

Awareness on RTI Act among Rural Population of Odisha

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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 the perception of rural population of Odisha about different aspects of RTI Act and draw inference.

Material and Method:-It is a community based, cross- sectional study done with random sampling method during month of January to June 2016 in rural area of Boudh, Odisha. Data was collected with pretested scientifically designed questionnaire in local language after pilot study and analyzed in Dept of Law, Dr Ambedkar Global Law Institute, Tirupati A.P..

Result and discussion:-Total 200 study population selected as per convenience .They consists of both sex and age group above 20 years.38% of them did not have any knowledge at all about the Act. Only 14% of them have good perception on RTI Act. Out of 124 study population, those knew, 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

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Information is the oxygen of the democracy. It seeps through the walls topped by barbed wire, it wafts across the electrified borders”¹. 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"² 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"³. However people are barred from accurate information due to defect in system and most of the time due to ignorance and adamant attitude of bureaucracy added by inadequate dissemination and. The attitude of the bureaucrats equipped with vast power and corrupt motives will not allow it to be implemented sincerely. The right to information is inadequate in this respect. Hence 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 sincere effort to explore the community knowledge of rural base on right to information with following objectives

OBJECTIVE

To assess the perception of rural population of Odisha about different aspects of RTI Act and draw inference.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

It is a cross sectional community based study carried out in rural area of Boudh, a western district of Odisha selected randomly. Convenient random sampling method was used to collect data from 200 study population after a short pilot study. Time of study was from 1st January to 31st June i.e. for 6 month duration in

the year 2016. 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 semi-structured, consists of both closed as well as opened types. Closed type of questionnaire means the questionnaire in which pre decided options are provided to the respondents & they have to choose their answer out of those options. However, 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 in the Department of Law, Dr Ambedkar Global Law Institute, Tirupati.

III. OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

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

Table no 1: The socio demographic profile of study population (n=200)

Age/Sex	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
20-40	46	36	28	37	74	37
40-60	66	47	31	54	97	48.5
>60	23	17	6	9	29	14.5
Total	135	100	65	100	200	100

Table no-2: Occupation of the study population (n=200)

Occupation	Female	Male	Total	
			No	%
Employed	18	57	75	37.5
Retired from service	1	24	25	12.5
Unemployed	46	54	100	50
Total	65	135	200	100

Table no3:- Knowledge status of study population

Knowledge status	Number	%
Adequate	28	14
Inadequate	96	48
Nil/Very little	76	38
Total	200	100

Out of 200 respondents taken for study about awareness on RTI Act, 14% mentioned they have adequate knowledge on RTI Act, while 48% of the respondents know inadequately on their own opinion. 38% of study population not having any knowledge were excluded from further questioning. Further questioning was done to 124 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. 69% of them told they did not have applied it but 7% told occasionally they applied for it and or advised other for doing so. However 2% of them used it frequently and also advised others (more than twice) for the same.

On analyzing the duration of perception about 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 have known the law for 1 to 5 years. This shows that the number of people have heard about the service of information provision under the act which show increase in number, 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 in awareness 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. This justify the legal & regulatory frameworks in information provision which will help in encouraging transparent & accountable public service.

On assessing 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 (77%) out of 44 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 59% & 10% of them applied to know the status of public service. This is a real purpose to explore the evil intension and inactivity of public authority for which, public money is being spent. However from the percentage of response (on enquiry about public services) i.e. 8% it appears not to be so encouraging & needs improvement. More people should seek information about public service for alleviation of corruption & smooth governance. However 10% people seek information to help others & some of them did it out of curiosity.

Attempts have been made to know what is the method & its applicability to get information under RTI, collection of document is mostly needed material to explore information, by the respondent for personal as well as official purpose. Use of other methods to get the information like inspecting the document & collection of samples is nil. So for getting large amount of information, inspection method is suitable as it is cost effective and for assessing quality of material, sample collection is ideal method to get the appropriate information. So to improve its wider application, knowledge on these methods are necessary. So assessing these methods, all respondents (100%) applied for information in the form of written & electronic document. None of them asked for inspection of documents or applied for samples which show that later two methods are unutilized. 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 of respondent 60% 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. However all these obstacles delay & deny the supply of information & discourage the information seeking behavior of the public.

IV. 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. Particularly rural people are devoid of adequate knowledge, who are at most need. Though some of them know they don't dare to apply due to inadequate knowledge about the procedure. Knowledge on different aspect of the Act is necessary. Different obstacles like illiteracy, ignorance about law, uncooperative attitude of authority of providing information are the hindrance in the way of application of RTI Act. Mass media should be used to make the people more aware. Each office should provide details of PIO and procedure of seeking information. Social activists, social advocates and NGO should ensure that people get the benefits of RTI Act.

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- [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 18 Doc 35 Writings 9:103—9
- [3] Aristotle

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