

A Noble Step Towards Right Direction

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India, the world's largest democracy, which is approaching towards its 59th grand anniversary of freedom, is firmly established on the concept of, "the people, by the people and for the people" of this vast country. Constitution of this subcontinent has stood up on the strong pillar of transparency and accountability towards its citizens. But, how far the country and its constitution are able to achieve its vision and objectives is certainly debatable. Acts and amendments are always meant to cater the need of the common people and to nullify the degree of adulteration from the society. It may be a serious crime or a piece of information; they have to be disseminated to the general public and discussed widely to keep the procedure of any development, pure. But, the bureaucrats and the administrators of our country are strongly accosted with the culture of maintaining secrecy since the British ruler. The British rulers had initiated the process of confiding information due to their prejudiced mindset towards the Indians. And this process is prevailing even after independence and increasing the trend of cynicism among the officers. The aware and educated are getting benefit by tricking the poor and illiterate people in the country.

Though, India is a developing country but majority of its citizens are affiliated to ignorance and grinding poverty, since a long. They are easily

duped by others for their simplicity and illiteracy. They don't know where goes their energy and money after paying for revenues and taxes used for the common purposes. They are only limited to hand to mouth and deceived by corruption and immoral act done by some fistful unsocial elements. Thus, in order to put a stop in disparity and to fight for the greater interest, some philanthropists guide the whole nation to make the government answerable towards the utilization of the huge resources and money generated out of their flesh and blood. And the country at large arouses to claim their right to access the developmental processes in order to liberate the drowning consumerism from the influence of conspiracy and fraud. Ultimately, gathering momentum and increased pressure by people compel the central government for setting out the practical regime of Right to Information for citizens to secure access the information under public authority.

Therefore, for furnishing certain information to the general citizenry to promote optimum use of limited fiscal resources the Indian government promulgated the Right To Information Act, 2005, in 56th year of Republic day. The Orissa government enacts this unique tool of communication as the Right To Information Rule, 2005 and Special cells are being designed to disperse the desirable information within a limited

time to every citizen applied for it after payment of required fees. This fee is waived for the citizens who are below poverty line (BPL).

Undoubtedly, this phenomenon sounds preserving the real democracy at the paramount and involving every citizen of the nation in all implementing process. But, is this pragmatic and will succeed to attain its objectives in reality? Seventy percent Indian citizens are residing in villages as well as tribal areas. Most of them are not exposed to proper education, awareness and modernity. Especially, Orissa being a poor state and a sizable portion of its population are tribal and underdeveloped, they are prone to remain unaware about the govt. policies, formulated for their well-being in far away cities. Poor and below marginal people here are not aware about what BPL is and need not to discuss their knowledge level about the programme especially meant for them. Under such circumstances will the implementation of the Orissa Right To Information Rules, 2005 be effective to groom the common people to be more assertive towards their rights?

First and foremostly, it raises the question of awareness level among the people staying in extremely rural and remote areas. Even if they will be informed by any means, then how far it is feasible for an uneducated person to go through the rules and regulation, filling the application form and depositing the required amount of money for the information. How the persons with disabilities will be able to move for these purposes? If even they get the help of anyone then who will ensure that their work be done in time and with a single approach! Chances are high that in order to get a piece of information they may pay the double or even more than that of the actual expense, in form of travel, pursuance and other miscellaneous. Level of manipulation and delaying will be high as these people may not

be able to follow the real procedures and easily influenced by the authorities in charge. Then again there will prevail the same darkness of corruption as before. In spite of all these constraints if they succeed to get information and find out any mismatch or cheat in the process, then who will guarantee their right further and punish the mischievous officers for the cause! Who will again raise voice against it? When an educated and well aware person keeps silence even eye-witnessing a inhumane or heinous act out of fear of not making annoyed the corrupt officers, then how far it is tangible for the poor rural citizens to fight against any duplicity, done by the government authorities. Rather, it will wind the activities of some politically influenced leaders and volunteers to start advocating, initiating rallies and shedding tears against corruption but for their self interest! If this will be the result then what is the need of such an innovative step, which will again overburden some of the punctual officers, those sincere at work!

Yes, the purpose can be fulfilled for those who have courage to raise voice and understand the programme properly. They may get benefitted in some ways. But, again for a larger portion of people information will remain unaccessed. Educated middle class and high elite groups are always responsible towards their well-being. They can fight for their rights and make the things done at their own level. So perhaps they even do not require this system of acquiring adequate information because they know how to get their work done. The authority usually donot cheat a knowledgeable person due to the fear of being caught red handed. But, what about the actual sufferers! They will be kept aside and used as puppets in this rule. Counts of success will be numbered through this rule as of large number, but only in records and documents. Actual result will be sceptical.

In another way even if they execute the whole process with clarity and cleanliness, then how far it is possible for them to consider all the applications deposited by crores of people in Orissa ! The possibility of misutilization and intrincating the official information by some shrewd people to misguide the common people will be high. Leakage of restricted official data may be highly entertained. Misinterpretation of proper information may affect the information providing officers by the agitated ignorant people around us. Thus, both the pros and cons of the rule are needed to look into and lacunas should be found out early. Because already the Indian citizens are headed with heavy weight Acts such as Acts against women emancipation, domestic violence, crimes, discrimination of minorities, disabled SCs, STs and so on. But how much we have achieved the status of an anti-corruption system in our nation ! Rather growing issues supporting the crimes have made the common people apprehensive about the honesty and credibility of each employee as well as the employer and the government.

But, this Act can be a genuine and praiseworthy one, if promulgated in right way. People can enjoy the accountability and transparency of the government and be conscious about each paise of their money spent and energy utilized. It can reduce the stake of bureaucrats and dictatorship upon certain projects / programmes and activities of the government. Interference of general public can accelerate the process of decision making, to be taken within specific time frame and administrative officers will have fear for misutilization of power. Even if there will be, then the strength of a conscious mass can compel the government for punishing those

obstacles in the process. Simultaneously, glares of this simmering success can make the people concern towards their other fundamental rights and responsibilities.

Advantages and constraints are at the either side of this wonderful tool of the Right to Information Rule, 2005 for empowerment of the individual and the community. But it needs to be educated, aware and advocated properly at all level so that every person will acquire intensive knowledge about the Rule and how to walk smoothly in the process. The pros and cons should be discussed among different groups. And the government as well as the general public should be open to accept the probable changes in the process for a greater interest. People must be empowered not only for their rights and demands but also responsible to be involved actively in the process towards the attainment of their desired result. The habit of dependency upon the government for each and every action should be discouraged and people should initiate the process of looking into those matters, which can be solved at their end. Finally as the government has already vowed transparency about their activities, then people also be clear enough to trace out their best form out of this new innovation but with honesty. This way the whole mass of a sub-continent can be communicable to its government directly, by keeping the concept of democracy, intact.

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