

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: **IJAR-59580**

Title: Right to Information and Democratic Governance in India: A Critical Analysis of Transparency, Accountability, Citizen Participation and Contemporary Challenges

Recommendation:

✓ Accept as it is **YES**.....
 Accept after minor revision.....
 Accept after major revision
 Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality	✓			
Clarity		✓		
Significance	✓			

Reviewer's ID: JPR- 159

Reviewer's Comment for Publication.

The document 'Right to Information and Democratic Governance in India: A Critical Analysis of Transparency, Accountability, Citizen Participation and Contemporary Challenges' is unique topic.

Recommendation : Accept as it is.

Detailed Reviewer's Report

- Originality** – This research paper, titled "Right to Information and Democratic Governance in India: A Critical Analysis of Transparency, Accountability, Citizen Participation and Contemporary Challenges," provides a qualitative and descriptive analysis of how the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 impacts Indian democracy.
- Structure and Clarity** – The manuscript is generally well-structured with sections such as Introduction, Results, and Conclusion. However, transitions between sections can be improved, and paragraph alignment should be checked for consistency.
- Strengths** –
 - Grassroots & Historical Roots:** The RTI movement emerged from persistent public demand against administrative secrecy (e.g., under the Official Secrets Act, 1923). Key grassroots efforts included the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan—which used public hearings (*jan sunwais*) and social audits—and the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI).

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- **Constitutional Basis:** The Supreme Court of India interpreted the right to know as an integral part of the freedom of speech and expression under **Article 19(1)(a)** of the Constitution.
- **Statutory Evolution:** The Freedom of Information Act, 2002 preceded the RTI Act, but was ineffective. The RTI Act, 2005 took effect on October 12, 2005.

2. Statutory Framework & Core Provisions

- **Definition & Access (Sections 2 & 3):** Grants citizens the right to inspect public works, request certified documents, and extract electronic data.
- **Proactive Disclosure (Section 4):** Mandates public authorities to routinely publish key administrative and spending information to minimize the need for individual applications.
- **Implementation & Appeals (Sections 6, 7, 19, 20):** Establishes Public Information Officers (PIOs), defines time-bound request procedures, creates Central and State Information Commissions for appeals, and provides for penalties on non-compliant PIOs.
- **Exemptions (Sections 8 & 9):** Protects information related to national security, strategic interests, commercial confidence, fiduciary relationships, and personal privacy.

3. Key Findings & Democratic Significance

- **Transformative Impact:** RTI shifts access to government records from a discretionary administrative favor to a legally enforceable citizen entitlement, deepening accountability, transparency, and social audits.
- **"Seed Right":** Acts as an enabling mechanism that allows citizens to pursue wider democratic goals and hold governing bodies accountable.
- **Limits on Anti-Corruption:** While RTI exposes maladministration and corruption, it cannot eliminate corruption on its own without strong institutional enforcement mechanisms.

4. Contemporary Challenges

The paper highlights a significant gap between the law on paper and its practical implementation:

- **Administrative Bottlenecks:** Delays in processing, massive backlogs of pending appeals at Information Commissions, poor record management, and uneven compliance with Section 4 proactive disclosures.
- **Bureaucratic Resistance:** Entrenched habits of official secrecy persist despite statutory changes.
- **Digital Divide & Privacy:** While online RTI portals increase accessibility, they risk excluding citizens without digital literacy; additionally, balancing transparency against personal privacy remains complex.
- **Safety Concerns:** Lack of adequate protection for information seekers and whistleblowers exposing wrongdoing.

4. Significance –

- Enforce robust, monitored Section 4 proactive disclosures and digitize public records.
- Adequately resource and staff Information Commissions to eliminate backlogs.
- Conduct ongoing training for PIOs and expand legal literacy campaigns for the public.
- Maintain accessible offline options alongside digital RTI portals.
- Establish clear legal guidelines balancing public transparency with individual privacy rights.