

Right to Information and Public Accountability: An Empirical Study of RTI Applications Filed Before State and Central Public Authorities

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ABSTRACT

The Right to Information Act, 2005 represents a landmark step in strengthening transparency, accountability, and democratic governance in India. By empowering citizens to access information held by public authorities, the Act serves as an important mechanism for ensuring openness in administration and promoting participatory democracy. The effectiveness of the legislation, however, depends upon its practical implementation by public authorities and the willingness of citizens to exercise their right to information.

This research paper undertakes an empirical study of Right to Information applications filed before various State and Central Public Authorities across different sectors, including education, banking, transport, health, local governance, law enforcement, and public administration. The study is based on information obtained through RTI applications and the responses furnished by public authorities during the period from November 2025 to June 2026. The research examines response patterns, delays in furnishing information, transfers of applications under Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, the effectiveness of appellate mechanisms, and the overall quality of information disclosed.

The study reveals that while the RTI Act has significantly enhanced transparency and public accountability, several challenges continue to impede its effective implementation. Delayed responses, frequent transfers of applications, incomplete disclosures, inadequate record management, and procedural barriers remain recurring concerns. At the same time, the research demonstrates that the RTI Act continues to be a powerful tool for citizens seeking information, monitoring public administration, and promoting good governance.

The paper concludes that strengthening institutional capacity, improving record management systems, ensuring timely responses, and enhancing awareness among both public officials and citizens are essential for realizing the full objectives of the RTI Act. The findings of this study contribute to the growing discourse on transparency laws and highlight the continuing relevance of the Right to Information in advancing accountability and democratic participation in India.

A distinctive feature of the present study is that it is based on actual RTI applications filed and pursued by the author before various State and Central Public Authorities. The study therefore provides first-hand empirical insights into the functioning of the RTI regime and the practical challenges encountered by information seekers in India.

Keywords: Right to Information Act, 2005; Transparency; Public Accountability; Good Governance; Access to Information; Public Authorities; Citizen Participation; Democratic Governance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI Act) is one of the most significant legislative measures enacted in independent India to promote transparency, accountability, and participatory governance¹. Recognizing that access to information is an essential component of democratic governance, the Act empowers citizens to obtain information from public authorities and thereby ensures greater openness in governmental functioning. The enactment of the RTI Act marked a transformative shift from a culture of secrecy towards a culture of transparency, enabling citizens to actively participate in the governance process and hold public authorities accountable for their actions.

¹ The Right to Information Act, 2005, No. 22 of 2005, India.

The foundation of the Right to Information is rooted in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India, which guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression². The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has consistently recognized that the right to know and access information held by public authorities forms an integral part of this constitutional guarantee³. Consequently, the RTI Act provides a statutory framework through which citizens can exercise this right and seek information concerning public affairs, governmental decisions, expenditure of public funds, and the functioning of public institutions.

Since its enactment, the RTI Act has emerged as a powerful instrument for promoting transparency in governance. Citizens, activists, researchers, journalists, and civil society organizations have extensively utilized the Act to uncover administrative irregularities, monitor public expenditure, expose corruption, and ensure accountability in public administration⁴. The legislation has significantly contributed to strengthening democratic institutions by enhancing the responsiveness of public authorities to the needs and concerns of citizens.

Despite its achievements, the implementation of the RTI Act continues to face several practical challenges. Delays in furnishing information, incomplete disclosures, frequent transfers of applications, inadequate record management systems, and procedural barriers often hinder the effective realization of the objectives of the Act. These challenges raise important questions regarding the efficiency of public authorities in complying with their statutory obligations and the overall effectiveness of the transparency framework established under the Act.

The present study adopts an empirical approach to examine the practical implementation of the RTI Act through the analysis of RTI applications filed before various State and Central Public Authorities. Unlike purely doctrinal studies that focus on statutory provisions and judicial decisions, this research evaluates the functioning of the Act in practice by examining actual RTI applications, responses, transfers, appeals, and disclosure patterns. The study covers multiple sectors, including education, banking, transport, health, law enforcement, local governance, and public administration.

² INDIA CONST. art. 19(1)(a).

³ State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain, (1975) 4 SCC 428.

⁴ People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India, (2004) 2 SCC 476.

The objective of this research is to assess the extent to which the RTI Act has succeeded in promoting transparency and public accountability, identify the challenges encountered by information seekers, and propose measures for strengthening the implementation of the Act. Through an examination of real-world experiences and responses obtained from public authorities, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on transparency, accountability, and democratic governance in India.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Right to Information Act, 2005 was enacted with the objective of promoting transparency and accountability in the functioning of public authorities. The present research seeks to evaluate the practical implementation of the Act through an empirical analysis of RTI applications filed before various State and Central Public Authorities. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the legal framework and objectives of the Right to Information Act, 2005.
2. To study the role of the Right to Information Act in promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance.
3. To analyze the responses furnished by State and Central Public Authorities to RTI applications.
4. To examine the effectiveness of the information disclosure mechanism established under the RTI Act.
5. To evaluate delays, transfers, rejections, and other procedural issues encountered during the processing of RTI applications.
6. To assess the implementation of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act relating to the transfer of applications between public authorities.
7. To examine the effectiveness of the appellate mechanisms available under the RTI Act.
8. To identify major challenges faced by citizens in obtaining information from public authorities.
9. To assess the contribution of the RTI Act towards strengthening public accountability and citizen participation in governance.
10. To suggest measures for improving the effective implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2005 and enhancing transparency in public administration.

