



Transparency Review

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Bridging the gap between promise and action

Dinesh C Sharma

The year 2015 marks ten years of the landmark transparency law, the Right to Information Act (2005). It provided an opportunity to introspect about the achievements and failures with regard to the use of this piece of legislation by people. As is usual, a series of seminars, symposia and conferences were organised by RTI activists, civil society groups as well as the government. The mood at meetings attended by activists and civil society members was somber and serious concern was expressed over implementation of the Act and about continued efforts from the establishment to dilute, circumvent and ignore the RTI Act. The undue delay in appointing a new Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and pendency of cases was cited as the government's lackadaisical attitude of the government towards people's right to information.

While a new CIC was appointed during the year, the post fell vacant once again in December. So the concerns about crippling functioning of the apex RTI body in the country continue. It is not just the question of delay in appointing CIC but the ripple effect such actions have on functioning of the central commission as well as state commissions, since CIC is vested with

important responsibilities relating to working of RTI throughout the country.

On the other hand, the mood in official functions and seminars about RTI was different. In these meetings too, some concerns were raised but they were of a different nature. Officials and information commissioners attending these meetings have suggested some kind of a restriction on so-called frivolous RTI applications. This is a double-edged sword- while it may help reduce the number of complaints and reduce the work load of information officers in government departments but it can also give a new weapon in the hands of

Unfortunately only so-called frivolous RTI applications are being discussed and targeted, sidestepping main issues like making RTI Act effective and voluntary disclosure of information

the government to block uncomfortable RTI applications. Terming an application as frivolous is a subjective matter. What a government officer or RTI commissioner may feel as frivolous may be a matter of great importance for the applicant. While currently, the number of such applications is reported to be very low- imposing a higher fee could work as an effective deterrent. This too may have unintended impact on applicants who can't afford to pay even rupees ten for an application, considering the fact that RTI owes its origins to in the campaign of daily wage earners in Rajasthan under the aegis of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan

CONTENTS

Bridging the gap between promise and action Dinesh C Sharma

Implications of higher FDI in media for consumers
P N Vasanti, Director General, CMS

Information is not an end in itself
Dr N Bhaskara Rao, Chairman, CMS

Perception and experience of corruption in public services in Delhi

Untimely Demise of Jaanane Ka Haq (Right to Know) MM Ansari, former CIC

Kejriwal asks ministers for action plan on uprooting corruption

Book Scan

Bassi 'explains' to CM findings on corruption

Inspiring tale of a village boy in New Delhi

"Media has an important role to play in cleansing public life. "

Story of India's IT Revolution

MEDIA REVIEW

Transparency needed in donations to political parties

RTI soon on Sri Lanka

Legal filter in RTI Act suggested

Bribe offered to RTI applicant

Government wants to keep CIC selection secret

Paytm to sponsor RTI applicants

RTI applicants can now change bench

Editor: Dinesh C Sharma

About CMS Transparency

The CMS Transparency team focuses on issues of good governance, raising awareness about the Right to Information Act (RTI) and empowering citizens to benefit from the legislation.

The Right to Information Act 2005 represents a historic breakthrough in recognising the citizen's democratic rights to monitor measures affecting the public good. Following adoption of the Act by the Parliament of India, the CMS has set up a Transparency Studies wing to document, examine and publicise the interrelation between governance and society in all its aspects. It facilitates dissemination of relevant material, confers with experts and field workers and networks with the media to promote implementation and awareness.



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(MKSS). The real point of concern is that instead of making the Act more effective and striving for proactive disclosure of information, only frivolous applications are being discussed and targeted.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke at the conference of information commissioners, which was held at Vigyan Bhawan under the theme of 'Trust through transparency'. The speech touched on a couple of issues concerning RTI and transparency. The first one related to the government's Digital India initiative being complementary to RTI. The Prime Minister said "when things begin to happen online, transparency is automatic. There should be trust between the government and people. When there is transparency, there will be trust. Therefore, when we go on making things online under Digital India, keep them open, there will be fewer questions."

He then referred to the example of coal and FM radio frequency auctions, which he said were conducted in an open and transparent manner, reducing the need for RTI. He also used the word "proactive transparency" on part of the government.

It is logical to connect Digital India with RTI, but to think that merely developing websites and mobile apps for government departments and services will bring in transparency and reduce the need for RTI is a fallacy. Government websites are only providing basic information like projects and programmes, names and contact details of officers, tender notices, annual reports etc. The information about progress of specific schemes, funds spent or problems there in are still locked in files and cupboards. Proactive disclosures, as desired under the RTI Act, are not happening at all. Grievance redressal in government departments is still a tardy process, delays in delivery of services to citizens is still a major problem. The backend procedures behind fancy websites and apps

continue to be subjected to movement of physical files and bureaucratic hierarchies. Unless we improve all this, just branding government websites under Digital India would not result in transparent governance.

Another suggestion the Prime Minister made was that the use of RTI in ensuring good governance. He said that RTI queries should be analysed to see if they point to any gaps in policies and programmes, so that corrective measures can be taken. Only providing an answer to a query is of no great use, it can only lead to some sensation in media or create a controversy, according to the Prime Minister. In fact, that is how RTI has been used in many cases during the past ten years. RTI queries have not only led to exposing corruption, scandals and scams but have also forced the government to take corrective measures in many instances. It would be great if the government itself starts making policy corrections based on an

analysis of RTI questions, as suggested by the Prime Minister.

If the government is interested in creating trust through transparency, the intent should translated into action. To begin with, there should be unconditional support to strengthen the RTI Act and its associated machinery within the government and in information commissions. The central and state governments should issue explicit directives to all government departments and entities to make proactive information disclosures. All such disclosures should be subjected to third party audits periodically. Such information disclosure should be given due publicity through awareness campaigns and social media, as was done with the RTI Act in its initial years. All other transparency related legislations about citizen charters, grievances and corruption should be fast-tracked. Only through such holistic and integrated approach, we can hope to achieve transparency, accountability and openness and governance. RTI alone is not sufficient nor is digitization.

If the government is interested in creating trust through transparency, there should be unconditional support to strengthening the RTI Act and all government departments be directed to expedite voluntary information disclosures

Information is not an end in itself

Dr N Bhaskara Rao, Chairman, CMS

Inaugurating the tenth anniversary Convention of Information Commission in October, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made some important observations which did not get attention in the media. First, RTI being a tool for good governance, delivery of service matters more than merely giving replies. Second, an analysis of who is seeking what information should be a concern to streamline implementation of the Act. Third, with Digital India prompt supply of information should be possible to make RTI far more relevant.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitely in his address reminded that RTI is not only for transparency, but it should also facilitate governance and make it citizen-centric. He noted that institution building for RTI has been a success story. How has this success been possible? Firstly, although initially it was criticized, but appointing retired senior bureaucrats at the outset as Chief Information Commissioners helped in quickly establishing commissions at the Centre and in states. Wajahat Habibullah, first Chief of Central Information Commission, for example, played a key role and set good example in organising state level commissions. Information commissioners with media background in some states like Kerala and Andhra Pradesh set also good precedent.



