



## Right to Information Movement in India

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### Abstract

During the colonial rule in India the right to information was restricted under the Official secret act, because the colonial rulers we intended to the fact that their mis governance and illegal policies should not reach the people. The Right to Information Act brought out in 2005 has made the general public discuss about the open and transparent governance, Right to information can be identified as a movement. Supplementing to the concept of right to speech and expression the movement of seeking information strengthened after 1990 which intensified and gained momentum due to public bureaucrat. Many public unions and non-government organizations jointly organized operations in national level to procure important documents from public authorities of the government.

**Keywords: Good Governance, Movement, Democracy, Transparency**

## Introduction

India which holds the biggest written constitution in the world is the largest democratic nation. The Indian government model formed under the people's republic supports broad spectrum democracy. The availability of administrative field to the citizens of the country openly helps the public democracy to come into force. Transparency is very essential for the government to function with the mutual participation of the people. In this aspect the people should be aware of the programme of the government and the decisions taken by the government.

Pre-independence when India was under the colonial rule, due to the constant efforts of freedom leaders India became independent from the clutches of foreign administration on 1947 August 15 and had an independent constitution which came into existence as a republican country on January 26, 1950 and established a new government system. The main aim of the government was to seek development in all the fields of the country. But due to prejudice, inequity, misuse of power and irrelevant law implementation in the name of development forced the people to fight for corruption less, open and transparent governance. The movement taken up by the Rajasthan Mazdoor Kisanshakti organization helped in the implementation of Right to information act and also put a break to secret administration.

The Right to information movement which started in 1990 through Mazdoor Kisanshakti Organization of Devdungri village in Rajasthan, in 2000 the Rajasthan government brought out the Right to Information Act. Later including Karnataka, the state of Tamil Nadu, Goa, Delhi, Maharashtra, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir implement the Right to Information. With the untiring efforts of right to information fighters, social workers, activists and joint movements with various organizations, the United Progressive Alliance implemented the Right to Information Act-2005 with an intention to provide comprehensive information seeking rights to the citizens at the All India level. On December 22, 2004 this Act was presented in the Lok Sabha and after a prolonged discussion the parliament approved and accepted it and on June 15, 2005 approval was taken from the President of India which was published in the gazettee on June 21, 2005 and implanted on October 12, 2005. The "freedom of Information Act" which was enforced by National Democratic Alliance was deferred.

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The Indian Evidence Act which was in existence in India pre-independence in 1872 was amended in 1923 and was called official Secret Act-1923. These acts which were in existence pre-independence gave more importance to confidentiality and were of the intention that if there is misuse of power, the secret should not be revealed to the general public. According to the 1872 Indian Evidence Act section 76 which stated that the person previewing public documents has the right to obtain an official copy of the documents. As per that, seeking information under 1923 Indian Evidence Act was intricate.

Though India became independent, with regard to transparency in governance there was no indepth effort to nullify the secret policies in governance. In 1951 the press commission was formed which presented transparency but it was of the opinion that it was impossible to implement information right. The 1952 Commission Enquiry Act, All India Services (Conduct) Act-1954, Central Civil Services (Conduct) Act-1955, Railway Services (Conduct) Act-1956 in this manner the regulations brought out by Government of India for the service of public staff became hurdles to bring about transparency in governance and provide the right to information for the people. The code of conducts related to public staff service regulations indicated not to disclose the administrative issues. The government of India amended the acts on secrecy of information on governance and in an attempt to bring transparency tried its best in 1990 but it was not possible. The fifth pay commission nominated by the government recommended to amend the Official Secret Act and provide the sight of information to the people.

Amidst this, agitation started in the country for the sake of procuring government documents. The movement started by Mazdoor Kisan Shakti and National Rights Movement organizations stating that information is a part of people's life was a special effort by the common man. The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti organization was a non-political organization of poor farmers, labourers and men and women.

