



Mains Practice Question

Q. The Right to Information (RTI) Act is path-breaking legislation which signals the march from the darkness of secrecy to the dawn of transparency. Comment. (250 words)

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Approach

- Briefly talk about RTI.
- Talk about the period before RTI.
- Mention the significance of the Act.
- Enumerate challenges in the Act.
- Suggest some ways to address the challenges and conclude optimistically.

Introduction

Right to Information (RTI) is one of the most empowering and progressive legislations passed in post-Independent India. It empowers the citizen by promoting transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. RTI enhances efficiency in the administration of public authorities, mitigates corruption and promotes good governance.

Body

Pre-RTI Era

- Before RTI, the Official Secrets Act (1923) governed the disclosure of information held by public authorities in India.
- The Act was designed to deny information about government activities to the people and encouraged secrecy and opaqueness in administration.
- Absence of information created an environment of distrust between the people and the government, which impinged upon the development and jeopardized democratic governance.

Post-enactment of RTI, this environment has considerably changed. It has not only resulted in a transparent environment for citizens but has also empowered them in various ways:

- **Accountability:** RTI opens up government's records to public scrutiny, thereby arming citizens with a vital tool to inform them about what the government does and how effectively.
- **Participative Democracy:** RTI makes the seeker of the information a partner in the decision-making process thereby ushering in citizen-centric governance.
- **Transparency:** The Act is used by civil society organizations and the media to bring about positive changes in the levels of corruption and accountability.
- **Empowering common people:** Issues like public distribution system, pensions, road repairs, electricity connections, telecom complaints have easily been dealt by people through the RTI.
- **Empowering Public Servants:** Many honest officers also feel strengthened as decisions are now open to civil society and media scrutiny which acts as a deterrent to any extraneous pressures.

However, there remain certain challenges in the effective implementation of the Act

- Inadequate public awareness especially in rural areas.
- lack of a proper system to manage and disseminate information.
- Incompetency of the public information officers (PIOs) to deal with the RTI requests.
- Bureaucratic mindset and attitudes that encourage secrecy and intimidation and threats to information seekers.

Way forward

- Mass awareness campaigns should be organised in rural areas.
- Public Authorities should display behaviour of voluntary disclosure of information.
- The old mindset of secretive government, processes and transactions should be abhorred.
- Information seeker should have ample safeguards so that he is not threatened or his life is not in danger.

Democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency of information which are vital to its functioning and also to contain corruption and to hold Governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed.

Despite its own challenges, RTI has ushered the level of transparency in the public sphere and thus can be called a novel step towards achieving good governance.

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