It is also to the credit of civil society activists and organisations that RTI soon acquired characteristic of a movement. A meeting of information commissioners that I had organized at the very outset in January 2006 in Hyderabad too helped expedite the process. This meet discussed modalities of commissions going about with priority concerns. In eight states, commissioners had been

CIC rejected 11,000 appeals in 2015

Minister of State in the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions and Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Jitendra Prasad informed the parliament on December 2, 2015 that 11328 number appeals have been turned away by the Central Information Commission since January, 2015. The RTI Rules, 2012 provides that if an appeal is not accompanied by the documents as specified in for removing deficiencies and filling the appeal complete in all respects may be returned to the appellant.

appointed by then but they had not yet started functioning. They had the benefit of deliberating steps to quickly get going with the implementation of the Act. Ajit Bhattacharjea, Sekhar Gupta, Nikhil Dey, Maja Daruwala, Dr Jayaprakash Narayan, Arvind Kejriwal, among others, were key participants in this conclave. It was Kejriwal's first visit outside New Delhi. He and myself met local activists in various fields next day in CMS office and chalked out campaign plans for creating awareness about the Act and ways of going about availing it. Many others elsewhere too picked up sooner. Aruna Roy launched *Transparency Review* journal early 2006 to cover and analyse RTI implementation across states.

I had the privilege of taking part in all the annual conventions of CIC over the years in New Delhi. I analysed the participation and deliberations of these meets for *Transparency Review*. Professor Madhav Menon, chairing one of the sessions at

the 10th Convention observed that RTI has lost enthusiasm of earlier years. This could be for two reasons.

First, many of the commissioners including the CIC were now on the verge of completing their tenure. Second, rather unusually, there was hardly any participation in this convention of activists, who played key role over the years in taking forward rights regime in the country. Out of some 26 panel members, only three were from outside the system and only two actually attended and made good presentations. The convention missed an opportunity of being citizen-centric as there were hardly anyone to reflect their perspective. Also, the convention should have regretted killing of over two dozen RTI activists and threats to many more.

This tenth year convention on October 16 and 17 should have been an occasion to “revive RTI” as Justice A P Shah observed chairing the session on privacy. Besides Professor Madhav Menon and Justice Shah from outside, Professor Sridhar

Acharyulu, an active Commissioner of CIC, referred directly and indirectly to some of the issues crippling the RTI Commissions. But there was no discussion whatsoever on any of these issues.

The Information Commissions including the CIC suffer on account of subdued compliance of their orders. Political parties’ refusal to come under RTI preview is only one glaring example. The backlog in commissions with piling of applications and appeals is due to lack of staff, delays in appointing commissioners and reduced budgets. In addition, the government is appointing persons whose record on transparency is questionable. Implementation of Section 4 on suo-motto disclosures continues to be a low key priority and no correctives could be particularly mentioned despite recent spread of communication networks, increased resource allocations for this, and priority of the government for e governance. A quarter or more of applications continue to be rejected under the pretext of privacy.

“Digital India is complimentary to RTI”

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, today described the “Right To Information” Act as a tool through which the common man has got not just the right to know, but also the right to question those in power.

In his remarks at the 10th Annual Convention of the Central Information Commission (CIC), the Prime Minister said that the Union Government’s “Digital India” initiative is complimentary to RTI, because putting information online brings transparency, which in turn, builds trust.

The Prime Minister mentioned the auctions of coal blocks, spectrum and FM radio licenses, and said that information should be given out proactively to people.

The Prime Minister called for an end to the silo-approach in Government. He said administrative processes should be run based on trusting the people, rather than doubting the people.

The Prime Minister said RTI has become a tool for good governance. He also described how the PRAGATI platform developed in the PMO has become a vibrant platform for monitoring progress of projects.

(Source: pmIndia.gov.in)

One session was on digitalisation and RTI, but there were no pointers for taking on or to expect qualitative change in the implementation of RTI provisions. All the panel members were former secretaries of IT sector ministries. Many participants referred to delays in giving replies and how it vitiates the very purpose, but how digitalisation could bring relief was not talked about.

Do we today need 30 days to respond? Why is the number of applications not increasing? Why all applications more coming from the same set of people? One would expect that information technology would have made a difference in reviving enthusiasm in

RTI. Even websites of commissions are not active and updated at a time when new media should have become handy. Even video conferences are nowhere used. Applicants need not come from far away all the way and all the time to appear before state commissions in state capitals.

Despite the Prime Minister making an observation for an analysis as to who is applying, for what Information etc, no commissioner cited an example

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New CIC appointed

R. K. Mathur (retired Indian Administrative Service officer) has been appointed as the Chief Information Commissioner in the Central Information Commission. The appointment has been made for a term of five years from the date on which he enters upon his office or till he attains the age of sixty five years, whichever is earlier.

The body had remained headless for nearly 10 months after the then Chief Information Commission Rajiv Mathur retired in August 2014. During the 10 months without Chief, over 35,000 cases were accumulated before the panel. Sharma, who was appointed on June 9, 2015, attained the age of 65 December 1 and demitted office.

after the inaugural session. On the contrary, it was mentioned that CIC suffers on account of lack of even basic data. Why are applications rejected or who is benefiting more from RTI? I was hoping that in the last session, state commissioners would come up with some new and proactive initiatives. But I heard the same old references that I heard in the third or fourth convention.

Nobody cared to discuss remark of the Prime Minister that replies by CIC themselves will not lead to good governance, and the important of service delivery. Had the Prime Minister given a one line call in support of transparency regime that

would have infused much needed enthusiasm. The need today is to think beyond information so that people avail other measures now available. For example Service Delivery Guarantee Act (SDG) in more than a dozen states have adapted with penalty provision for officers responsible for refusal or delay in ensuring service delivery could be linked to RTI. Similarity Citizen Charters (CC) which most public services have adopted with specific expectations and Social Audit (SA) being taken up in the case of some public services with participation or involvement of citizens are those measures.

A few years ago I suggested to activists in the field who are somewhat desperate or disappointed with RTI to go beyond and take a holistic view of their pursuit. Delay in Whistle Blower Bill coming through and increased threats have added to this situation. The Good Governance (GG) formula I suggested is GG: RTI + SDG +CC+SA+IT. This formula is also for taking rights regime forward. Activists and civil society organisations should take to these enablers together in their fight against corruption. Otherwise, as Prime Minister, Finance Minister and others at this convention have implied, Information alone is not an end in itself. Information Technologies (IT) facilitates this process further.

After attending all the sessions of the 10th Convention, I am convinced that RTI has a long way to get deep rooted in the country. Some months ago I had published an article “RTI need to be saved from becoming archaic”. The task of reviving RTI should not be limited to Governments and the Commissions, although their role in that process is more significant. Civil society and its various organs too have to play a key role. There was no evidence of any of the sessions deliberating remarks of the Prime Minister or of the Finance Minister. An impression otherwise is that there was no analysis of applications or appeals has been undertaken at any level. CMS *Transparency Review* as well CHRI have done such analysis.

In fact, at the end of first five years of RTI, CMS had brought out that hardly ten percent of applications were from women and much less

were of poor and of far away people from district headquarters. And that there were fewer applications for social sector schemes, or departments and more were for urban development, infrastructure. And most were from those in powers including employees themselves. After hearing State Commissioner’s presentation

the impression I got on October 16 and 17 was that we have not come a long way in the last couple of years in deepening RTI regime in the country.

RTI today requires to be revived from slumber within, activists need to be re-enthused, threats from multiple sources of establishment and those in powers need to be

minimized and even resisted by civil society groups and sane voices. Only then it could be brought back to catch up with the aspirations of people. Academics, researchers and media need to change their gears too in this context in collaboration with activists.

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RBI accountable to give information under RTI: SC

The Supreme Court has held that RBI should take rigid action against those banks and financial institutions which have been indulging in "disreputable business practices" and said it cannot withhold information on defaulters and other issues covered under the RTI Act.

