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## Social Movement and Social Transformation in India: The RTI (Right to Information) Movement- Content Analysis

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### ABSTRACT :

The Right to Information (RTI) movement in India reflects how ordinary citizens can drive democratic change. Emerging in Rajasthan during the 1990s, it began with demands for wage transparency and grew into a nationwide push for accountability. The RTI Act, enacted in 2005, gave legal power to these demands by allowing citizens to seek information from public authorities.

This study examines the origins, legal framework, and social impact of the RTI movement, supported by an empirical survey of 100 respondents. Findings show high awareness but limited usage, with challenges such as procedural delays and risks to activists. Nevertheless, RTI has exposed corruption, improved governance, and strengthened citizen participation. The study concludes that RTI is more than a legal tool—it is a social transformation mechanism that has redefined the relationship between state and society, while also requiring ongoing protection and reform to remain effective.

**Keywords:** Social Movement, Social Transparency, Accountability, Corruption, Governance, Transformation, RTI (Right to Information) Act, 2005

### Introduction

The Right to Information (RTI) Movement is one of the most important social movements in modern India. It shows how people at the grassroots level can push for change that improves democracy. The RTI Act, passed in 2005, has made it possible for citizens to ask questions and demand answers from the government. This study will explain how the RTI movement started, how it became law, and what changes it brought in society. The present study includes a small survey of 100 people to understand how the RTI Act is seen in practice.

### Statement of the Problem

In a democratic country like India, transparency and accountability are essential for good governance. However, for many years, citizens had limited access to government information. This lack of Transparency led to corruption, misuse of power, and poor delivery of public services.

The Right to Information Act, 2005, was introduced as a legal tool to address these problems by giving people the right to demand information from public authorities. While the Act has been successful in exposing corruption and empowering citizens, several challenges remain. Many citizens are not fully aware of the RTI process, some applications face unnecessary delays or rejections, and RTI activists are often threatened or attacked.

This research seeks to study the RTI Movement as a social movement that has transformed governance in India. It also examines the level of public awareness, the practical use of RTI, and the challenges that need to be solved for the law to achieve its full potential.

### Objectives

- To understand the origin, development, and significance of the RTI Movement in India.
- To explore the role of the RTI Act in promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance.
- To describe the social impact of the RTI Movement, including citizen empowerment and participation.
- To study the legal framework, key provisions, and landmark cases related to the RTI Act.
- To conduct an empirical survey to assess public awareness, usage, and perception of the RTI Act.
- To identify the challenges, limitations, and potential improvements in the implementation of RTI.
- To evaluate how the RTI Movement has contributed to social transformation in India.

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## Conceptual Framework

A social movement is a group effort where people come together to demand change in society. It can be about rights, justice, equality, or better living conditions. Social transformation means a big change in how society works, including laws, values, and everyday practices. Movements and law are often connected because movements put pressure on governments to make new laws or improve old ones. The RTI movement is a good example because people demanded their right to know, and the law was created.

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## Literature Review

Many scholars and activists have studied the RTI Act and its impact. Writings by **Aruna Roy and the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)** highlight how public hearings (Jan Sunwai) built the base of the movement. Legal experts like Justice **P.N. Bhagwati** stressed that the right to know is a part of the right to freedom of speech. Articles in journals like Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) have shown how RTI has exposed corruption and improved governance. However, other studies point out challenges such as delays in replies and risks faced by RTI activists.

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## Social Transformation of RTI

The RTI movement has led to significant social transformation by empowering ordinary citizens to actively participate in governance and demand accountability. By making government information accessible, RTI has helped dismantle the culture of secrecy and corruption that often-marginalized vulnerable communities. It has promoted transparency, strengthened democracy, and encouraged greater civic engagement, enabling people to challenge injustice, improve public services, and assert their rights. This shift has fostered a more informed and vigilant society, where citizens no longer remain passive recipients but become active stakeholders in shaping policies and governance.

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## Historical Background of RTI Movement

The RTI movement began in Rajasthan in the early 1990s when the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) demanded transparency in local accounts, especially wages paid to laborers, and organized “Jan Sunwais” (public hearings) where official records were read aloud to expose corruption. These grassroots efforts inspired wider demands across India, with activists, NGOs, and the media pushing for greater accountability in governance. At the same time, the Supreme Court, through landmark judgments, recognized the right to information as part of the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a), giving constitutional backing to the movement. Several states, including Tamil Nadu and Goa, enacted their own RTI laws in the late 1990s, proving the effectiveness of such legislation and building momentum for a central law. After years of sustained struggle and advocacy, the Indian Parliament passed the Right to Information Act in 2005, granting citizens the legal right to demand information and marking a historic step toward transparency and participatory democracy.

