



## SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF RTI LAWS AMONG URBAN DWELLER

**Dr. Dillip Kumar Mahapatra**

*Assistant Professor, Dr. Ambedkar Global Law Institute, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.*

### **Abstract**

Right to information Act is a democratic weapon to combat corruption and smoothen the path of governance. Full utilization by the citizens will definitely contribute to development of the country. Perception of people is a determining step in its utilization. Since, urban people are relatively more aware about laws than rural people an attempt has been made with following objective.

### **Objective**

To assess their perception about different aspect of RTI Act and draw inference.

### **Material and Method**

It is a community based, cross sectional study done with convenient sampling method during month of December 2016 in urban area of Berhampur, Odisha. Data was collected with pretested well designed Odiya questionnaire after pilot study and analysed in Dept of Law, DAGLI, Tirupati.

### **Result and discussion**

Total 200 study population selected as per convenience. They consists of both sex and age group above 20 years. 8% of them did have any knowledge at all about the Act. Only 34% of them have good perception on RTI Act. Out of 184 study population 29% have not used or advised anybody to use it. However a gradual rise of awareness and utilization seen over the years. Gradual increasing trend of knowledge and utilization of RTI Act is observed over years. People should be more encouraged for other methods like inspection and sample collection beside document collection for information.

**Keyword: Information, RTI, Respondent, Knowledge.**

### **Introduction**

"Information is the oxygen of the modern age. It seeps through the walls topped by barbed wire; it wafts across the electrified borders"<sup>1</sup>. The right to information is vital to democracy. It equips the citizen to handle their affairs including participation in the governance of the country with adequate knowledge. Information is important because it empowers people & ensure transparency of administration, keep the governance effective. It is therefore said that "a popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce, or a tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives"<sup>2</sup>. If liberty and equality, as is thought by some are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost"<sup>3</sup>. However people's access to information is often restricted due to non-existence of effective mechanism for dissemination and authorities deliberately holding back information. The right to information Act 2005 seems like an empowering legislation to give citizens the right to change the culture of the administration. The adamant attitude of the bureaucrats with vast power to use, with corrupt motives will not allow it to be implemented so easily. The right to information is inadequate in this respect. Hence this study is to make right to information act truly an empowering legislation when all citizens realize its power as a weapon to counter act against corruption. The main intention of the present study is to make an intensive exploration of community knowledge on right to information with following objectives.

### **Objective**

To assess the legal awareness on RTI Act among people of different strata of the society so as to suggest different methods to improve its implementation.

### **Material and Methods**

It is a cross sectional community based study carried out in urban area of Berhampur, a town of southern Odisha. Convenient random sampling method was used to collect data from 200 study population after a short pilot study. Time of study was from 1<sup>st</sup> December to 31<sup>st</sup> December i.e. for 1 month duration. For this purpose a questionnaire was prepared in Odia language. There are varieties of questions which are framed to seek various information which is helpful to draw the inference about the social perspective of the RTI Act, 2005. The questionnaire is both closed as well as opened types. Closed type of questionnaire means the questionnaire in which pre-decided options are provided to the respondent & they have to



choose their answer out of those options. On the other hand open type of questionnaire means the question in which the respondent can provide their subjective answer. Total 200 study population was approached, after taking verbal consent their response was tabulated & statistical analysis was done.

### Observation and Discussion

Socio-demographic profile of study population is given as bellow.

**Table 1: The socio demographic profile of study population (n=200)**

Age/Sex	Male		Female	
	No	%	No	%
20-40	48	36	24	37
40-60	64	47	35	54
>60	23	17	6	9
Total	135	100	65	100

**Table 2: Occupation of the study population (n=200)**

Occupation	Female	Male
Employed	38	77
Retired from service	1	24
Unemployed	26	34
Total	65	135

**Table 3:-Knowledge status of study population**

Knowledge status	Number	%
Adequate	68	34
Inadequate	116	58
Nil/Very little	16	8
Total	200	100

Out of 200 respondents taken for study about awareness on RTI Act. 34% mentioned they have adequate knowledge on RTI Act, while 58% of the respondents know inadequately on their own opinion. 8% of study population not having any knowledge were excluded from further questioning. Further questioning was done to 184 study participants. Questions has been asked to get information about the frequency of using RTI Act in their own life, this is essentially an vital data because this will help to understand the social practice of utilizing the act. Three options were provided & responses are tabulated which can be put in the following manner. 29% of them told they did not have applied it but 47% told occasionally they applied for it and or advised other for doing so. However 24% of them used it frequently and also advised others (more than twice) for the same.

On analyzing the utilization of the act any time during these years after implementation, 10 % told they knew about it since 5 years or more, 68% for 1 to 5 years and 22% less than 1 year. It is evident that maximum users are utilizing the law for 1 to 5 years. This shows that the number of users availing the service of information provision under the act is increased over the past 5 year. As highest respondents belong to this group, it appears the awareness is increasing over the years gradually. However 22% of respondent has used the service within 1 year from study period indicating increase utilization in the short span of past one year. This shows significant improvement & a positive trend in the field of implementation of RTI Act.

This leads to conclusion that in coming years more number of people will be aware of & utilize the Act to seek information. These justify the legal & regulatory frameworks in information provision which will help in encouraging transparent & accountable public service.