"We have surmised that many financial institutions have resorted to such acts which are neither clean nor transparent. The RBI in association with them has been trying to cover up their acts from public scrutiny. It is the responsibility of the RBI to take rigid action against those banks which have been practicing disreputable business practices," a bench comprising Justices M Y Eqbal and C Nagappan said.

The apex court clarified that Reserve Bank of India (RBI) cannot withhold information under the "guise" of confidence or trust with financial institutions and is accountable to provide information sought by general public. "RBI and the Banks have sidestepped the general public's demand to give the requisite information on the pretext of 'fiduciary relationship' and 'economic interest'. This attitude of the RBI will only attract more suspicion and disbelief in them. RBI as a regulatory authority should work to make the Banks accountable to their actions.

Untimely Demise of *Jaanane Ka Haq* (Right to Know)

MM Ansari, former CIC

Door Darshan (DD) has scrapped one of its most popular programmes known as *Janne ka Haq* (right to know), which was regularly telecast for the last nine years. This was an educative and awareness programme on effective implementation of the Right to Information Act (RTI).

This weekly programme focussed on: i) major highlights of RTI related activities of the week, ii) case studies based on the outcome of the government responses to RTI applications, and, iii) phone-in programme for promoting interaction between the RTI users and other experts drawn from different fields of development and governance. The programme was hugely successful for two reasons; one, for promoting information literacy, as no other TV media did it to reach out the remote areas where the concentration of illiterate population is high; and the other is to expose corrupt practices in implementation of various welfare programmes for poverty alleviation. This was also used as a forum for sharing information across the states and government departments.

The proponents of transparency are hugely disappointed because the DD is evasive and silent on the issue of: who decided to discontinue the programme and why? The government's action is considered as a blot on the idea of strengthening democratic governance. And, DD's decision to scrap the *Jaanane Ka Haq* is also in contravention of its policy statement: "***Our government is committed to providing a***

transparent and accountable administration, which works for the betterment and welfare of the common citizens" (Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Good Governance Day, 25th December, 2014). Clearly, there is a contradiction in policy pronouncement and the actions to promote peoples' awareness about the manner in which they can exercise their rights to realize the genuine entitlements through the use of right to know.

The impact of RTI awareness programme through

Jannene ka Haq can be gauged from the fact that the right to information has been used as a powerful instrument for not only dismantling the culture of secrecy, but also to contain corruption, and to galvanise people's participation in the process of development. This has resulted in ensuring that the benefits of public expenditures reach the target groups. With the exercise of the right to info, people have been gathering info and using them to take appropriate decisions about themselves. And, they are providing relevant inputs for effective

delivery of services provided by the government. Democratization of knowledge resources has thus been assured to empower the deprived groups of our society and to encourage their participation in development process. But, lack of awareness about the various provisions of the Act may cripple their efforts to effectively participate in the information society.

Access to information has changed the people's perception of the government and the society and



given them reason to trust public institutions' commitment to enhance welfare. The RTI Act mandates maximum disclosure of all aspects of the various public activities. People, as watchdogs now, observe the decision making processes and eagerly provide the feedback, which help in designing and executing citizen-centric socioeconomic schemes. These aspects may now be adversely affected due to lack of education and awareness, which DD was promoting.

It is observed that information literacy facilitates in ensuring that service providers adhere to the norms and guidelines for delivering entitlements such as jobs and payment of wages. This in turn has resulted in effective implementation of the various flagship programmes, such as, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rural Health Mission and minimised wastages of resources due to pilferage and misuse of authority.

Several areas of public activities, which are known to be the sources of illegal or unethical practices, are now open for scrutiny by citizens. These include the process of recruitment and promotion of staff, award of contracts and launch of projects under public-private partnerships, inspection reports on quality assurance, issue of licences for retail outs/ LPG dealerships, disbursement and recovery of loans, etc. Lack of awareness among the people about the manner in which RTI can be used, would deprive the people of their democratic rights to participate in the decision making process.

Therefore, all the stakeholders and agents of change, particularly the media, civil society and

the government should intensify their effort to evolve multimedia strategies to promote information literacy. And, to create awareness among the masses about the importance of accessing information. The fact that one-third of our people are illiterate and at least one-tenth of the country's population lives in remote areas, which are not accessible through media coverage, the task of promoting information literacy is challenging indeed. The

efforts made by *Door Darshan* under its *Jaanane Ka Haq* programme should have been continued and intensified, rather than taking regressive policy decision to blunt the transparency regime by scrapping the popular awareness programme.

The Parliament is committed to promote free flow of information under the RTI Act to ensure transparency and accountability in the functioning of the government. Under section 26 of the Act, public authorities are mandated to promote public awareness about various policies and programmes affecting the common people. The Central government has also decided to undertake transparency audit of suo moto disclosure u/s 4 of the Act, which has not been done so far. In this backdrop, any attempt to deprive people from education and awareness by taking off the relevant education and training programme, such as *Jannene ka Haq* may agitate against intentions and motives of the government to provide a clean administration. A reversal of decision to continue with the RTI awareness programme is urgently called for, lest the attempts to discourage RTI activism would prove to be counterproductive.

The efforts made by the public broadcaster through its Jaanane Ka Haq programme should have been continued and intensified, rather than taking regressive policy decision to blunt the transparency regime by scrapping the popular awareness programme.

Clearly, there is a contradiction in policy pronouncement and the actions to promote peoples' awareness about the manner in which they can exercise their rights to realize the genuine entitlements through the use of right to know.

Implications of higher FDI in media for consumers

PN Vasanti, Director General, CMS

The long awaited increase in FDI limit in broadcasting was announced in November. It is expected that the limit increase from 26% to 49 % in news channels and private FM radio will allow greater funds inflow in this sector to give it the much needed boost. However, given the inconsistent regulation and special character of this sensitive sector, what and how much will this announcement benefit audiences? What are implications of more FDI in news media or FM radio for consumers?

Viewers of any media are concerned about two key issues - quality and variety of content. Another relevant factor for most consumers is the cost of accessing the content.

Quality is an elusive and ambiguous attribute in a diverse and complex media landscape in our country. The sheer diversity of tastes and requirements of consumers is a challenge. Yet, any investment in production standards, creativity and innovation are also appreciated. Whether it is fresh program formats or new storylines or slicker presentation styles or jazzy graphics or even better broadcast quality, these are now attributes that audiences are ready to even pay more to access and consume. These are also often distinguishing features in the currently cluttered and competitive space.

For news, credibility is an important attribute of quality. However, in these times of paid news and shrill voices, this is not a characteristic feature held at high esteem for our television news channels. The recent Bihar election coverage, specially the numerous confusing and flawed polls are a case to illustrate this point. [By the way, a point to also note is that less than 10% television viewers actually watch news channels and that too mostly regional or language news channels.]

This brings us to the next important feature a consumer looks for – variety or range of choice. In spite of more than 400 registered news channels and 300 FM channels, the range of diversity or choice available to Indian consumer is limited. This is also evident in the positive trend for online (news and music) sources and a steady upbeat of newspapers still in our country. ‘More of the same’ phenomenon is pretty obvious in our media, where any one popular show or style or format is quickly replicated across other channels.

Investments are certainly required for new technology, but how does investment help in developing capacities that is much required to drive quality. One recent CMS study (supported by UKIERI) on Indian media education painted a grave picture with trust deficit between media industry and academia on one side and on the other, poor job opportunities or integration of media graduates in industry (mostly due to incompatible skills and knowledge). There are few media houses who have invested in their own training institutes, more as a business opportunity than building capacities required for the growth and worth of media in our country.



