

Digital Transparency: E- Governance And Right To Information Act, 2005

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ABSTRACT

Accountability envisages a powerful democracy. It implies strength and growth through the robustness of political parties within RTI to expedite responsiveness and adaptability ensuring coherence and inclusivity in governance. The Right to Information Act, 2005, has been an effective instrument to disclose and uncover the corruption, inefficiencies, mismanagement and arbitrariness in government functioning. RTI Act provides a right to access in working of democratic governance. RTI Act has been passed in 2005 but India has not been utilized this act at its maximum potential due to number of obstacles. This paper will examine challenges to strengthen the legal framework for the protection of data privacy and enforcement of digital infrastructure for the administration of RTI Act. E- Governance can help RTI Act to use its full potential because this will ensure maximum access and faster response from the public authorities. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to explore role of Digital platforms and E-governance in enhancing accountability in the political institutions through the RTI Act, 2005.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, E-Governance, RTI Act.

1.Introduction

Right to Information Act, 2005 designed to enhance transparency and permit citizens to access disclosure of finances for public records. To hold public authorities accountable, RTI Act is a strong tool to engage in governance. There are two factors of effective government, public participation and answerability which increase the openness. E-governance means the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support public services, administration, democratic functioning and working of state among civil society as stated by (*Dawes, 2008*).

The RTI Act, 2005 could be carried out better with the enforceability of technology. Technologies can be used to make online portals, digital platforms, online websites and applications for citizens to ask for information from the public authorities. Artificial Intelligence tools could help to examine and comprehend high volume data that could help government to keep documents arranged in sequence. Section 4 of Right to Information Act, 2005 provided that every public institution under this act shall maintain records in appropriate manner (*Right to Information Act, 2005*).

India has taken numerous actions towards betterment digitization in the government services. The four constituents of e- governance are Transparency, Accountability, Public Sector Administration and Legal framework. The world bank expressed that Accountability is the heart of good governance. It means public institutions are bound to disclose their financial details because they are answerable to the citizens whom they represent. Digital Platforms such as Public Financial Management System have expedited financial transactions, fostering accountability in tax collection. When the concept of transparency and information comes into the Indian context of governance, RTI Act 2005 is a milestone in the operationalization concept of good governance. E-Courts were officially opened during the covid -19 as justice is also an important requisite for good governance and the social,

economic and political justice is essential to preserve the rights and liberties of the individuals in a state and the constitution (*Rawat, 2023*).

1.1 Comparison between E- Government, E- Governance and E- Administration

The object of introducing E-Governance is to enhance and upgrade delivery of governance and public services to citizens. The Comparative analysis of following areas is given by (*Grigalashvili V., 2022*):

e-Government: This includes both external and internal aspects of public services.

e-Administration: This includes management of organizations and policy development.

e-Governance: This includes use of ICT to promote greater participation and transparency in the political institutions.

2. Digital Platforms in India to enhance E- Governance

Digital transformation plays a very important role in enhancing and fostering transparency. There are initiatives taken by Indian government such as **C-Vigil, Saksham ECI App, Umang App, National E-Governance Plan (NeGP) and Digital India Campaign** significantly developed the nation towards digitalization among democratic processes.

(*India, 2017*) introduced **Umang App (Unified Application for New- age Governance)**, launched with an aim to provide access to wide range of services including both central, state and local government. Umang App was developed by Ministry of electronics and Information Technology with National e- Governance Division to promote digital governance and easy access to government services. Services given by Umang App:

- CPGRAMS (Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System) helps to lodge complaints regarding central and state government services.
- National Consumer Helpline (Consumer Affairs): Consumers can lodge a complaint regarding the dispute and this service is connected to state level dispute redressal forums.

2.1 RTI Online Portal, hundreds of RTI requests and their responses were disappeared from RTI Online portal in 2023 as highlighted by (*Deep, 2013*). RTI Activists in Maharashtra filed 49 RTI applications and he failed to get registered although the fee was paid by him as stated by (*Deshmukh, 2025*). In (*Pravasi Legal Cell v. Union of India & Ors, 2020*), it was held by the Honble Supreme Court that filing RTI request under RTI portal is a statutory right and it was clarified that all High Courts and District Courts are bound to operationalize online RTI portals within three months.

2.2 Election Commission of India, has embraced digital tools but political parties still comply with limited accountability. There are certain online platforms like NVSP Portal for new voter registration, Suvidha Portal for requesting campaign for rallies etc., SPIN portal for checking status of political parties, C-vigil App for reporting violations and mode code of conduct (MCC) like bribery and hate speech highlighted by (*Pandey, 2021*).

2.3 Ministry of Corporate Affairs, provides online platform which fosters transparency and accountability of public and private companies through digitalization. This promotes trust in corporate sector. This is a powerful example that how digital governance foster transparency. Likewise, there should be online portals for financial disclosure of political institutions.