The achievement of these objectives provides a comprehensive understanding of the practical functioning of the RTI regime in India and enables an assessment of its effectiveness as an instrument of transparency and democratic governance.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology constitutes the foundation of any academic research as it provides a systematic framework for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The present study adopts an empirical and analytical approach to examine the implementation and effectiveness of the Right to Information Act, 2005 in promoting transparency and public accountability.

3.1 Nature of the Study

The study is primarily empirical in nature and is based on actual Right to Information (RTI) applications filed before various State and Central Public Authorities. In addition to empirical analysis, the research also incorporates doctrinal elements through the examination of statutory provisions, judicial decisions, and scholarly literature relating to the Right to Information Act, 2005.

3.2 Sources of Data

The research is based on both primary and secondary sources of data.

A. Primary Sources

The primary source of data consists of RTI applications filed with various State and central public authorities, as well as the responses received from those authorities. First appeal orders, transfer orders under Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, and communications received from Public Information Officers have also been utilized for the purpose of analysis.

B. Secondary Sources

Secondary data has been collected from books, journals, research articles, government reports, official websites, statutory materials, and judicial decisions relating to the Right to Information Act, 2005.

3.3 Scope of the Study

The study covers RTI applications filed before various public authorities operating in sectors such as education, banking, transport, health, local governance, law enforcement, public administration, and regulatory bodies. The research includes both State and Central Public Authorities, thereby providing a broader understanding of the implementation of the RTI Act across different administrative levels.

3.4 Period of Study

The study is based on RTI applications filed and responses received during the period from November 2025 to June 2026. The selected period provides adequate data for examining response patterns, disclosure practices, delays, transfers, and appellate proceedings under the RTI Act.

3.5 Method of Analysis

The collected data has been analyzed using descriptive and analytical methods. The study evaluates the nature of information sought, response time taken by public authorities, transfers under Section 6(3), instances of incomplete disclosure, first appeals, and the overall effectiveness of the information delivery mechanism. Comparative observations have also been made wherever necessary to identify trends and recurring issues in the implementation of the Act.

3.6 Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to RTI applications filed during the selected period and therefore may not represent the entire spectrum of RTI implementation across India. Further, the findings are based on responses received from specific public authorities and may vary depending upon administrative practices followed by different departments. Nevertheless, the study provides valuable insights into the practical functioning of the RTI regime and the challenges faced by information seekers.

The methodology adopted in this research enables a systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the Right to Information Act, 2005 and facilitates an objective evaluation of its contribution towards transparency, accountability, and democratic governance.

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT.

The Right to Information Act, 2005 is a landmark legislation enacted to promote transparency and accountability in the functioning of public authorities. The Act seeks to empower citizens by providing them access to information held by government bodies and other authorities performing public functions. It represents a significant step towards strengthening democratic governance and ensuring greater participation of citizens in public affairs.

4.1 Historical Background

Prior to the enactment of the RTI Act, governmental functioning in India was largely governed by a culture of secrecy inherited from colonial administration. The enactment of the Official Secrets Act, 1923 further restricted public access to governmental information. Over time, demands for transparency and accountability gained momentum through civil society movements, journalists, and activists. The movement led by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) played a crucial role in advocating for citizens' right to access information. These efforts ultimately resulted in the enactment of the Right to Information Act, 2005, which came into force on 12 October 2005.

4.2 Constitutional Basis of the Right to Information

The Right to Information is derived from Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India, which guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has consistently held that the right to know and receive information is an essential component of the freedom of speech and expression. Access to information enables citizens to participate meaningfully in democratic processes and hold public authorities accountable for their actions.

4.3 Objectives of the RTI Act, 2005

The primary objectives of the Right to Information Act, 2005 are:

1. To promote transparency in the functioning of public authorities.
2. To strengthen accountability in public administration.
3. To empower citizens through access to information.
4. To reduce corruption and arbitrariness in governance.
5. To enhance public participation in democratic processes.
6. To establish a practical mechanism for securing access to information.

4.4 Public Authorities under the RTI Act

Section 2(h) of the RTI Act defines⁵ a "Public Authority" to include any authority, body, or institution of self-government established or constituted by or under the Constitution, by law made by Parliament or State Legislature, or by notification or order of the appropriate Government. It also includes bodies owned, controlled, or substantially financed by the Government.

4.5 Right to Seek Information

Under Section 3 of the RTI Act⁶, all citizens of India have the right to access information held by or under the control of public authorities. Section 6 provides the procedure for submitting an RTI application to the Public Information Officer (PIO) and seeking information on matters relating to public administration.

4.6 Duties of Public Authorities

Section 4 of the Act imposes an obligation on public authorities to maintain records properly and proactively disclose important information to the public⁷. Proactive disclosure reduces the need for individual RTI applications and promotes transparency in governance.

4.7 Transfer of Applications

Section 6(3) of the RTI Act ⁸provides that where the information sought is held by another public authority, the application shall be transferred to the concerned authority within five days. This provision ensures that applicants are not denied information merely because the application was initially addressed to the wrong authority.