This is the scenario with already existing 26% FDI limits and a steady flow of investments (including mergers) that we saw in the last few years by major Indian corporations, like Reliance. Clearly, more foreign investment will address concerns of broadcasters but my question is will it also address concerns of audience in getting improved quality and choice at better costs.

Trends within our country and other countries have shown no direct linkage of more investment leading to better quality or variety or even more relevant programming. In fact most countries, including US and Australia have very stringent rules for

avoiding foreign investment or keeping foreign content at bay. In these countries, you cannot have stake in media businesses unless you are a citizen of the respective country. Another example is of France where it is mandatory to produce and procure minimum 30% local content. These may sound archaic rules in the current world of technology that we live in, but these are important checks put in place to encourage and protect local players, talent and content.

Clearly, there are many more issues to be considered in a sector like broadcasting. Just increasing FDI limits is not the answer, especially without any conditions to ensure level playing field.

Investments are good, specially to keep abreast with changing times and technology, but it is equally important to retain checks and balances in place to ensure level playing field and to nurture our local talent.

The question whether more foreign investment provide improved quality and choice at better prices can only be answered in time. However, one thing that is clear from experience from other countries and previous trends within our own country, is that the media cannot be equated with other sectors and needs a much holistic policy reforms than just increasing foreign investments to make an impact on its current growth trajectory.

Perception and experience of corruption in public services in Delhi

CMS India Corruption Study (ICS) is the only of its kind of study consistently being published since 2000. Every year it measures perception and experience of citizens about corruption in public services. A unique PEE (Perception, Experience and Estimation) methodology has been evolved by CMS to capture and discuss trends. The ICS-2015 is based on tenth round of India Corruption Study and focuses on Delhi. As there are so many contestants in all levels of governance for addressing corruption, it was felt appropriate to gauge changing perception or experience of corruption among citizens of the national capital.

In recent past, Delhi with more than 33 lakh residential households has witnessed a lot of activities towards ensuring better governance, transparency and accountability. Moreover, the change of governments at both central and state levels was primarily based on anti-corruption promises, and hence the study is of immense importance to assess the change, if any in perception as well as experience of Delhi residents with the public services. In all, 15 public services were covered.



During the last one year, the households in Delhi have interacted on an average with 6 of 15 public services. This shows that there is high dependency of households on public services, and it also means that opinion of households is not based on just perception but experience as well. However, average number of public services under the three governing agencies availed by the Delhi households shows that these households have interacted with around 3 of the public services of the state government, around two of the central government and one public service of the municipal corporation. Among the most interacted services are electricity (82%) followed by LPG (81%) and public health/hospital services (75%). Other public services, where more than half of the households interacted at least once during the last one year are the railways (67%), water supply (65%), public distribution system (58%) and sanitation/garbage disposal (55%).

Around 20 percent of Delhi households feel that the level of corruption in public services has increased during the last one year while around 39 percent feel that there is no change i.e. level of corruption has remained same. On the level of

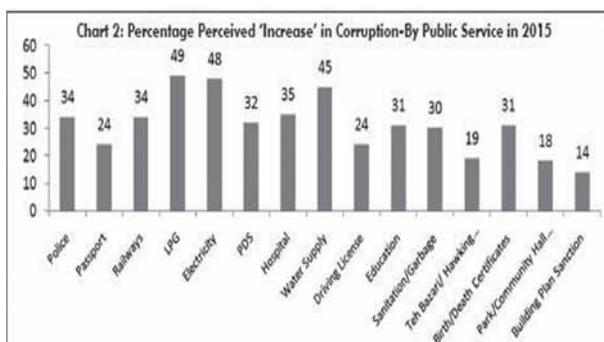
Shocking findings (of) CMS Survey-Delhi Police (Under Modiji & his LG) most corrupt. Modi ji stop being stubborn work with us. Hand over ACB and police to Delhi govt. We will deliver in a year

Arvind Kejriwal Delhi Chief Minister on Twitter 19 October 2015

corruption in the departments of state government of Delhi, around 45 percent opined that it has decreased during the last one year as compared to 39 percent opining so about central government governed public services for residents of Delhi. A slightly higher percentage of Delhi households feel that the level of corruption has remained same i.e. no change is noticeable in the level of corruption prevailing in public services under the Municipal Corporations of Delhi as compared to those public services, which are under state or central governments.

A significant percentage of Delhi households do not perceive any change in level of corruption in the public services, as more than one-third felt that level of corruption in state government has 'remained same' during the last one year compared to the preceding one year while around 38 percent opined so about the central government run public services in Delhi. The situation is much worse in the case of Municipal Corporations, where 45 percent of Delhiites find no change in the level of corruption.

No significant difference in perception of households belonging to different socio-economic groups indicates that the opinion is not skewed due to varying socio-economic profile of the households in Delhi. It may be pertinent to point here that this general perception of citizens of Delhi is based on their own understanding and knowledge of which services fall under various government. This



understanding was further found to be vague and therefore, in further analysis perception, experience and estimation is based only on respective services.

Public Service wise Perception about Corruption

The percentage of Delhi households who indicated that corruption in the public service has 'Increased' during the last one year is higher in services related to domestic cooking gas-LPG (49%) followed by electricity (48%) and Water Supply (45%).

Among the services, where comparatively lesser percentage of Delhi households perceived 'increase' in level of corruption, such as, Building Plan Sanction (14%), Park/Community Hall booking (18%) or Teh Bazaari/Hawking permit (19%), the percentage of the households which 'did not notice any change in the scenario' are comparatively higher i.e., 37% , 40% and 45% respectively. A significant percentage of Delhi residents opining 'No change in level of corruption' suggest that people want more evidence to believe that the governance has changed for better.

Experience with Corruption/Paid Bribe

Compared to perception, experience is reflection of the first hand exposure to the situation and reflects upon prevailing situation. Nearly one-third of the households in Delhi had paid bribe at least once during the last 12 months.

Of the households which were asked for a bribe or had to use contacts, 62% households experienced the demand for a bribe at least once during the last 12 months or had to use influence of influential person while another 29% came across such situation twice.

Surveyed households in Delhi reporting 'experience with corruption' was highest in Delhi Police (39%) followed by Teh Bazaari/ Hawking permits (32%) and Driving license (26%). On the other hand, households having first-hand experience of corrupt practices in public services' in Delhi was almost negligible in LPG (1%), Electricity and Water Supply (2% each) and Hospital (3%). On line booking and delivery of gas cylinder or online payment of monthly bills, direct cash transfer of subsidy (in case of LPG domestic cylinder) could be the reasons behind lesser households in Delhi experiencing corrupt practices by service providers in these public services. Socially and economically

marginalized population groups suffer more due to the corrupt practices in public services.

The worst situation in corruption- public services is the denial of services on 'non-payment of bribe'. Though such cases were reported by less than one percent of the households in six out of 15 public services covered in CMS-ICS 2015; in six other public services, denial of services as households refused or could not pay bribe, was reported by 1-2% households. Highest service denial rate was in Driving license (8%) followed by Building plan sanction (6%) and Police (5%).

Around one third of the surveyed households in Delhi paid cash as bribe to avail the basic and essential services, which as a citizen they have a right to avail. Public service wise, Rs 45000 was paid as bribe by a household for approval of building plan while in education Rs 10000 was paid for school admission. In spite of advertisement by Delhi Police informing citizens that police cannot stop construction of buildings, CMS-ICS survey brought out that police charged Rs 25000 to allow construction. Similarly, park and community halls can be done online but in spite of this, households had to pay bribe as high as Rs 10000 due to proxy bookings.

