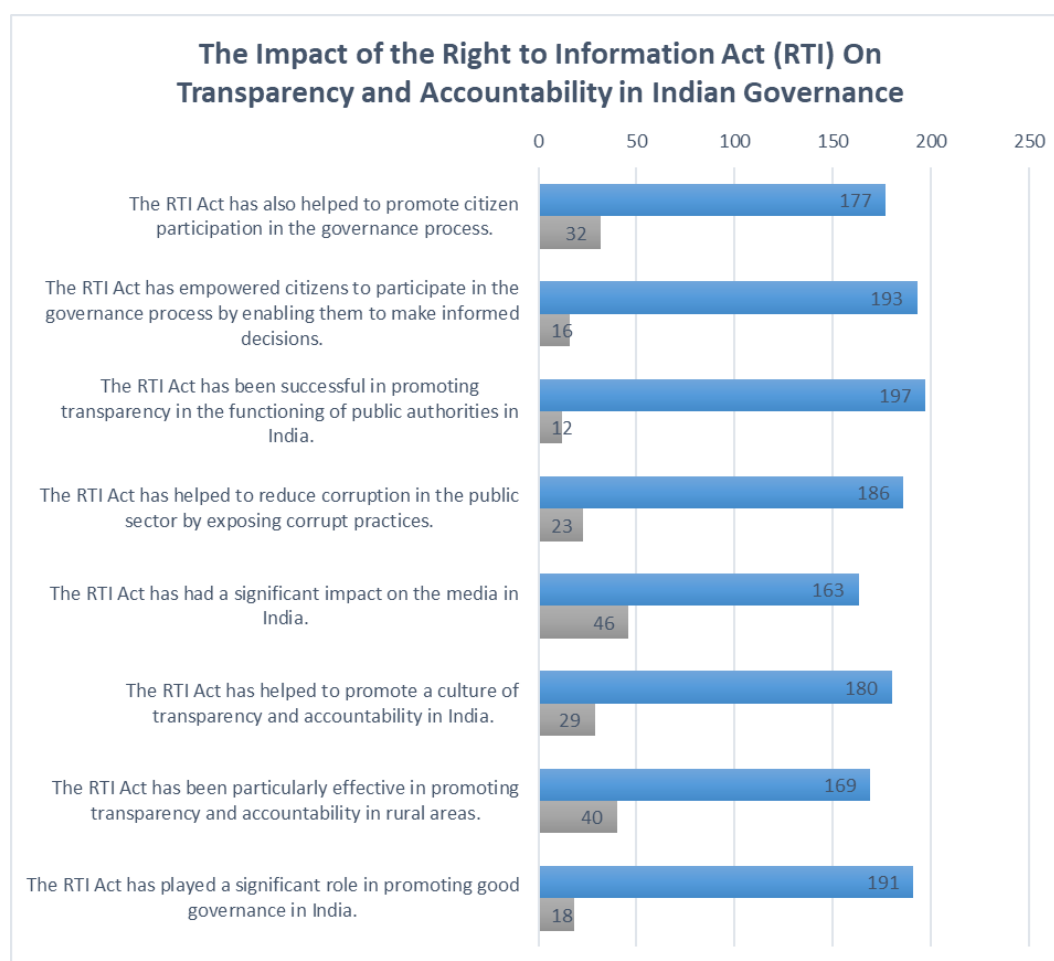


Figure 1 The Impact of the Right to Information Act (RTI) On Transparency and Accountability in Indian Governance

Table and Figure 1 shows the impact of the right to information act (RTI) on transparency and accountability in Indian governance. It was found that around 94.2% of respondents accept that the RTI Act has been successful in promoting transparency in the functioning of public authorities in India, the RTI Act has empowered citizens to participate in the governance process by enabling them to make informed decisions (92.3%), the RTI Act has played a significant role in promoting good governance in India (91.3%), the RTI Act has helped to reduce corruption in the public sector by exposing corrupt practices (89.0%), the RTI Act has helped to promote a culture of transparency and accountability in India (86.1%), the RTI Act has also helped to promote citizen participation in the governance process (84.6%), the RTI Act has been particularly effective in promoting transparency and accountability in rural areas (80.8%) and the RTI Act has had a significant impact on the media in India (77.9%).

Conclusion

The enactment of the Right to Information Act (RTI) has brought about a profound revolution in terms of transparency and accountability in the governance of India. Based on empirical evidence, it can be inferred that the RTI has endowed the citizenry with the power to gain access to information, meticulously scrutinize governmental decisions, and vigorously demand accountability from public officials. This legislation has effectively restructured the traditional *modus operandi* of governance in India, thereby rendering it more transparent, responsible, and oriented towards the welfare of the populace. The inquiry has brought to light that the RTI has not only augmented transparency but has also engendered a curtailment in venality, cronyism, and partiality within the government mechanism. The legislation has instigated an environment of candor and answerability, which in turn has intensified public reliance in the government and the democratic operation. Nevertheless, the study has also illuminated a few predicaments and shortcomings of the RTI, for instance, bureaucratic opposition, lack of awareness amongst the populace, and hindrances in the processing of information petitions. The daunting obstacles that beset the effective implementation of the RTI Act in India require an unflagging and ongoing commitment to promoting awareness, streamlining the RTI process, and enhancing the act's execution. To conclude, the RTI Act has emerged as a potent tool for engendering transparency and accountability in Indian governance. It has engendered democratic strengthening, corruption mitigation, and greater citizen engagement in governance. The study highlights the need for continued support and improvement of the RTI Act to ensure its viability as a crucial instrument for furthering good governance in India.

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