2.4 The study conducted by (*Mavuri, 2020*) discussed about **Aadhaar Enabled Payment System**, introduced by the National Payments Corporation of India (NCPI), Aadhaar enabled payment system is a service based on an Aadhaar card (one can use an Aadhaar card instead of debit or credit cards), which enables the owner to make financial transactions such as transfer money, make payments and cash deposits & withdrawal etc

(Bindal, 2024) said according to the Report of Central Information Commission (2000) there were number of RTI applications are pending, the number increased from 36,512 in 2016 to 1.82,552 in 2020. This report of Central Information Commission stated the urgent need for E-governance for speedy disposal of applications.

3. Challenges to E-Governance in India

Despite the advantages of digitalization, it also faces several challenges like Cyber Threats, Data Privacy, Regional Disparities, Unequal Access to Technology, Misuse of Artificial Intelligence raised a critical challenge to the integrity of digitalization in the RTI Act (Chaturvedi, 2025). Issues such as digital illiteracy, infrastructure inadequacy, limited government services, slow responses, incomplete information and lack of public awareness, has reduced the full potential of projects initiated by government like National e-governance plan and digital India initiative. The main barriers of digitalization were discussed by (Pradhan, 2019):

- **Digital Divide:** The digital divide means the gap between those who have access to ICTs and those who do not, often along socio-economic, geographic, and demographic lines. Bridging the digital divide requires investments in digital infrastructure, connectivity, and digital literacy programs to participate in e-governance initiatives.
- **Cybersecurity and Data Privacy:** E-governance raises concern about cybersecurity and data privacy, as governments collect and store large amounts of sensitive information about citizens. Ensuring the security and integrity of government systems, protecting personal data, and mitigating cyber threats are critical challenges for e-governance implementation.
- **Capacity Building and Institutional Reform:** E-governance requires building the capacity of government agencies to adopt and utilize ICTs effectively. This will reform bureaucratic structures and foster a regime of innovation and digital transformation within government organizations.
- **Legal and Regulatory Frameworks:** E-governance operates within legal and regulatory frameworks that may be outdated or inadequate to address emerging digital challenges. Updating laws and regulations to accommodate new technologies, protect digital rights, and ensure accountability is essential for effective e-governance implementation.
- **Resistance to Change:** Resistance to change within government agencies and among stakeholders can pose significant barriers to e-governance adoption. Overcoming resistance requires effective change management strategies, stakeholder engagement, and communication to build trust and buy-in for e-governance initiatives (Kumar, 2024).
- **Proliferation of fake news:** Spread of misinformation and targeted citizens by disseminating wrong and incomplete information will lead to breakage of democracy in the country.
- The majority of people who do not speak English are unable to access the internet due to English's dominance. Ninety-five percent of people in India do not speak English.

Suggestions

1. E-Governance needs a wide range of new rules, policies, laws and legislative amendments to address activities including electronic signatures, archiving, freedom of information, data protection and cyber- crime.
2. e-Governance requires hybrid human capacities, technical skills for installation, maintenance, as well as skills for using and managing online processes, functions and citizens, are necessary.
3. Inequality: disparities in how different groups of people can receive public sector services, particularly between urban and rural areas, educated and illiterate populations, and the rich and the poor (Rao, 2024).
4. To minimize the malfunctions, routine maintenance and checkups should be initiated by government to become e- governance as more efficient, trustworthy and resilient.

5. Social media and Use of Digital Campaign: Conducting online awareness programmes, advertisement and disseminating real- time updates, rapidly increase digital landscape.

E- Governance focus on openness and accountability, people are free to report any crime without mentioning their name and personal details on the website www.whistleblower.gov.in and they are not afraid of getting in trouble like RTI Activists are threatened and harassed after giving reports against government officials. If we can see Open Data Initiative Model in countries like USA and UK, large datasets are made available to public in readable formats like CSV and JSON. There was an idea behind open data initiative that is government data should be transparent and open to public access. In a report by the Special Rapporteur of United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the essential principles led down for effective enforcement of e-governance with RTI. The principles were discussed by *(Sheer, 2024)*:

1. Maximum Disclosure highlights the right to access information, in case of denial burden of proof will be on respondent.
2. Reports, Expenditure and Services of government should be subjected to an obligation to publish information without the specific request from general public.
3. Promoting the culture of openness and reducing the tendency of secrecy.
4. Exemptions shall serve legitimate purpose and should not be misused discretionary.
5. Existing Legislations should be amended in consonance with principles of natural justice.
6. RTI Activists must be protected from undue pressure and coercion from government officials or even state.
7. Fees should not be excessive and information should be rapid, free and fair.

Conclusion

Right to Information Act, 2005 was introduced to promote openness and transparency and allow individuals to participate in the working of government processes. When RTI Act integrated with e-governance by using large number of online platforms would serves as transparency and accountable governance. Unfortunately, public entities under RTI Act due to number of challenges such as data privacy, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, arbitrariness, violations and inconsistent implementation of e- governance failed to achieve its full potential. Enforcement of digitization to RTI Act will reduce the corruption and improve transparency and accountability. Addressing the obstacles and barriers of e- governance will not only improve effectiveness of RTI Act but also strengthens the democratic structure and public accountability. E- governance is not merely a digitization but a strong vehicle for deepening transparency into a democratic country.

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