Corrupt public service providers are not content with large amount only but are ready to take as low as Rs 10/- to clean the garbage lying on streets or in front of the house (sanitation). Similarly, in case of public services like LPG cylinders, Rs 20/

While the occurrence of corruption impacts the area where it occurred locally in majority of the larger occurred in the Capital or elsewhere. Further, given that the Delhi is the seat of power for Central and State Government and the Hon'ble Supreme Court is also located in the capital to which most of the issues relating to corruption reach in some form or the other ultimately, the awareness in Delhi on corruption and corrupt practices is certainly believed to be much higher and it is appropriate that CMS has focused its study in the National Capital. The impact of the various anti corruption campaigns that were undertaken by the Government and various NGOs since 2011 would be an interesting study.

K V Chowdary, Central Vigilance Commissioner

"Governance-wise, Delhi is of course a peculiar animal, straddling multiple layers of government, Union government, State government and municipal corporations. This makes the pinning down of responsibility somewhat difficult. Any study on corruption can only be done through surveys and questionnaires. Following the methodology used in earlier CMS studies, this one also quantifies perception, experience and estimates. It is a study worth reading and disseminating because of the awareness such studies create, contributing to the countervailing pressure. The results of CMS corruption study are also worth probing."

Bibek Debroy, Member, NITI Aayog

- was charged to replace the damaged pipe connecting to the cylinder or Rs 25/- at PDS shops during distribution of entitled food items to the households. In many cases, these are one time charge, while regular amount are also taken on a monthly basis. For example, as reported, INR 100/- per month is 'charged' for sweeping roads and picking garbage or Rs 1000/- per month for roadside vending. The range of bribe amount is very large across services. Depending upon the kind of specific service required and documents/process to be followed, the bribe amount gets scaled up.

Nearly 30 percent of Delhi households had paid bribe at least once during the last 12 months. This cannot be considered low. As per CMS-ICS 2015, on an average a household in Delhi had to pay a bribe amount of INR 2486/- during the last one year. It is therefore estimated that the total amount paid by households in Delhi across 15 public services as bribe, during the last one year, is around INR 239.26 crore (INR 2392 million).

Performance Score

Taking in to consideration, Delhi households' perception and experience with public services, a Performance Score card was developed for each of the fifteen public services, as well as combined score of the public services under three governments i.e. Central government, Government of NCT Delhi and Municipal Corporations of Delhi.

Using the above, Performance Score (lesser the score, lower the corruption) based on perception

and experience with public services under the control of three different governments i.e. Central, State and Municipal Corporations, public services under state government of Delhi is rated as least corrupt (15.6) followed by those under Municipal Corporations (15.7). Public services under Central government in Delhi (16.6) are rated as worst among the three government agencies as far as level of corruption in Delhi is concerned.

However, the narrow gap in performance scores of the three different governments suggests that nothing substantial has been done by the three governments, in terms of checking corruption in the public services under their supervision. It is therefore important to gauge performance score of each public service to understand the perception

and experience with these services among citizens. The three high scores (indicating poorer performance) were Police, Teh bazari/Hawking permits and driving license.

Usage of RTI Act in Delhi

Right to Information (RTI) Act 2006 is an important tool for citizens to ensure transparency and accountability in the service delivery. This round of CMS-ICS assessed the extent to which households are using RTI for seeking information related to public services after 10 years of its inception.

Around 2.3 percent of the surveyed households in Delhi had sought information using RTI Act, during the last one year. Further, on being enquired about

CMS- ICS 2015: At a Glance

- Around 20 percent of Delhi households feel that the level of corruption in public services has increased during the last one year while around 39 percent feel that there is no change i.e. level of corruption has remained same.
- Nearly 30 percent of Delhi households had paid bribe at least once during the last 12 months.
- Around 8 percent of Delhi residents seeking driving license were denied services because they did not (or could not) pay a bribe; 6 percent reported so in case of Building Plan Sanction and 5 percent of those seeking services from Delhi Police were denied services because they could not pay bribe.
- On an average a household in Delhi had to pay a bribe amount of INR 2486/- during last one year. It is estimated that the total amount paid by such households across 15 public services as bribe is around INR 239.26 crore.
- Average number of public services interacted by a household during the last one year was six out of 15 public services.
- Most interacted services include, Electricity (82%) followed by LPG (81%) and Public health/Hospital Services (75%).
- ‘Perception’ about corruption in a particular public service was highest in Police Service.
- Highest percentage of households reported paying bribe was in Police services (39%) and least in LPG connection/supply for domestic use (1%).
- The highest amount (INR 45000) among services was ‘to get the building plan sanctioned’ from MCD.
- The least amount paid was (INR 20) ‘to replace gas pipe connected to the cylinder’.
- A little more than 3 percent of Delhi households had sought information under RTI Act; of these around 20 percent each applied to Education department and MCD.

'ever used RTI Act', it emerged that around 51 households out of 1501, constituting 3.4 percent had ever applied under RTI seeking the information from 20 departments covering all three governing agencies- Central, State and Municipal Corporation. MCD and Education were the two most 'popular' departments where relatively more applications were filed under RTI (10 nos. and 9 nos. respectively).

Usage of Helpline

In order to curb corrupt practices by government officials/employees, the present state government of Delhi as well as Delhi Police had informed

citizens of Delhi to send audio/video clippings after recording the demand for bribe by any state government's employee or call the helpline number to register their complaint against persons harassing them for bribes.

On being enquired, only six out of 1501 household reported sending audio/video clippings while around 1.3 percent (19 out of 1501) had called helpline number during the last one year. Among the public services against which phone calls were made include Delhi Police, MCD, Delhi Jal Board, Education, Health, Electricity, PDS, RTO and Post office.

Corruption Survey Follow up

Kejriwal asks ministers for action plan on uprooting corruption

In letters to the ministers, the CM cited a recent Centre for Media Studies (CMS) survey which pointed out areas vulnerable to corruption.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Wednesday asked his cabinet ministers to come up with detailed action plans within a week for wiping out corruption from their departments.

In letters to the ministers, the CM cited a recent Centre for Media Studies (CMS) survey which pointed out areas vulnerable to corruption.

"As you are aware, our government maintains a zero tolerance approach towards corruption in public life. It is, therefore, requested that a detailed action plan may be drawn to uproot the scourge of corruption from the departments under your charge, focusing specially on the critical areas pointed out in CMS-India Corruption Study 2015 report. I look forward to action plan within one week," the Chief Minister wrote.

In his letter to Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, the CM outlined areas in education and

sanitation cited as vulnerable by the CMS study. "... getting admission in government schools, and in private schools under EWS category, poor people, mainly migrants not possessing required documents, for admission in schools... In sanitation department, corruption could prevail in getting lane, street, road in front of houses swept, and to get blocked drains cleaned..."

In his letter to water minister Kapil Mishra, the CM wrote, "To get water tanker from DJB, for installation of piped water supply and repair of water pipeline, corruption can make its way into the system, says the CMS survey."

To transport minister Gopal Rai, Kejriwal wrote, "... The critical area vulnerable to corruption... has been identified as one of driving licence. This includes getting new driving licence, renewal of driving licence, to get commercial driving licence." The CM asked food minister Imran Hussain to look at vulnerable areas in issuing ration cards, addition and deletion of names, and quantity of supplies.

