

RTI and Mass Media: RTI as a Feeder for News

R Arunkumar¹, B Radha²

¹Doctoral Research Scholar, (Part time), ²Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.

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Abstract

Right to Information has had its origins in the 1990's. The concept had undergone drastic changes and dimensions through the test of time. Although there were a plenty of states that brought about state level laws across the country, it was in the year 2005 that the law was actually formulated into effect as an Act majorly due to the efforts of the current CM of Delhi Shri. Arvind Kejriwal. RTI has had also been subject of intense discussion and deliberations across academia, policy makers and bureaucrats for a large period of time. Despite restraints on certain information not accessible and obtainable for the people at all times, this Act is beneficial for a large populace. The current research paper looks at information obtained from RTI by various persons becoming news articles of much importance by analysing the RTI petitions filed by various people. The study employs quantitative research approaches in the form of surveys.

Keywords: Traditional media, News, Right to Information, Mass media, Information

Introduction

History of RTI in India:

The earliest movements and efforts for the Right to Information Act in India started in 1990 through the people belonging to Mastur Dishan Sakthi Sangh in the state of Rajasthan. It brought to the limelight as "People asking". Despite many fold protests for more active laws pertaining to RTI, it was not entirely possible for a while to bring state laws in Rajasthan due to corrupt bureaucracy. As a result of government intervention during late 1990's in Rajasthan many of the corrupt officials and officers were punished severely.

On April 17, 1997 the M. Karunanidhi government brought the Tamil Nadu Right to Information Act for legislation in the assembly. On May 4, 1997 the legislation was accepted as law and came into force in Tamil Nadu. Following suit, states like Goa (1997), Karnataka (2000), Delhi (2001), Maharashtra (2002), Assam (2002), Madhya Pradesh (2003) and Jammu & Kashmir (2004) brought about their own laws in their respective states.

In October 2005, apart from Jammu & Kashmir all of the country were covered under the legislation of the Right to Information Act. The Act helped in people to get information that they sought apart from also fighting for their rights. Transparency in governance and improving the functioning of the government.

Review of Literature

RTI

Sathe S. P. (2006) had traced the history of this legislation and also the evolution of the right to information as a constitutional right. He has also explained the administrative process involved in the implementation of this act. Goel S. L. (2007) a learned author has delved into the Right to Information from different angles viz. historical, legal, institutional, political, administrative and even futuristic.

Wadia Angela (2006) in his book 'Global Sourcebook on Right to Information' had comprehensively covered the Right to Information Act, 2005 and the challenges thrown by this Act. He explained the duties of PIOs (Public Information Officers), the powers and functions

Corresponding Author: R. Arunkumar, Department of Communication, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.

E-mail Id: arunkumar.shgm@gmail.com

Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4939-5114>

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of CIC (Central Information Commission) and SIC (State Information Commission) and the role of Government in promoting RTI Act.

A Robers (2010) spoke about the revolutionary aspects of RTI Act in its first four years. Nachiappan N. and Thanuskodi S. (2013) spoke about the awareness of RTI among professionals and students in Tamil Nadu.

Key Provisions of RTI Act, 2005

List of information that can be obtained:

- Work, Documents, archives, Essential documents that concerns the individual person
- E-documents and E-portals
- Information that will benefit the common man at large
- Information that is available at the State and Union legislature must be provided should the request be made etc.

List of information that cannot be obtained:

- Information that concerns the sovereignty, integrity, security, national safety, scientific and economic matters
- Information that will affect friendly relations with foreign states/ countries
- Information that has been banned by the Courts
- Confidential information received from other countries
- Information from Q- branch, Defence, Police, Naxalites, Narcotics, Statues and idols etc.

List of redressal mechanisms available:

- State Information Commission
- Central Information Commission

Methodology

The research study looks into the important news articles that became news as a result of important RTI petitions. The researcher has looked into the various news articles and specifically into the issue at large which was sought by various respondents across the country.

Analysis and Findings

The foremost RTI taken up for the study spoke about the absence of Electricity meter in PM Narendra Modi's house. Jagadish Singh a resident of Gurgaon, had requested information pertaining to the amount of electricity consumed and paid by the Prime Minister in his residence during the past and present. The reply obtained was that the PWD department was overseeing the electricity consumption of the Rashtrapathi Bhawan, the Parliament and the PM's residence. The applicant had also asked whether LED bulbs were in use as the PM in one of his

address to the nation had instructed to use LED bulbs to reduce consumption of electricity both in homes and offices.

Another RTI revealed that due to lack of space allocation, the proposed AIIMS hospital has not been set up in Tamil Nadu as mentioned earlier. The RTI was filed by Manimaran. The next RTI was filed to look into the adulteration levels in milk that is being distributed in Tamil Nadu by various vendors. The query revealed that there were no dangerous substances that were mixed and that the levels are well in accordance with the government regulations.

Mohan Kumar Sharma in his RTI had asked for the 15 lakh rupees for every individual in the country as promised by the PM. He got a reply stating that the authorities cannot answer to the query. Another RTI revealed that 71 colleges are operating in Coimbatore district without proper permission and accreditation.

EVM's are also susceptible to faults an RTI has revealed. Sultanpur constituency had elections held again as EVM's recorded votes wrongly. The problem was informed to the concerned authorities who in turn sealed the machines and conducted the voting again later by employing different EVMs. The RTI was filed by Anil Karling. A container containing 570 crore rupees was seized by the flying squad of the Election Commission an RTI has revealed. The seized vehicles were kept at the Collector's office in Tiruppur. The money was caught in Tiruppur district during the elections in 2016. The RTI was filed by Brahma.

Conclusion

The current research study was envisioned to look into how RTI is serving as a primary source of information for the traditional media outlets across the country. The study revealed that after 13 years since the incorporation of the Act in the law books and constitution, it is heartening to see people using the law to obtain information that they seek. The study revealed that people had queries on various subjects such as status of setting up of AIIMS hospital in Tamil Nadu, milk adulteration, 15 lakh rupees being credited to each and every voter in the country etc. This affirms that there is scope for people to get information that they seek unless it is not under the purview of restricted information under the RTI Act, 2005.

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