This organization placed a demand for certified information on the amount incurred towards the people of a small village named Devadungri in Rajasthan. The letter was submitted to the sub-divisional offices. As per the transparency when there was a forced plea to give the details of wages credited the officials only gave a vague answer that the work was done and blustered that they had the documents. The Kisan Mazdoor Sabha Organization repeatedly heard about this and later demanded for documents. The clear cut answer given by the officers that those documents could not be shown as per the rules,

infuriated the agitators. This movement which was aimed at labour wages and proper distribution of grains transformed itself into right to information movement.

The person who played a lead role in this organization and movement was Smt. Aruna Roy, Shekar Singh and Nikhil De. These people not only registered the Mazdoor Kisan Organization but also formulated many structural strategies like 'Janasunavan's and Jananeka Hakku' (public appeal).

This movement paved way for right to information, become a legislative action. This movement received lot of support from the public and transformed into a collective form. The officers and representatives of the villages did not turn up for the 'Janasunvayi' programme which indirectly proved their mistakes. There were instances where an officer returned the amount taken from a poor farmer fearing the outrage of the public. This spread to the neighbouring states and a movement to collect money against corrupt employees took place in Tehrigarava village of Uttar Pradesh.

Noted journalists of the country, Kuldeep Nayar, social activist Medha Parkar, Nikhil Chakravathy, Prakash Joshi supported this movement. Due to this, then Chief minister B. Shekhawat had to respond to this pressure. The demands putforth by this organization in 1995 were as follows:

- ❖ Amendment to be made to Panchayat Raj system and the certified copy of the documents in government offices should be made available to the public.
- ❖ Files, which means receipts, bills, distribution and disbursement of wages details and expenditure should be accessible to be known by the public.
- ❖ Providing the rights to public in seeking information in all the fields of administration.

But since the government did not respond positively the organization continued its agitation. During the 1996 elections this issue again gained momentum and slogans like "right to know and right to live" spread widely. The word "Give our money to us" became common slogan. This agitation which started under the auspice of Mazdoor Shakti Sanghatan laid the foundation stone to Right to Information movement.

During the state Information and broad casting ministers convention during 1996-97 more emphasis was made to approve the right to information Act. Providing right to information to the citizens by the government was a dream of Gandhijis concept of Ramarajya and this has been introduced in the minimal way, was the declaration that was mad.

According to this Indian Press Council prepared a draft of right to information. This draft was sent to all the MPs. The “National Campaign for Right to Information” formed in 1997 pressurized this issue. In the same year the central government organized a convention for the chief ministers of all the states termed as “Effective and responsive government” under the leadership of. H.D. Shouri and formed a task force for the betterment of Right to information and transparency in governance. The Press Council of India, Press Institute of India, National Campaign for Right to Information, RTI Forum organizations held the membership in this task force.

Amidst these developments in the year 1977, for the first time in Tamil Nadu Right to Information law came into existence. In the year 1998 Madhya Pradesh, Goa in 1999, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in 2000, Delhi and Jharkhand in 2001, Assam, Pondichery, Kerala, Maharashtra in 2002 implements this law. Since 2004 separate Act is in force in Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2002 our parliament approved the Right to Information Act. This Act is being called as Freedom of Information Act 2002 which was implemented by the NDA government. Later the Central Government in 2005 enforced the Right to information Act and under section 26 of this Act each state was given the opportunity to enforce local law.

Right to information is the tool to the citizens to make the government more responsible and transparent to make democracy more meaningful and to encourage people in administrative matters is the main objective of Right to Information Act 2005.

## Conclusion

As all we know that India is a vast democratic country among the world countries. Openness and transparency play a crucial role while making man as statesman. It is believed that a government should function with the participation of people. People free to avail information about government achievements, different policies and execution. Bureaucracy should have responsibility to openness and transparency in administration. Right to information brings decent change in public and avoids misuse of power within the statutory.

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