⁵ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 2(h).

⁶ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 3.

⁷ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 4.

⁸ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 6(3).

4.8 Exemptions from Disclosure

The RTI Act recognizes certain exemptions from disclosure under Sections 8 and 9⁹. Information affecting national security, sovereignty and integrity of India, trade secrets, fiduciary relationships, personal privacy, and information expressly prohibited from disclosure by courts may be exempt from disclosure. These exemptions seek to balance transparency with legitimate public interests.

4.9 Appeals and Penalties

The Act provides a two-tier appellate mechanism. Under Section 19(1)¹⁰, an applicant may file a First Appeal before the designated First Appellate Authority if dissatisfied with the decision of the Public Information Officer. A Second Appeal may thereafter be filed before the Central Information Commission or State Information Commission under Section 19(3).

Section 20 empowers the Information Commission ¹¹to impose penalties upon Public Information Officers for unreasonable refusal of information, delay in furnishing information, or providing misleading information. This provision acts as a deterrent against non-compliance with the statutory obligations imposed by the Act.

The legal framework established by the Right to Information Act, 2005 provides citizens with an effective mechanism for obtaining information and promoting accountability in governance. Its successful implementation is essential for strengthening transparency, reducing corruption, and enhancing democratic participation in India.

5. JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION

The judiciary has played a crucial role in the evolution and development of the Right to Information in India. Even before the enactment of the Right to Information Act, 2005, the Supreme Court of India recognized the citizens' right to know as an essential component of the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. Through a series of landmark judgments, the judiciary laid the foundation for

⁹ The Right to Information Act, 2005, §§ 8–9.

¹⁰ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 19.

¹¹ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 20.

transparency and accountability in governance and significantly influenced the enactment and interpretation of the RTI Act.

5.1 State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain (1975)¹²

In this landmark case, the Supreme Court held that the people of India have a right to know every public act performed by public functionaries. The Court observed that in a democratic system, transparency is essential and citizens are entitled to know how the government functions. This decision is widely regarded as the constitutional foundation of the Right to Information in India.

5.2 S.P. Gupta v. Union of India (1981)¹³

Popularly known as the Judges' Transfer Case, this judgment further strengthened the concept of the right to know. The Supreme Court emphasized that openness in government is the hallmark of a democratic society and that disclosure of information should be the rule while secrecy should remain the exception. The Court recognized that access to information promotes accountability and enhances public confidence in governance.

5.3 People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India (2004)¹⁴

The Supreme Court reaffirmed that the right to information is an integral part of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. The Court observed that citizens cannot effectively exercise their democratic rights without access to relevant information concerning governmental activities and public affairs.

5.4 Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms (2002)¹⁵

In this significant case, the Supreme Court held that voters have a right to know the background, assets, liabilities, and criminal antecedents of electoral candidates. The Court recognized that access to such information is necessary for informed participation in the democratic process and forms part of the constitutional right to freedom of expression.

¹² State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain, (1975) 4 SCC 428.

¹³ S.P. Gupta v. Union of India, 1981 Supp SCC 87.

¹⁴ People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India, (2004) 2 SCC 476.

¹⁵ Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms, (2002) 5 SCC 294.

5.5 Central Board of Secondary Education v. Aditya Bandopadhyay (2011)¹⁶

The Supreme Court clarified the scope and objectives of the RTI Act, 2005. The Court held that answer scripts evaluated by examining bodies constitute information under the RTI Act and may be accessed by examinees. The judgment reinforced the principle that transparency should be promoted wherever disclosure does not harm protected interests.

5.6 Institute of Chartered Accountants of India v. Shaunak H. Satya (2011)¹⁷

The Court examined the balance between transparency and confidentiality under the RTI Act. While recognizing the importance of access to information, the Court also emphasized that statutory exemptions provided under the Act must be respected where disclosure may adversely affect protected interests.

5.7 Girish Ramchandra Deshpande v. Central Information Commission (2013)¹⁸

The Supreme Court considered the scope of personal information under Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act. The Court held that personal information relating to an individual may be exempt from disclosure unless a larger public interest justifies its release. The decision highlighted the need to balance transparency with the right to privacy.

5.8 Significance of Judicial Interpretation

The contribution of the judiciary to the development of the Right to Information cannot be overstated. Judicial decisions have consistently emphasized that transparency is fundamental to democratic governance and that access to information empowers citizens to participate effectively in public affairs. At the same time, the courts have recognized the necessity of protecting legitimate interests such as national security, confidentiality, and privacy.

The judicial interpretation of the Right to Information has transformed the concept from a constitutional principle into a practical tool for ensuring accountability in governance. These landmark decisions continue to guide the implementation and interpretation of the RTI Act,

¹⁶ Central Board of Secondary Education v. Aditya Bandopadhyay, (2011) 8 SCC 497.

¹⁷ Institute of Chartered Accountants of India v. Shaunak H. Satya, (2011) 8 SCC 781.

¹⁸ Girish Ramchandra Deshpande v. Central Information Commission, (2013) 1 SCC 212.

2005 and have significantly contributed to strengthening transparency and democratic participation in India.

6. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF RTI APPLICATIONS AND RESPONSES

The effectiveness of the Right to Information Act, 2005 can be properly assessed only through an examination of its practical implementation. While the statutory framework and judicial pronouncements establish the legal foundation of the right to information, the actual functioning of the Act depends upon the manner in which public authorities respond to requests for information. The present study adopts an empirical approach by analyzing RTI applications filed before various State and Central Public Authorities and the responses received from them.

The empirical data utilized in this study consists of RTI applications filed before public authorities operating in diverse sectors, including banking, education, transport, health, law enforcement, local governance, public administration, and regulatory bodies. The study covers both State and Central Public Authorities, thereby providing a broader understanding of transparency practices across different levels of governance.

6.1 Nature and Scope of RTI Applications

The RTI applications examined in this study sought information relating to a wide range of public matters, including administrative procedures, grievance redressal mechanisms, public expenditure, staffing patterns, regulatory compliance, citizen services, educational administration, transport management, health services, and law enforcement activities. The diversity of subjects demonstrates the broad scope of the Right to Information Act and its utility as a tool for obtaining information concerning public administration¹⁹.

The information sought through the RTI applications was intended not only to obtain specific records but also to evaluate the responsiveness of public authorities and their compliance with the obligations imposed under the RTI Act. The applications further served as a means of assessing transparency levels within various governmental institutions.

¹⁹ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 3.

Bar Chart – Department-wise RTI Applications

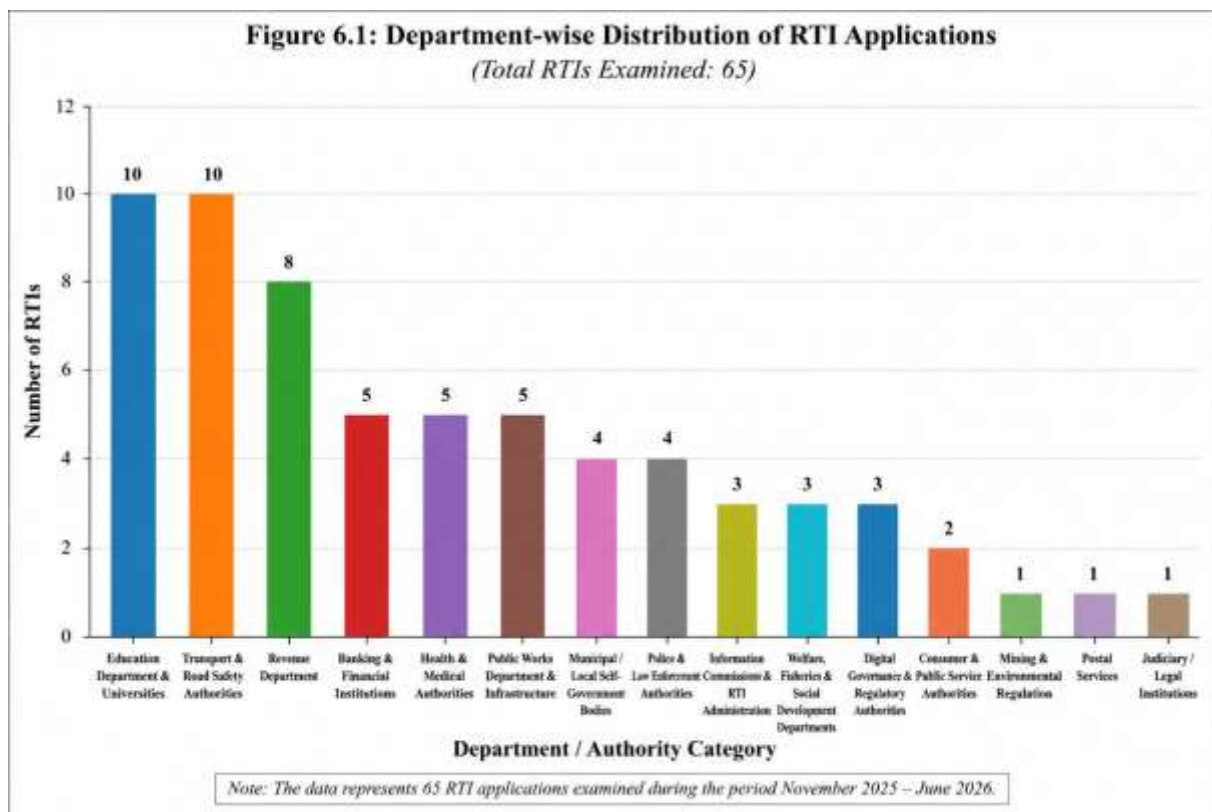


Figure 6.1: Department-wise

Figure 6.1 illustrates the distribution of RTI applications across various public authorities. The highest number of RTI applications were filed before Education Departments and Transport Authorities, accounting for ten applications each. Revenue Authorities constituted the third largest category with eight applications. The data demonstrates that the RTI Act is extensively utilized across diverse sectors of governance, indicating the growing role of citizens in seeking transparency and accountability within public administration.

6.2 Categories of Public Authorities Covered

The study includes RTI applications filed before both State and Central Public Authorities. The authorities examined belong to multiple sectors, including:

- Banking and Financial Institutions
- Educational Institutions and Regulatory Bodies
- Transport and Road Safety Authorities
- Health and Medical Departments
- Police and Law Enforcement Agencies

- f) Local Self-Government Institutions
- g) Public Works and Infrastructure Departments
- h) Regulatory and Administrative Authorities

The inclusion of diverse public authorities enables a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the RTI Act across different administrative sectors.