Courtesy: Indian Express

Bassi ‘explains’ to CM findings on corruption

Responding to chief minister Arvind Kejriwal’s allegation that the Delhi police was the “most corrupt” force, city police commissioner Bhim Sain Bassi on Wednesday said that the survey cited by Mr Kejriwal while making the remark was actually “flattering” for the force and offered to help him understand its findings.

The top cop said he has gone through the 34-page survey, by the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), and claimed that its findings had “doubled” his force’s enthusiasm. “The survey reveals that in 2012, 80 per cent of the people in Delhi said they have experienced corruption in dealing with police officials. That rate has dropped to 34 per cent in 2015,” Mr Bassi said on the sidelines of the police commemoration day parade.

“Similarly, the perception that police officials are corrupt has dropped from 56 per cent in 2012 to 49 per cent in 2015,” he added. Taking a dig at the chief minister, Mr Bassi said, “After reading the survey thoroughly, I can go for a one-on-one debate with anybody regarding its results. If the

honourable CM allows, I can help him understand those findings.”

Mr Bassi added: “the findings of the survey are flattering for Delhi Police and it has doubled the force’s enthusiasm.” The police commissioner said that sanitation and police services were the only areas in Delhi which have witnessed a drop both in terms of experienced and perceived corruption.

Citing the CMS survey, Mr Kejriwal had on Tuesday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to “stop being stubborn” and hand over the control of the Delhi police and the anti-corruption branch to the AAP government. “Shocking findings CMS survey 2day-Del police (under Modiji n his LG) most corrupt — scathing attack on Modiji’s capabilities n intentions (sic).”

“Modiji stop being stubborn, work with us. Hand over the ACB and the police to the Delhi government. We will deliver in a year,” the chief minister had said in a series of tweets.

Courtesy: Asian Age

“Media has an important role to play in cleansing public life”

(The following are excerpts from the speech given by the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee on the occasion of the National Press Day in New delhi on november 16, 2015)

Freedom of the press in India forms part of the freedom of expression which is guaranteed by the Constitution as a fundamental right. Protection of this right is our bounden duty. In a democracy, various challenges will emerge from time to time. These should be addressed collectively. We must ensure that the letter and spirit of the law always remains a living reality.

The National Press Day is marked every year on November 16, the day when in 1966 the Press Council of India started functioning as an autonomous, statutory and quasi-judicial body. The Press Council has the dual mandate of protecting

the freedom of the press and ensuring that the Press exercises its freedom within the ambit of the ethics of journalism and the legal framework of our country. Over the years, the Press Council of India has played an important role in promoting press freedom and instilling public trust and confidence in the news media. The growth of newspapers and agencies in our country has its roots in our freedom struggle. The press in India has evolved, not through the aegis of the Government but due to the commitment of individuals who used it as a tool to fight the exploitative and oppressive policies of the colonial Government. Newspapers became the platforms for social reform movements across the country.

It is a matter of pride that between 1780 until India's Independence in 1947, more than 120 newspapers and periodicals were launched in almost every Indian language. Each of these publications carried the ideals of freedom to the doorsteps of our people and spread the message of an independent India. Campaigns gave voice to the struggle for independence. Today, the influence, credibility and quality of our media is well recognized all over the world.

The Indian media has grown in scale, reach and revenues over the years. Its significance has further increased with higher literacy levels and the revolution in communication technologies. New media has brought about a convergence between traditional, audio-visual, digital and social media. It has become a powerful means for shaping the ideas, aspirations and behaviour of our people, even in the remotest corners of our country.

This entrusts media with an additional responsibility. They must act as a watchdog of public interest and give voice to the marginalized. Journalists must bring to public notice the array of ills and deprivations that continue to beset large number of our people. They must shape and influence public opinion even as they provide objective and balanced coverage of news.

Gloom and dark alone should not dominate news coverage. A conscious effort should be made to show what is noble and good in the society. It must highlight the positive and inspire change for the better. The power of the media should be used to reset our moral compass and promote liberalism, humanism and decency in public life.

The media has an important role to play in cleansing public life. For that, the conduct of the media itself should be above board. Independence and integrity are two sides of the same coin and it goes for every one of us including the media. Sensationalism should not substitute for objective, accurate and dispassionate reporting.

While opinion is free, facts should be sacred. Caution should be exercised in passing judgements, especially on matters where the due process of law is yet to be completed. We must never forget that careers and reputations take years to build

but only minutes to demolish. It is said accusations appear in headlines, denial in small print and contradictions are hidden away amidst cheap advertisements. The media must realise that it remains always accountable to its readers and viewers and through them, to the entire nation.

The media recognized as the fourth estate serves as a facilitator, protector and enabler of democratic institutions and processes. It is an important component in the fabric of a functional democracy. As India marches forward into the 21st century, it is extremely important that the free press of India remains strong and vibrant. On this day, I recall the thousands of journalists who toil day and night across the country to provide access to latest and accurate information to the people of our country. The media fraternity of India are not only providers of news, but also educators who empower our citizens and strengthen the democratic framework of our country. I thank you for your service to the country and wish you the very best in all your future endeavours.



“I have been the subject of cartoons and caricatures for many decades now. Until I stopped smoking, I was always identified in caricatures with a trademark pipe. It feels good to be able to enjoy and laugh at cartoons of oneself. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister used to repeatedly tell V. Shankar, the doyen of Indian Cartoonists, ‘Don't spare me, Shankar’. He would often drive down to Shankar's house for a cup of coffee and a chat about the subject of the cartoon. This open mindedness and appreciation of genuine criticism is one of the lovable traditions of our great nation, which we must preserve and strengthen” - **Pranab Mukherjee**

Inspiring tale of a village boy in New Delhi

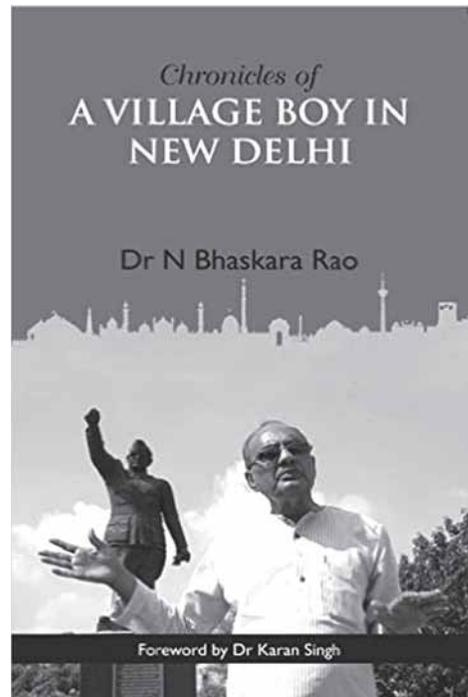
In nutshell this book is a story of a village boy who came to New Delhi with just one hundred rupees in his pocket and dreams in his eyes. In just a decade he made a mark on the national scene as someone who built think tanks, advised more than one Prime Minister and several ministers in the national capital over the past four decades. He could all this without seeking any favour or a position in the government. *Chronicles of a village boy in New Delhi* provides an account of this journey in an inspirational tone. It is meant to encourage youth to think big but without losing track of one's roots, concerns and values.

