

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE AWARENESS OF RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Dr.S.GAJENDRA RAJ

Dean, Bharath Institute of Law, Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research

ABSTRACT

In India, the Right to Information Act was enacted in the year 2005. Right to information Act helps citizens to be informed and ensures the transparency in work of government for smooth functioning of democracy. It has been felt that even after 12 years since the Act had come in to force there is lack of awareness among people about this. The paper tries to test the awareness of college students about their right to information and the procedure by which information can be sought. For this, a survey was conducted among one hundred students from five different colleges in Chennai. Even though majority of them were aware of the Act but were not aware of the procedures. As a part of the research the students were educated on the right to which they are entitled and the procedure to enforce their rights.

Key Words: Right to Information, Awareness, Students, Procedure

INTRODUCTION

Human rights ensure respect and dignity to mankind. Humans are entitled to various kinds of rights which are guaranteed under the law and otherwise. One of the recent introductions to the set of rights guaranteed under the law to humans is 'Right to Information'. India, through Right to Information Act, 2005 vested upon the citizen the right to seek information, even though the constitution guarantees it implicitly. The purpose to create this Act is to serve a larger public interest to question the age old hierarchical traditional system of governance and to strengthen foundation for a true participatory democracy. The Act empowers Indian citizens to seek any accessible information from a public authority and makes the government and its functionaries more accountable and responsible. The Act provides for a practical regime of right to information for the citizens and acts as a powerful tool to the citizens to get information from the Government as a matter of right.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Right to Information is an inalienable and natural right of every human being. In every democratic country people have the right to freedom of speech and expression. This right also includes the right to hold public opinion and obtain information from public authorities. Availability of appropriate information as to administration of state and making governance transparent is integral in a democratic country. People have a momentous role in a representative form of government and it is necessary that they must be aware of all the functioning of government activities to facilitate framing a practical regime of good governance. Right to Information must be enforced strictly, due to its dependency on many other rights. Right to shelter, food, clean environment, security and employment opportunity

are all bound up with right to information. In the absence of information on these aspects, people cannot live a dignified life and will remain ever marginalized group in the society. It is a powerful instrument to protect the fundamental rights of people. Corruption and criminalization has become the nerve of Indian governance today. The secrecy the government have maintained is the foundation of corruption, which could be eradicated through this Act. Transparency and efficiency in the governance is important to achieve the goal of good governance which is made possible through this Act.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Even after a decade of enactment of this Act, there seems to be lack of awareness among the people about this right and its enforcement.

OBJECTIVES

- To study about the awareness of Right to Information among college students
- To study about the awareness of procedure to seek information
- To spread awareness as a part of the study.

HYPOTHESIS

There is considerable awareness among the college students about the right to information even though lack in awareness as to procedure to seek information.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on survey conducted among one hundred college students from five different colleges in Chennai City. The data required for the study was collected through administration of structured and self-made questionnaire to the students. The questionnaire consisted of 10 Yes/No type questions. 5 questions as to the awareness of RTI Act, 5 questions as to procedure to seek information and one open question as to opinion or suggestion of students constituted the questionnaire. The respondents were requested to record free, frank and independent responses. Analysis of data was done by calculating the percentage of responses given.

FINDINGS

On using the percentage method upon the data collected, the following were found:

1. 89% of the students were aware of the Right To Information Act
2. 85% of the students were aware that the Act applicable only to citizens of India
3. 83% of the students were aware that information can be sought from Public Information Officers
4. 78% of the students were aware of the time period within which the Public Information Officers must reply to request of citizens.

5. 35% of the students were aware about the information excluded from the purview of Right To Information Act
6. 55% of the students were aware of the form of application to be presented.
7. 59% of the students were aware of the payment of fees to obtain information
8. 48% of students were aware that there is no need not have to state the reason for seeking information under the Act
9. 46% of the students were aware of the time period within which information can be obtained.
10. 32% of the students aware of the appeal provisions under Right To Information Act.

From the data, it can be analyzed that about 74% of students were aware of the basics of Right to Information Act and about 48% of the students were aware of the procedures under the Act. It was also found that the students were willing to know more about the Act.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As it has been analyzed that there is lack of awareness among students as to procedures under the Act, there is a need to educate them on this aspect. As RTI Act is not a complex Act and the procedures are simple, a one day awareness programme would be sufficient to get the required results. It is recommended that the awareness programmes be conducted by experts in the field to have an exposure to the practicality of the Act. The expert in this field can preferably be a public information officer. Students could get eager to make use of the provisions of law when they became aware of it. But it must always be kept in mind not to misuse the provision of law or overburden the government officials. It is also advisable to have the provisions under the law as a measure to get information when other possible ways get exhausted. Students as leaders of tomorrow can take lead to create awareness among the general public who are actually in need of the provisions under RTI.

CONCLUSION

Every citizen has a right to know how the Government they elected is functioning. Right to Information empowers every citizen to seek any information from the Government, inspect any public documents and seek certified photocopies thereof. Prior to the introduction of RTI also there were bodies which brought transparency in government departments like. Such bodies include Public Grievance Commission & Ombudsman. These bodies were not as much as effective as the machinery under RTI because in those bodies had no Accountability on the part of concerned officials. But now under Right to Information Act, 2005, there is accountability on the part of Govt. officials. It is their legal obligation to respond to the applications made within a period of 30 days otherwise they are liable to pay a fine of Rs.100 per day subject to a maximum of Rs.25,000/-.It can thus be construed that the RTI Act is not only vesting the right to seek information on the citizen but also casts duty upon the officials to provide information sought. When the citizens have a powerful tool to exercise their other rights, it

should not be wasted in the name of lack of awareness. Hence, by creating awareness on RTI among the public, the Act can be effectively implemented and the purpose for which it was enacted can be successfully achieved.

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