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## Legal Framework

The RTI Act, 2005, is based on Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution. This Article guarantees freedom of speech and expression, and the courts have said that this includes the right to know. Important cases like **State of UP v. Raj Narain (1975)** and **SP Gupta v. Union of India (1982)** helped build this principle. The Act requires public offices to share information, respond within 30 days, and maintain records. It also created the Central and State Information Commissions to handle complaints.

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## Difficulties in Exercising the Right to Information

Despite its potential, the implementation of the RTI Act faces several challenges that limit its effectiveness. Many citizens struggle with a lack of awareness about their rights under the law or find the application process complex and intimidating. Public authorities sometimes delay or deny information, and officials may resist transparency due to fear of exposure or bureaucratic hurdles. Additionally, there are cases of harassment or threats against RTI activists and applicants. These challenges highlight the need for better education, stronger protections, and more proactive governance to ensure that the right to information truly empowers all citizens.

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## Definition of Terms

<b>Social Movement</b>	<i>: A collective effort by people to promote or resist change in society through organized actions and campaigns.</i>
<b>Social Transparency</b>	<i>: The openness and accessibility of information within a society, allowing citizens to hold institutions and individuals accountable.</i>
<b>Corruption</b>	<i>: The abuse of power for personal gain, often involving bribery, fraud, or misuse of public resources.</i>
<b>Governance</b>	<i>: The process of decision-making and implementation by authorities to manage a country, organization, or institution effectively.</i>

**Transformation** : A significant change in structure, systems, or thinking that leads to improvement or a new way of functioning.

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**RTI Act, 2005** : A law that empowers Indian citizens to request information from public authorities, promoting transparency and accountability in government.

### Sources of data

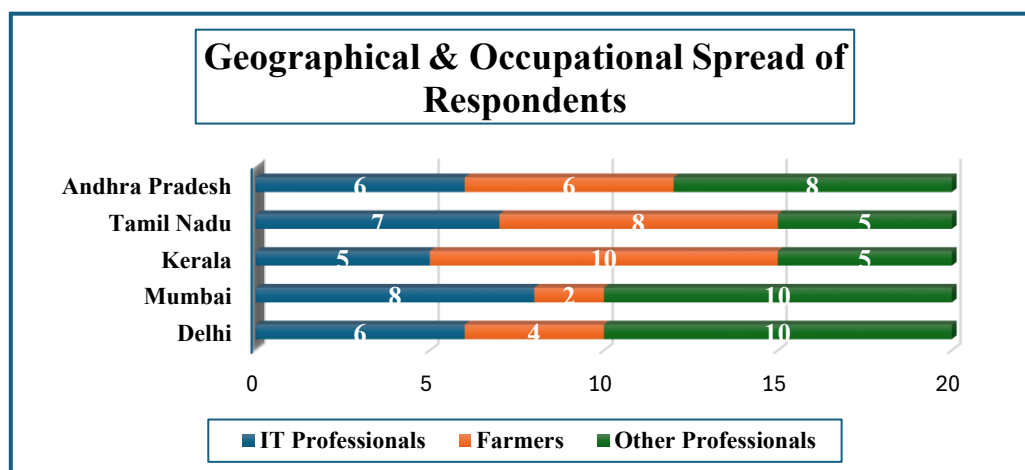
This study is conducting based on both primary and secondary data sources.

- ✓ **Primary Data:** Collected through an empirical survey of 100 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The respondents were from different age groups, genders, and occupations. Their responses helped to assess awareness, usage, and perceptions of the Right to Information Act.
- ✓ **Secondary Data:** Gathered from books, research articles, newspapers, government reports, online journals, and authentic websites. These sources provided background information on the history, legal framework, and impact of the RTI Movement in India.

### Selection of Samples

For the purpose of this study, 100 respondents were selected to represent a mix of regions and occupations in India. The respondents were chosen mainly from Delhi(20), Mumbai(20), Kerala(20), Tamil Nadu(20), and Andhra Pradesh(20) to ensure geographical diversity.

To make the data more meaningful, participants were drawn from different occupational backgrounds such as IT professionals, farmers, and other working professionals. This diversity helped to capture a variety of opinions and experiences regarding the use and awareness of the Right to Information Act. The selection was done through convenience and purposive sampling, where respondents were chosen based on accessibility and willingness to participate. While the sample does not cover the entire population of India, it provides useful insights into the general awareness and perception of RTI among different groups.