Assessment was done to know the purpose of collection of information by the respondents whether the Act is being used in desirable way. Four option has been given to the respondent & their response are analyzed statistical manner and interpreted as majority (47%) of RTI users seeks information for personal use. This shows that maximum people are well benefitted from the Act which is used to alleviate their personal inconvenience. Respondents seek information for academic purpose is 23% & 18% of them applied to know the status of public service. This is a real purpose to explore the inactivity of public authority for which, public money is being spent. However from the percentage of response (18%) it appears not to be so encouraging



& needs improvement. More people should seek information about public service for alleviation of corruption & smooth governance. However 12% people seek information to help others & some of them did it out of curiosity.

On assessing the method respondent adopted to explore information, collection of document is a most needed material for personal as well as official purpose. Few people knew about the use of other methods to get the information like inspecting the document & collection of samples. So attempts have been taken to know what is the degree of application of different method & its applicability. For getting large amount of information, inspection method is suitable as it is cost effective. For getting information on quality of some material, food sample or building material etc sample should be collected to get the appropriate information. But to improve its wider application, knowledge on these methods are necessary. So assessing these methods will throw light on it. Majority respondent (84%) applied for information in the form of written & electronic document. Few (15%) of them asked for inspection of documents & negligible respondent applied for samples which show that later two methods are not utilized adequately. Awareness about these two qualitative methods of seeking information is necessary for its application. To know further, the operational aspect of information seeking, the difficulty faced by the respondents was recorded. In responses, only 40% of respondents were provided with the information on time. Maximum number (45%) of respondent faced lot of difficulties in obtaining information. Factors like ignorance of PIO, lack of time with the overburdened PIO, shortage of staff, uncooperative attitude, unavailability of information due to mismanagement & improper storage of data, etc are the obstacles faced by respondent. Lack of knowledge on RTI as well as callousness to RTI law by the authority is the cause mentioned by 50% of respondents. Even 15% of them have to appeal to the authority to get the information. This suggests that the law should be more stringent to improve the situation. However all these obstacles delay & deny the supply of information & discourage the information seeking behavior of the public. On assessing their perception on eligibility of the applicant. Closed options were provided for the respondent with all possible answers learnt from pilot study.

Maximum (70%) number of respondent could answer correctly about who is eligible to seek information under the Act. Sixteen percent (16%) of them answer wrongly. They could not differentiate between adult citizen of the country, minor age group, foreigner & person without identity card, to apply for information under the Act. Even few (14%) respondent could not tell who is eligible to apply. This observation shows the poor perception of respondent on eligibility criteria to apply for information. This shows lots of awareness needed on the subject. To seek knowledge of respondent on appointment of Public information officer to whom they have to apply to get the information. Most of the time people are ignorant about the concerned person in a organization for which there may be delay in information seeking. So it is a priority to have the knowledge on it. PIO who is to provide the information to them. They should know that the person available at the same institution has been designated for this purpose. So three options has been given in this closed ended question. Response leads to conclusion that 52% of respondents answer correctly that PIO is the employee of same institution designated for this purpose. But 48% of them could not answer correctly. Thirty percent of them told PIO is a separate person appointed for RTI purpose only & 11% answered that he is a person other than Govt employee who is a activist from people's side. This implies poor perception on PIO who play pivotal role in RTI implementation. This situation should be improved with proper awareness of the people. Assessing perception of material needed to seek information.

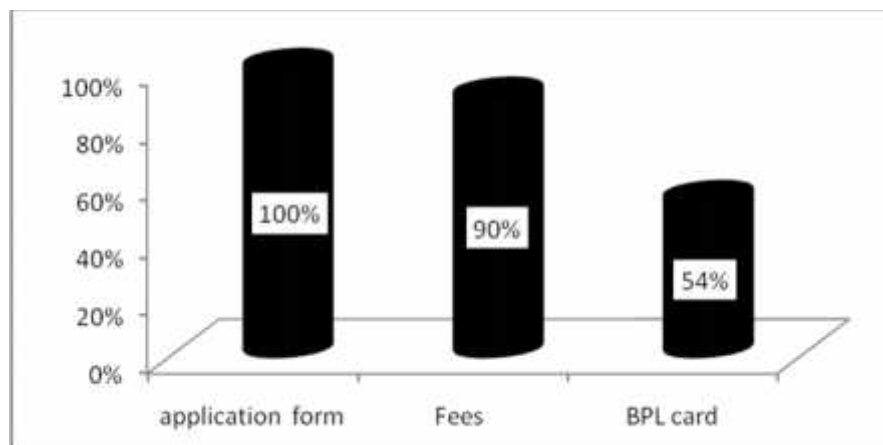


Fig: 1. Perception on requirements for seeking information under RTI Act



The data was analyzed leading to conclusion that all of them know about the necessity of application form. Fee is required to be deposited, mentioned by 90 % of respondent. Half the respondents (50%) mentioned to apply with Xerox copy of BPL card for exemption of fees. However the knowledge is poor among the respondents about fees structure & BPL which shows needs improvement.

### **Conclusion**

As most of the people of our country are illiterate, ignorant about their rights and different legal provision they are not confident enough for availing their rights. So it is very important to know the eligibility criteria for this act. But to improve its wider application, knowledge on different aspect of the Act is necessary. Mass media should be used to make the people more aware. Each office should provide with details of PIO and procedure of seeking information. Social activists, social advocates and NGO should ensure that people get the benefits of RTI Act.

### **References**

1. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/r/ronaldreag140789.html#88YJmzuS2tjeObKK.99>.
2. Madison James quotes to W.T. Barry on August 14, 1822 Epilogue: Securing the Republic Chapter 18Doc 35 Writings 9:103—9.
3. Aristotle.