The book is a first person account of the transition that most youth are experiencing today - from one age to another, one place to another and one value system to another. It elucidates what factors influence that process of transition from one value system to another and unleash the potential in individuals (even for those without

a godfather). Written in an unconventional style, the book has insights for youth of today to understand their elders and be sensitive to



The book was released by Suresh P Prabhu, Union Minister for Railways in New Delhi on November 27, 2015



Chronicles of a Village Boy in New Delhi

Dr N Bhaskar Rao

Distributed by: Authors Upfront

Price: Rs 250, Pages 232

Kindle edition available on Amazon.in and Google Play

generational transition without succumbing to 'gene' factors and not falling prey to the lures of emerging times. It subtly hints at the dilemma of today in public space, points at contradictions and suggests introspection for proactive initiatives.

It is not an autobiographical account but is an insightful account of ten important public movements in independent India. These are need for independent primary research, fallacies of poll surveys, phenomena of paid news and note-for-vote, corruption and citizen, RTI movement and the importance of children's libraries. The author being a pioneer in applied

BOOK SCAN

social research, the book is a treasure trove for social analysts.

The book is a first person account of the author who was inspired by his encounters early in his life with personalities like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Morarji Desai, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Communist theoretician, Michel Suslow, civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Junior and Vikram Sarabhai and showed how there is so much to learn from encounters with important and not so important people. The book also has a chapter devoted to the author's association with Chandrababu Naidu since the time he was first elected to state assembly till Vision 2020 exercise which was the author's idea.

The author, Dr N Bhaskara Rao, has been living in New Delhi for the last fifty five years. He has, however, stayed in touch with his village, Mudunuru, near Vijayawada with annual visits and engagements there. He visits at least a dozen public schools yearly to interact with children and seeks insights from them. He has set up nearly 750 children libraries in government schools in AP and Telengana states.

As an institutional builder, Dr Rao has been responsible to the civil society or educational institutes in Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Hyderabad and New Delhi. He narrates the motivation and upheavals in the process of building these

institutes – CMS, MDRA, MICA, STEM, BREAD, Social Audit Council, etc.

In his foreword Dr Karan Singh describes Dr Rao as “a frank and forthright social researcher with national concerns”, who has written “candidly and brings to the fore clash of values between generations, raises issues and suggest a rethink on lifestyles”. He says “the Book is more than a biography. It offers insights for the young as to how they should face life's challenges while taking proactive initiatives. It is a motivating book written with a certain passion, the story of a village boy, with humble origins who aspired and achieved even without a godfather”.

"This is not merely a record of unique events in my life. This is more retrospective recollections with insights for young people today. I hope these insights help youngsters at crossroads in different contexts to make the best out of every moment, every encounter in their prime years. I expect to offer insights for the young to make conscious choices as they transit to an altogether different value culture without realizing the process is happening," says Dr. Rao

The book is being widely acclaimed for the kind of insights it offers for the young, and for advocating “minimalistic life style” for a more durable future.



The book was released by M Buddha Prasad, Dy. Speaker AP assembly in Vijayawada on November 1, 2015

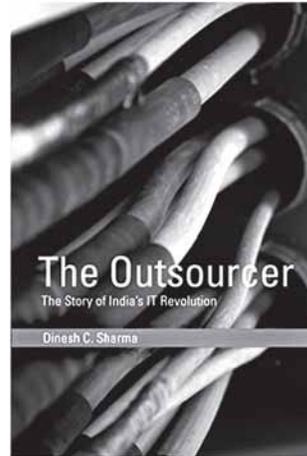


The book was released by Dr T H Chowdary, Telecom Expert & Dr Jayaprakash Narayan, Founder Lok Satta in Hyderabad on October 24, 2015

Story of India's IT Revolution

The rise of the Indian information technology industry is a remarkable economic success story. Software and services exports from India amounted to less than \$100 million in 1990, and today come close to \$100 billion. But, as author Dinesh C Sharma explains in *The Outsourcer*, Indian IT's success has a long prehistory; it did not begin with software support, or with American firms' eager recruitment of cheap and plentiful programming labor, or with India's economic liberalization of the 1990s. The foundations of India's IT revolution were laid long ago, even before the country's independence from British rule in 1947, as leading Indian scientists established research institutes that became centers for the development of computer science and technology. The "miracle" of Indian IT is actually a story about the long work of converting skills and knowledge into capital and wealth. With *The Outsourcer*, Sharma offers the first comprehensive history of the forces that drove India's IT success.

The book describes India's early development of computer technology, part of the country's efforts to achieve national self-sufficiency, and shows that excessive state control stifled IT industry growth before economic policy changed in 1991. He traces the rise and fall (and return) of IBM in India and the emergence of pioneering indigenous hardware and software firms. He describes the satellite communication links and state-sponsored, tax-free technology parks that made software-related outsourcing by foreign firms viable, and the tsunami of outsourcing operations at the beginning of the new millennium. It is the convergence of many factors, from the tradition of technical education to the rise of entrepreneurship to advances in communication technology, that have made the



The Outsourcer: The Story of India's IT Revolution

Dinesh C. Sharma

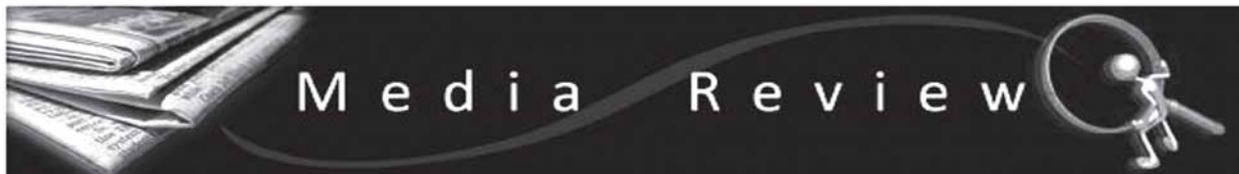
MIT Press, USA

Pages 296, Price \$ 29.95

Available on Amazon.in

spectacular growth of India's IT industry possible.

Ross Bassett, Associate Professor of History, North Carolina State University, notes that "In *The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman introduced Americans to the concept of outsourcing. In *The Outsourcer*, the author shows us its fascinating and most improbable history. Sharma's book should be read by anyone interested in understanding globalization in the twenty-first century." In the opinion of Vinod Dham, widely considered the father of Pentium processor, the book is a thoroughly researched and lucidly written chronicle of how India became the world's preferred destination for outsourcing IT services. He says, "It is a must-read for understanding how Indians became strong in IT and software despite all odds and the role they will play in the digital world of the twenty-first century."



Transparency needed in donations to political parties

Political parties rely heavily on donations for contesting elections and running their daily affairs. They receive huge sums of money in the form of donations/ contributions from corporates or business houses, trusts and individuals. Section 29C of the Representation of People Act, 1951 mandates that political parties submit their contribution details in excess of Rs 20,000 received from any person or a company to the ECI annually, in order to enjoy 100% tax exemption.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW) have analysed data about donations received by the national political parties, above Rs 20,000, during financial year 2014-15 as submitted by the parties to the Election Commission of India. The National Parties include Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M).

The total amount of donations received above Rs 20,000 by the parties was Rs. 622.38 crores from 1695 donations. With 1234 donations from individuals and corporate entities, BJP tops the list and has declared a total of Rs 437.35 crores as received via voluntary contributions above Rs 20,000. The donations declared by BJP is more than twice the aggregate declared by the INC, NCP, CPI and CPM for the same period. The Congress declared the second highest donations of Rs 141.46 crores from 280 donations, followed by NCP which declared a total of Rs 38.82 crores from 52 donations. The number of donations to CPM was 74 and the party collected a total of Rs 3.42 crores while CPI collected Rs 1.33 crores from 55 donations. BSP declared that the party did not receive any donations above Rs 20,000 during FY 2014-15, as it has been declaring for the past 10 years.