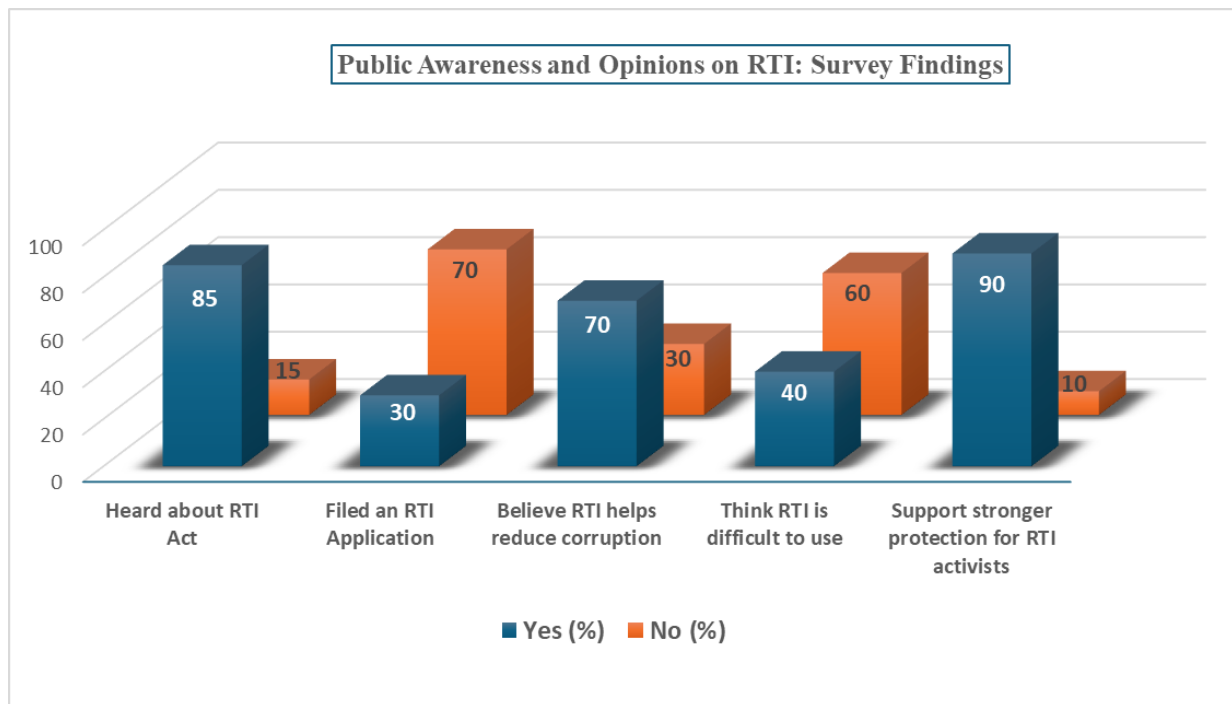


### Methodology

A small survey was done with 100 people to understand their views on RTI. The sample included students, professionals, and homemakers. The questions asked about awareness of RTI, use of RTI, and views on transparency. The small survey was done through online, so the responses are based on personal experiences. The study has adopted descriptive in nature.

Survey Areas and Outcomes		
Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
Heard about RTI Act	85	15
Filed an RTI Application	30	70

<b>Believe RTI helps reduce corruption</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Think RTI is difficult to use</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Support stronger protection for RTI activists</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>10</b>



From the survey, it is clear that most people (85 per cent) have heard about the RTI Act, but only 30 per cent have actually used it. A large majority (70 per cent) believe RTI helps reduce corruption, and 90 percent support stronger protection for RTI activists. However, 40 per cent feel the RTI process is difficult to use

**Table1 distribution of the awareness of RTI Act among the respondents**

REGION	NO OF RESPONDENTS	YES/%	NO/%	TOTAL
Andra Pradesh	20	15(75%)	5(25%)	20(100%)
Tamil Nadu	20	12(60%)	8(40%)	20(100%)
Kerala	20	18(90%)	2(10%)	20(100%)
Mumbai	20	13(65%)	7(35%)	20(100%)
Delhi	20	11(55%)	9(45%)	20(100%)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100</b>

The data presents the regional distribution of awareness of the RTI Act among 100 respondents across five locations. In Andhra Pradesh, out of 20 respondents, 15 individuals (75percentage) were aware of the RTI Act while 5 (25percentage) were not. Tamil Nadu reported 12 aware respondents (60percentage) and 8 unaware (40percentage) out of its 20 participants. Kerala showed the highest awareness, with 18 respondents (90percentage) knowledgeable about the Act and only 2 (10percentage) lacking awareness. In Mumbai, 13 respondents (65percentage) were aware and 7 (35percentage) were unaware. Delhi reflected the lowest awareness, where only 11 respondents (55percentage) knew about the RTI Act while 9 (45percentage) did not. Overall, out of 100 respondents, 69percentage were aware of the RTI Act, whereas 31percentage had no awareness.