6.3 Response Patterns Observed

An examination of the responses received from public authorities indicates varying levels of compliance with the provisions of the RTI Act. While several authorities furnished the requested information within the prescribed time limits, others exhibited delays, incomplete disclosures, or procedural deficiencies.

In many instances, public authorities provided relevant information in a satisfactory manner, demonstrating adherence to the principles of transparency and accountability. However, certain responses revealed deficiencies in record maintenance, information management, and administrative coordination, resulting in delays and incomplete disclosures.

The analysis also indicates that the quality of responses varied considerably among different departments. Authorities maintaining organized records and established RTI mechanisms generally demonstrated higher levels of compliance than those lacking efficient record management systems.

The findings of the empirical study highlight both the achievements and challenges associated with the implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2005. While the legislation has undoubtedly strengthened transparency and citizen participation, the practical experiences of applicants reveal the continuing need for administrative reforms aimed at ensuring timely and effective disclosure of information.

6.4 Department-wise Analysis of RTI Applications and Responses

The empirical study covers RTI applications filed before a diverse range of State and Central Public Authorities. The responses received from these authorities provide valuable insights into the practical implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2005 and the extent of transparency maintained within public administration. The department-wise analysis reveals significant variations in response time, quality of disclosure, administrative efficiency, and compliance with statutory obligations.

A substantial number of RTI applications were filed before banking and financial institutions, including Karnataka Grameena Bank, the Reserve Bank of India²⁰, and other financial regulatory authorities. The responses received from these institutions generally demonstrated adherence to procedural requirements under the RTI Act. However, certain applications were transferred to other authorities under Section 6(3) of the Act, indicating jurisdictional limitations and the need for improved coordination among public authorities.

Applications submitted to educational institutions and regulatory bodies²¹ sought information relating to academic administration, regulations, fee structures, and institutional governance. The responses received from educational authorities highlighted varying levels of transparency and responsiveness. While some authorities furnished the requested information promptly, others relied upon transfers, clarifications, or procedural requirements before providing substantive responses.

²⁰ RTI Applications filed before Karnataka Grameena Bank and Reserve Bank of India (on file with the author).

²¹ RTI Applications submitted to Karnataka State Law University and School Education Authorities (on file with the author).

The study also examined RTI applications filed before transport authorities and law enforcement agencies. These applications sought information regarding traffic regulation, enforcement activities, public complaints, and administrative procedures. The responses revealed both effective disclosure practices and instances where applicants were required to pursue appellate remedies to obtain complete information.

Significant observations emerged from RTI applications filed before health departments, hospitals, and public welfare authorities. Information relating to grievance redressal mechanisms, service delivery, administrative functioning, and public welfare schemes was sought through these applications. The responses indicated the growing importance of transparency in sectors directly affecting public welfare and citizen services.

Applications submitted to local self-government institutions, public works departments, and administrative authorities provided useful insights into governance practices at the grassroots level. These applications sought information relating to public infrastructure, expenditure, staffing, developmental activities, and administrative decision-making. The responses demonstrated the potential of the RTI Act as a mechanism for enhancing accountability in local governance.

A noteworthy feature of the study was the filing of RTI applications before several Central Public Authorities. These applications enabled an assessment of transparency practices at the national level and provided an opportunity to compare administrative responses across different governmental structures. The findings suggest that while Central Public Authorities generally maintain structured RTI mechanisms, procedural delays and transfers continue to be observed in certain cases.

Overall, the department-wise analysis demonstrates that the RTI Act has significantly improved access to information across a broad spectrum of public authorities. At the same time, the variations observed in response quality, timeliness, and disclosure practices indicate the continuing need for capacity building, better record management, and stronger institutional commitment towards transparency and accountability.

6.5 Analysis of Transfers under Section 6(3) of the RTI Act

One of the important aspects examined during the study was the transfer of RTI applications under Section 6(3) of the Right to Information Act, 2005. This provision requires a public authority to transfer an application to the appropriate authority where the requested information is held by another public authority²². The objective of the provision is to facilitate access to information and prevent rejection of applications merely on technical grounds.

The empirical analysis revealed that a number of RTI applications were transferred between authorities due to jurisdictional considerations. While such transfers are legally permissible and often necessary, excessive dependence upon transfers may result in delays and inconvenience to applicants. In certain instances, applications were transferred multiple times before reaching the authority actually possessing the requested information²³.

The study indicates that effective implementation of Section 6(3) requires greater administrative coordination and clearer identification of information-holding authorities. Timely transfers and proper communication with applicants are essential for ensuring that the objectives of the RTI Act are achieved without unnecessary procedural obstacles.

6.6 Analysis of Delays, Appeals, and Quality of Information Disclosed

The Right to Information Act, 2005 mandates that information sought by an applicant shall ordinarily be furnished within thirty days from the date of receipt of the application²⁴. Timely disclosure of information is essential for ensuring the effectiveness of the Act and achieving its objectives of transparency and accountability. The empirical study, however, revealed varying levels of compliance with the statutory timelines prescribed under the Act.