The Supreme Court gave a judgment on September 13, 2013 declaring that no part of a candidate's affidavit should be left blank. Similarly, no part of the Form 24A submitted by political parties providing details of donations above Rs 20,000 should be blank.

There is ambiguity in details of donations declared by the National Parties. In the report submitted by INC, the column for declaring mode of contribution does not contain the Cheque/DD numbers, for 192 donations amounting to Rs 138.98 crores. This forms 98% of total donations above Rs 20,000 to the party. Without the complete cheque/DD details, it would be a time consuming process to link the donors against their donations and hence trace the money trail.

Rs 83.915 lakhs was declared as received by BJP from 20 such donors whose PAN details, Address and Mode of contribution (together) were unavailable. Thus, only names of such donors and the contributed amount was declared by the party. 73% of such funds came from corporates and 27% from individual donors. Such blatant disregard for rules by the political parties should be curbed and donations with incomplete details should not be entitled to the benefit of 100% tax exemptions of the defaulting parties.

Full details of all donors should be made available for public scrutiny under the RTI. Some countries where this is done include Bhutan, Nepal, Germany, France, Italy, Brazil, Bulgaria, the US and Japan. In none of these countries is it possible for 75% of the source of funds to be unknown, but at present it is so in India.

The National and regional political parties must provide all information on their finances under the Right to Information Act. This will go a long way to strengthen political parties, elections and democracy.

Legal filter in RTI Act suggested

The Central Information Commission and the state information commissions want the government to introduce a legal filter in the Right to Information Act to sift out vexatious, flippant and frivolous applications. The National Federation of Information Commissions in India, the apex body headed by the chief of CIC, has recommended that the Centre introduce a filter in the transparency legislation so that the RTI Act cannot be misused by applicants, according to a report in *Economic Times*.

“We have had talks with the state commissions. They are unanimous in their view that genuine applications need to be separated from frivolous applications,” Chief Information Commissioner Vijai Sharma told the newspaper. “Vexatious and frivolous applications are clogging the system,” he said. The federation at its meeting last week decided to recommend to the government that a legal filter be introduced. Citing examples from CIC, Sharma said a retired Air Force official had filed 3,588 applications in two years with Air Force authorities seeking almost similar information from different public authorities. The decision, however, has irked civil society. “It is absolutely impossible to objectively define ‘vexatious’ or ‘frivolous,’” said Anjali Bharadwaj of National Campaign for People’s Right to Information. “Frivolous means unimportant.

Government wants to keep CIC selection secret

The government has refused to make public any information relating to the appointment of the next chief information commissioner, insisting that papers relating to the selection process would be made public only after the appointment has been made, according to a report in *Hindustan Times*. The government’s stance is a contrast to its practice over the last decade when it had given out in response to right to information requests names of those who had applied for the post of information commissioners. The department of personnel and training (DoPT), however, seems to have discovered that papers relating to the selection were “cabinet papers”.

“Decision on the appointment for the post of chief information commissioner/information commissioners is not over, therefore, papers related to file ... are exempted under Section 8 (1)(i),” the DoPT said in response to a RTI request, invoking a provision under the law that exempts cabinet papers from disclosure.

Last year when the government did not appoint the CIC for nearly nine months, RTI activists had invoked the information law to figure out that the DoPT had initiated the process on time but was stalled at various levels. This time too, the DoPT did start the selection process in time when it called for people to apply for the information watchdog’s job in September. It is not clear why the process has not been completed so far. A panel, headed by the prime minister and including the opposition leader in the Lok Sabha, is a part of the selection committee that considers names shortlisted by senior civil servants. RTI activist Lokesh Batra wondered if his request was denied because the information had embarrassed the government the last time and was used to lobby for early appointment of the chief.

RTI applicants can now change bench

Uttar Pradesh Right to Information Rules, 2015, empowers RTI applicants in more ways than one. An applicant, or any party to the proceeding, can seek transfer of proceedings from the bench hearing it. Applicant will have to seek transfer of hearing from the chief information commissioner. After considering the comments, CIC can transfer the proceedings to another bench if he finds sufficient ground for such transfer, according to a report in *Times of India*. UP RTI Rules, 2015, were passed by the cabinet recently. SIC had prepared draft rules and put it on its website seeking public suggestions. “We studied the suggestions and found 30 to 35 of them substantive. We consulted over them while we prepared the rules,” said CIC Jawed Usmani. Applicant or any party to the proceeding can seek adjournment of hearing and CIC may grant the same if it is just and sufficient. Besides, during the hearing on any complaint or appeal, an applicant can withdraw it if allowed by the commission or make amendments in his complaint, appeal or written statement in the course of hearing.

RTI soon on Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan Cabinet has approved a draft bill on the right to information, *The Hindu* has reported. Seven months ago when the United National Party was running a coalition government that did not have majority in Parliament, the proposed law was cleared but it was not taken to its logical conclusion and Parliament was dissolved in late June. It was originally included in the 100 days' programme of the government that assumed office in January this year following the defeat of Mahinda Rajapaksa in the presidential election.

Describing the proposed legislation as the "most progressive" in the region, Karunarathna Paranawithana, Deputy Minister of Local Government and Provincial Councils, told *The Hindu* that this was very much similar to India's Right to Information Act. It would guarantee the provision of information "at every level of public sphere". The scope for limitation was "very narrow". An information commission would be constituted and every public authority would have an information officer. Members of the commission would be appointed through the Constitutional Council so that the body would not get "politicised".

Bribe offered to RTI applicant

Babus can be booked for demanding a bribe from a citizen. But what if they are the ones offering the bribe to an RTI applicant? The Central Information Commission is grappling with this peculiar situation after an RTI applicant from west Delhi moved the information watchdog complaining that he had been offered a bribe for not filing information requests. And the anti-corruption branch too was refusing to tell him what action had been taken on his complaint against the official, *Hindustan Times* reports. "The commission finds that, for the first time in the history of Independent India such an incident came to light that a public

servant offered a 'bribe' to member of the public. This can be a symbol of empowerment of a citizen that became possible because of the RTI Act," information commissioner M Sridhar Acharyulu ruled recently. "This is surely a significant incident, as it reversed the process of bribing, though morally wrong," he said, awarding a compensation of Rs 10,000 to Uttam Nagar resident SK Saxena as an interim measure.

In addition, Acharyulu — who also struggled with the case for months — also asked the government official why he shouldn't be made to pay Rs 25,000 for trying to block an RTI application. Saxena had complained that an officer at the Najafgarh subdivision office had offered him a Rs 10,000 bribe in January 2014 for not filing information requests on the welcome gates erected in the Palam assembly constituency. He believed the gates were constructed at an inflated cost and did not even conform to the engineer's designs.

Paytm to sponsor RTI applicants

Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma has agreed to sponsor 1,000 Right to Information requests for onlineRTI.com, a Bengaluru-based platform that helps people file these applications online.

"RTI is a good mechanism for transparency in governance and it has truly brought some power to the common man. People have been truly empowered by using this tool," Sharma was quoted as saying in *Economic Times*. Sharma was approached by the onlineRTI team earlier this month during an 'Ask-me-Anything' session - an interactive session on the social networking website Reddit, where a famous guest is often asked questions in a live chat environment. OnlineRTI is a for-profit platform. It charges Rs 99- Rs 199 per RTI application and several of its users come from small cities and towns. It uses Paytm's gateway for accepting payments.

