

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 after minor revision

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

Reviewer Name: Dr. Abdul Haseeb Mir

Detailed Reviewer's Report

This manuscript offers a qualitative, descriptive, and critical evaluation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 in India, examining its role in fostering democratic governance, administrative accountability, transparency, and public participation. The study traces the historical and constitutional evolution of the right—from colonial secrecy frameworks such as the Official Secrets Act, 1923, through grassroots movements like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan and the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI), to landmark Supreme Court interpretations under Article 19(1)(a).

The manuscript evaluates both the statutory architecture of the Act (Sections 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 19, and 20) and the practical realities of implementation. The theoretical framing links RTI to good governance principles and analyzes the widening gap between the law on paper and the law in practice.

The paper identifies several core empirical and operational findings:

- **Democratic & Administrative Transformation:** The RTI Act has successfully shifted access to official records from a discretionary favor of the administration to an enforceable legal entitlement.
- **Grassroots & Participatory Origins:** Demonstrates how public hearings (*jan sunwais*) and social audits transformed information from abstract data into a practical tool for collective democratic action regarding development funds and public wages.

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- **Systemic Implementation Barriers:** Highlights significant operational hurdles, including immense appeal backlogs before Central and State Information Commissions, bureaucratic resistance, low public awareness in rural sectors, poor record management, and weak compliance with Section 4 proactive disclosure mandates.
- **Digitalization & Privacy Dynamics:** Analyzes how digital RTI portals enhance accessibility while threatening to deepen the digital divide, alongside the growing legal friction between public transparency and personal data privacy.

The manuscript presents a balanced, comprehensive synthesis of public administration, constitutional law, and socio-political dynamics in India.

Key Strengths

1. **Comprehensive Historical and Constitutional Grounding:** The author effectively connects early judicial interpretations of Article 19(1)(a) with grassroots struggles (MKSS) and statutory legislative drafting, giving the reader a complete understanding of the law's origins.
2. **Nuanced Literature Integration:** The manuscript synthesizes key scholarship (e.g., Relly et al., Ghuman & Sohail, Sharma, Mandowara & Thomas) to contextualize the persistent gap between legal ideals and administrative execution.
3. **Actionable Policy Roadmap:** Section 9 ("Way Forward") lays out pragmatic recommendations covering proactive disclosure audits, record digitization, staff capacity building for Information Commissions, and legal literacy programs.

Recommendations for Improvement

While the manuscript is conceptually solid and well-written, the author should address the following minor points prior to final publication:

1. **Incorporate Recent Statutory Amendments and Key Precedents:**
 - In Section 3 and Section 8, the author should explicitly discuss the structural impact of the *Right to Information (Amendment) Act, 2019*, specifically regarding the altered autonomy, terms of office, and tenure conditions of Information Commissioners.
 - Briefly incorporate key Supreme Court jurisprudence, such as *Central Public Information Officer, Supreme Court of India v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal (2020)*, to enrich the discussion in Section 8.8 regarding the judicial balance between public interest transparency and Section 8(1)(j) personal privacy exemptions.
2. **Reconcile Heading Typographical Errors and Duplicate References:**

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- Line 416 contains a minor typography/spacing slip in the thematic flow heading ("Transparency Accountability → Citizen Participation → Democratic Governance"). Ensure clean formatting.
- Remove duplicate reference entries in the bibliography (e.g., the dual citations for the Department of Personnel and Training / Government of India, 2005).

3. Expand on the Protection of RTI Activists:

In Section 8.10 ("Protection of Information Seekers"), add 2–3 sentences detailing specific policy mechanisms or legislative proposals (such as the Whistleblowers Protection Act framework) necessary to protect information seekers and grassroots activists from physical threats and harassment.

4. Standardize Bibliographic Formatting:

Ensure all reference entries strictly adhere to APA 7th Edition guidelines, verifying uniform capitalization of journal titles, complete volume/issue numbers, page ranges, and active DOI links.

Final Evaluation and Verdict

This manuscript provides an insightful, rigorous, and well-structured critical evaluation of the Right to Information Act and its relationship with democratic governance in India. The theoretical synthesis is sound, the narrative analysis is objective, and the proposed policy solutions are pragmatic.

The manuscript is **accepted with minor revisions**. Integrating brief references to the 2019 Amendment Act and recent judicial precedents, correcting minor typographical slips, and standardizing the reference list will render the paper fully ready for publication