A significant number of public authorities responded within the prescribed period and furnished the requested information in a satisfactory manner. Such responses reflected a positive commitment towards transparency and demonstrated effective implementation of the RTI framework. In these cases, applicants were able to obtain relevant information without resorting to appellate remedies.

²² The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 6(3).

²³ Transfer communications received from various State and Central Public Authorities during the study period (on file with the author).

²⁴ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 7(1).

At the same time, the study identified instances of delayed responses, incomplete disclosures, and procedural deficiencies. Delays were observed due to factors such as administrative inefficiency, poor record management practices, transfers between authorities, and inadequate coordination among departments. In certain cases, applicants were required to submit reminders or pursue appellate proceedings before receiving the requested information.

The quality of information disclosed also varied significantly among different public authorities. Some authorities furnished comprehensive and well-documented responses accompanied by supporting records and relevant documents. Such disclosures promoted transparency and enabled applicants to effectively understand the functioning of public institutions.

Conversely, certain responses were incomplete, vague, or limited in scope. In some instances, public authorities provided partial information without adequate justification or failed to address all the queries raised in the application. Such practices undermine the objectives of the RTI Act and may discourage citizens from exercising their statutory right to information.

The study further examined the utilization of the appellate mechanism available under the RTI Act. The right to appeal serves as an important safeguard against denial of information and enables applicants to challenge unsatisfactory decisions of Public Information Officers²⁵. First Appeals were filed in cases involving delayed responses, incomplete disclosures, transfers, or failure to furnish information within the prescribed period.

The analysis indicates that the appellate mechanism plays a crucial role in ensuring accountability and encouraging compliance with the provisions of the Act. However, the necessity of pursuing appeals in routine matters also highlights deficiencies in the initial response process and the need for improved administrative practices.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the Right to Information Act has substantially enhanced transparency within public administration, challenges relating to delays, incomplete disclosures, and procedural inefficiencies continue to affect its effective implementation. Strengthening record management systems, improving institutional capacity, and ensuring

²⁵ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 19.

strict compliance with statutory timelines would significantly enhance the quality and effectiveness of information

disclosure under the Act.

The empirical evidence gathered during the study demonstrates that the RTI Act remains one of the most effective instruments available to citizens for securing access to information and promoting public accountability. Nevertheless, continuous efforts are required to address operational challenges and ensure that the objectives of the legislation are fully realized in practice.

6.7 Statistical Overview of the Study

The present empirical study is based on the analysis of sixty-five (65) RTI applications filed before various State and Central Public Authorities during the period from November 2025 to June 2026. The applications covered a wide range of governmental sectors, including education, transport, revenue administration, banking, health services, public works, local governance, law enforcement, welfare administration, and regulatory authorities.

The purpose of examining RTI applications across multiple sectors was to assess the practical implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2005 and evaluate the extent to which public authorities comply with their statutory obligations relating to information disclosure.

Table 6.A: Statistical Overview of the Study

Particulars	Number
Total RTI Applications Examined	65
Study Period	November 2025 – June 2026
State and Central Public Authorities Covered	Multiple Authorities
Sectors Covered	Education, Banking, Health, Transport, Police, Revenue, Local Governance, Infrastructure and Others
First Appeals Filed	Various Cases
Second Appeals Filed	Limited Cases
Transfers under Section 6(3)	Frequently Observed
Delayed Replies	Frequently Observed
Partial Information Cases	Several Cases
Complete Information Cases	Numerous Cases

The analysis of these applications provides valuable empirical evidence regarding transparency practices, administrative responsiveness, information disclosure patterns, appellate remedies, and procedural challenges encountered by citizens while exercising their right to information. The diversity of authorities covered in the study strengthens the reliability of the findings and enables a comparative assessment of transparency and accountability across different sectors of public administration²⁶.

²⁶ Empirical dataset compiled from sixty-five RTI applications, replies, appeal orders, and transfer communications collected by the author between November 2025 and June 2026.

Table 6.B – Department-wise Classification of RTIs

Department / Authority Category	Number of RTIs
Education Department & Universities	10
Transport & Road Safety Authorities	10
Revenue Department	8
Banking & Financial Institutions	5
Health & Medical Authorities	5
Public Works Department & Infrastructure	5
Municipal / Local Self-Government Bodies	4
Police & Law Enforcement Authorities	4
Information Commissions & RTI Administration	3
Welfare, Fisheries & Social Development Departments	3
Digital Governance & Regulatory Authorities	3
Consumer & Public Service Authorities	2
Mining & Environmental Regulation	1
Postal Services	1
Judiciary / Legal Institutions	1
Total	65

6.8 Response Time Analysis

The Right to Information Act, 2005 requires Public Information Officers to furnish information within thirty days from the date of receipt of an RTI application²⁷. Timely disclosure of information is essential for ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective realization of the right to information.

The empirical study revealed considerable variations in response times among different public authorities. While several authorities furnished information within the statutory period, others

²⁷ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 7(1).

exhibited delays attributable to administrative inefficiencies, transfer of applications, procedural objections, and record management issues.

Certain public authorities demonstrated commendable compliance with statutory timelines and furnished information promptly. Authorities such as UIDAI, the Department of Mines and Geology, Consumer Commission, Karnataka State Law University, and Transport Authorities generally responded within the prescribed period. Conversely, certain authorities furnished delayed replies or required applicants to pursue appellate remedies for obtaining information.

Table 6.C: Response Time Analysis

Response Category	Observation
Replies within Statutory Period	Frequently Observed
Delayed Replies	Observed in Several Cases
Applications Requiring First Appeal	Significant
Transfers under Section 6(3) Affecting Response Time	Frequently Observed
Partial Replies Furnished	Observed
Deemed Refusals / Non-Responses	Observed in Certain Cases

The study further indicates that delays were often associated with inter-departmental transfers, lack of coordination among authorities, inadequate record maintenance systems, and procedural deficiencies. In several instances, applicants were required to file First Appeals due to non-receipt of information within the prescribed period.

A notable example of delayed response was observed in matters involving authorities where information was either transferred multiple times or where appellate intervention became necessary. Such delays diminish the effectiveness of the RTI framework and may discourage citizens from exercising their statutory rights.

At the same time, several authorities furnished information within the statutory period and demonstrated a positive commitment towards transparency. These responses indicate that efficient record management systems and dedicated RTI mechanisms contribute significantly towards effective implementation of the Act.

The analysis therefore suggests that while compliance with statutory timelines has improved considerably since the enactment of the RTI Act, delays in information disclosure continue to remain one of the major practical challenges affecting the effectiveness of the transparency regime in India.

7. KEY FINDINGS

The empirical analysis of RTI applications and responses received from various State and Central Public Authorities reveals several important findings regarding the practical implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2005. These findings provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Act in promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance.

1. The Right to Information Act continues to serve as an effective mechanism for obtaining information from public authorities and promoting transparency in public administration.
2. Public authorities generally acknowledge RTI applications and process requests in accordance with the statutory framework established under the Act.
3. Significant variations exist in the quality, completeness, and timeliness of responses furnished by different public authorities.
4. Several public authorities demonstrated a commendable level of transparency by providing detailed and relevant information within the prescribed statutory period.
5. Delays in furnishing information remain one of the most common challenges encountered during the implementation of the Act.
6. Administrative inefficiencies, inadequate record management systems, and inter-departmental coordination issues were identified as major causes of delayed responses.

7. The transfer of applications under Section 6(3) of the RTI Act is frequently utilized where information is held by another public authority. While legally justified, repeated transfers often result in procedural delays and inconvenience to applicants.
8. The study reveals that applicants occasionally face difficulties in identifying the appropriate public authority responsible for maintaining the requested information.
9. Variations were observed between different departments regarding compliance with RTI obligations, indicating the absence of uniform administrative practices.
10. Authorities maintaining organized records and dedicated RTI mechanisms generally demonstrated higher levels of compliance and responsiveness.
11. Certain responses provided only partial information or failed to address all queries raised in the RTI applications, thereby affecting the effectiveness of information disclosure.
12. The appellate mechanism under the RTI Act plays a crucial role in safeguarding the rights of applicants and ensuring accountability of Public Information Officers.
13. First Appeals proved to be an effective remedy in cases involving delayed responses, incomplete disclosures, or procedural deficiencies.
14. The study confirms that the RTI Act has enhanced citizen participation by enabling individuals to seek information regarding governmental activities, public expenditure, administrative procedures, and service delivery mechanisms.
15. Public authorities are increasingly aware of their obligations under the RTI Act; however, the level of compliance varies considerably across departments and institutions.
16. The empirical evidence demonstrates that transparency and accountability improve when public authorities proactively disclose information and maintain accessible records.
17. The study highlights the continuing relevance of the RTI Act as an instrument for strengthening democratic governance, reducing administrative opacity, and promoting informed citizen participation.
18. Despite operational challenges, the RTI Act remains one of the most effective legal tools available to citizens for ensuring transparency and accountability in public administration.

The findings of this study indicate that while considerable progress has been achieved in the implementation of the Right to Information Act, further reforms are necessary to improve administrative efficiency, strengthen record management systems, ensure timely disclosure of information, and enhance public awareness regarding the effective utilization of the Act²⁸.

²⁸ Findings derived from analysis of RTI applications, replies, appellate proceedings, and official records examined during the study.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the present study, several measures may be adopted to strengthen the implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2005 and enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency within public administration. The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthening Record Management Systems

Public authorities should establish efficient record management systems to ensure proper maintenance, retrieval, and preservation of information. Digitization of records would significantly reduce delays and improve the quality of responses furnished under the RTI Act.

2. Timely Disposal of RTI Applications

Strict compliance with the statutory timelines prescribed under the RTI Act should be ensured. Public Information Officers must be provided with adequate resources and administrative support to facilitate timely disclosure of

information.

3. Capacity Building and Training

Regular training programmes should be conducted for Public Information Officers and other government officials regarding the provisions, objectives, and implementation requirements of the RTI Act. Such training would enhance institutional capacity and improve compliance.

4. Reduction of Unnecessary Transfers

Public authorities should develop clear mechanisms for identifying information-holding departments so as to minimize unnecessary transfers under Section 6(3) of the Act. Improved coordination among departments would reduce delays and inconvenience to applicants.

5. Promotion of Proactive Disclosure

Public authorities should fully comply with the obligations contained in Section 4 of the RTI Act by proactively publishing important information on official websites and public platforms.

Effective proactive disclosure would reduce the need for individual RTI applications and enhance transparency²⁹.

6. Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms

Appropriate action should be taken in cases involving unreasonable delays, incomplete disclosures, or non-compliance with the provisions of the Act. Effective enforcement of statutory obligations would improve the quality of information delivery.

7. Public Awareness and Legal Literacy

Awareness programmes should be organized to educate citizens regarding their rights under the RTI Act and the procedures for seeking information. Greater public awareness would encourage wider utilization of the Act and strengthen participatory governance.

8. Simplification of RTI Procedures

Efforts should be made to simplify procedural requirements associated with filing RTI applications and appeals. User-friendly online systems and standardized procedures would facilitate easier access to information.

9. Strengthening Appellate Mechanisms

The appellate process should be made more efficient and accessible. Timely disposal of appeals by Appellate Authorities and Information Commissions would enhance confidence in the effectiveness of the RTI framework³⁰.

10. Encouraging Transparency-Oriented Governance

Government departments should adopt transparency as an administrative principle rather than merely a statutory obligation. A culture of openness and accountability would strengthen public trust in governance and reduce the need for repeated information requests.

11. Greater Use of Technology

²⁹ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 4.

³⁰ The Right to Information Act, 2005, § 19.

Modern technological tools should be utilized for managing RTI applications, tracking responses, maintaining records, and facilitating online disclosure of information. Technology-driven governance can significantly improve transparency and administrative efficiency.

12. Periodic Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular monitoring of RTI implementation should be undertaken at both State and Central levels. Periodic evaluation would help identify shortcomings, assess compliance levels, and formulate appropriate corrective measures.

The implementation of these recommendations would contribute significantly towards achieving the objectives of the Right to Information Act, 2005. Strengthening transparency mechanisms, improving administrative efficiency, and enhancing citizen participation would further promote accountable and democratic governance in India.

9. CONCLUSION

The Right to Information Act, 2005 represents one of the most significant democratic reforms in contemporary India. By recognizing the citizen's right to access information held by public authorities, the Act has strengthened transparency, accountability, and participatory governance. It has transformed the relationship between citizens and the State by enabling individuals to scrutinize governmental actions, monitor public expenditure, and seek explanations for administrative decisions affecting public interest.

The present study examined the practical implementation of the RTI Act through an empirical analysis of RTI applications filed before various State and Central Public Authorities. Unlike purely theoretical studies, this research focused on actual experiences relating to information requests, responses, transfers, delays, appeals, and disclosure practices. The analysis demonstrates that the RTI Act continues to serve as a powerful instrument for ensuring openness in governance and facilitating citizen participation in public affairs.

The findings reveal that while many public authorities have shown a positive commitment towards transparency and compliance with statutory obligations, several operational challenges continue to affect the effective implementation of the Act. Delays in furnishing information, incomplete disclosures, procedural complexities, inadequate record management systems, and repeated transfers of applications remain recurring concerns. These issues highlight the need for continuous administrative reforms and institutional strengthening.

The study further establishes that the effectiveness of the RTI Act depends not only upon the existence of legal provisions but also upon the willingness of public authorities to embrace transparency as a fundamental principle of governance. Proactive disclosure of information, efficient record maintenance, trained Public Information Officers, and effective appellate mechanisms are essential for ensuring meaningful access to information.

At the same time, the research confirms that citizens are increasingly utilizing the RTI Act as a tool for promoting accountability and monitoring governmental functioning. The growing use of the Act across sectors such as education, banking, health, transport, law enforcement, and local governance demonstrates its continuing relevance in a democratic society.

In conclusion, the Right to Information Act, 2005 has made a substantial contribution towards strengthening

transparency and public accountability in India. Although challenges remain, the Act continues to empower citizens and enhance democratic governance. The successful realization of its objectives requires sustained efforts from public authorities, policymakers, civil society organizations, and citizens alike. By fostering a culture of openness and accountability, the RTI Act can continue to serve as a cornerstone of good governance and democratic participation in India.

The study concludes that transparency is not merely an administrative requirement but a democratic necessity. The continued effective implementation of the Right to Information Act is therefore essential for ensuring accountable governance, protecting citizens' rights, and strengthening the foundations of Indian democracy³¹.

³¹ Based on empirical analysis conducted by the author through RTI applications filed before State and Central Public Authorities during November 2025–June 2026.

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Any errors or omissions that remain are solely the responsibility of the author.

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Abhishek K. Badiger is pursuing the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) degree at BLDE (Deemed to be University), School of Law, Vijayapura, Karnataka. He is an emerging legal researcher with a keen interest in transparency laws, public accountability, constitutional governance, and access to justice.

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The author has undertaken extensive empirical research under the Right to Information Act, 2005 and has filed numerous RTI applications before various State and Central Public Authorities covering sectors such as banking, education, health, transport, public administration, local governance, and law enforcement. His research primarily focuses on evaluating transparency mechanisms, access to information, and the role of RTI in strengthening democratic governance and public accountability.

In addition to academic research, he has gained practical exposure through internships and legal aid activities with various institutions, including Legal Services Authorities and public bodies. These experiences have enhanced his understanding of governance, dispute resolution, legal aid, and citizens' rights.

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The present research paper reflects the author's commitment to promoting transparency, democratic participation, and good governance through the effective utilization of the Right to Information Act, 2005.