This table depicts that the respondents located in Kerala are more aware about RTI Act followed by Tamil Nadu and others.

REGION	NO OF RESPONDENTS	YES/%	NO/%	TOTAL
Andra Pradesh	20	8(40%)	12(60%)	20(100%)

Tamil Nadu	20	13(65%)	7(35%)	20(100%)
Kerala	20	9(45%)	11(55%)	20(100%)
Mumbai	20	11(55%)	9(45%)	20(100%)
Delhi	20	8(40%)	12(60%)	20(100%)
Total:	100	49	51	100

**Table2 Filed an RTI Act**

The table presents the responses of 100 individuals from different regions regarding a particular question. In Andhra Pradesh, out of 20 respondents, 8 people (40 percentage) answered “Yes” while 12 people (60 percentage) answered “No.” In Tamil Nadu, the majority leaned towards “Yes,” with 13 respondents (65 percentage) compared to 7 respondents (35 percentage) who said “No.” Kerala showed a slightly higher number of “No” responses, where 9 respondents (45 percentage) answered “Yes” and 11 respondents (55 percentage) answered “No.” In Mumbai, 11 respondents (55 percentage) agreed with “Yes,” while 9 respondents (45 percentage) disagreed with “No.” Delhi reflected the same pattern as Andhra Pradesh, with 8 respondents (40 percentage) choosing “Yes” and 12 respondents (60 percentage) choosing “No.” Overall, considering all regions together, 49 respondents said “Yes” and 51 respondents said “No,” showing a nearly equal distribution, with a slight majority of respondents favoring the “No” response. This table depicts that the respondents located in Tamil Nadu are more aware about RTI Act followed by Mumbai and others.

**Table3 Believe RTI helps reduce corruption**

REGION	NO OF RESPONDENTS	YES/%	NO/%	TOTAL
Andhra Pradesh	20	6(30%)	14(70%)	20(100%)
Tamil Nadu	20	8(40%)	12(60%)	20(100%)
Kerala	20	3(15%)	17(85%)	20(100%)
Mumbai	20	10(50%)	10(50%)	20(100%)
Delhi	20	9(45%)	11(55%)	20(100%)
Total:	100	36	64	100

The table shows the responses of 100 individuals from different regions. In Andhra Pradesh, out of 20 respondents, only 6 (30 percentage) answered “Yes,” while a larger share of 14 respondents (70 percentage) answered “No.” In Tamil Nadu, 8 respondents (40 percentage) said “Yes” and 12 respondents (60 percentage) said “No.” Kerala recorded the lowest “Yes” responses, with just 3 respondents (15 percentage) in favor and 17 respondents (85 percentage) against. In Mumbai, the responses were evenly split, with 10 respondents (50 percentage) saying “Yes” and 10 respondents (50 percentage) saying “No.” In Delhi, 9 respondents (45 percentage) answered “Yes,” while 11 respondents (55 percentage) answered “No.” When considering the overall total across all regions, 36 respondents (36 percentage) agreed with “Yes,” while 64 respondents (64 percentage) disagreed with “No,” showing a clear majority leaning towards the “No” response.

This table depicts that the respondents located in Mumbai are more aware about RTI Act followed by Delhi and others.

**Table4 Think RTI is difficult to use**

REGION	NO OF RESPONDENTS	YES/%	NO/%	TOTAL
Andhra Pradesh	20	9(45%)	11(55%)	20(100%)
Tamil Nadu	20	15(75%)	5(25%)	20(100%)
Kerala	20	17(85%)	3(15%)	20(100%)
Mumbai	20	15(75%)	5(25%)	20(100%)
Delhi	20	12(60%)	8(40%)	20(100%)
Total:	100	68	32	100

The table highlights the responses of 100 individuals from five different regions. In Andhra Pradesh, out of 20 respondents, 9 (45 percentage) said “Yes,” while 11 (55 percentage) said “No.” In Tamil Nadu, the majority favored “Yes,” with 15 respondents (75 percentage), while only 5 respondents (25 percentage) said “No.” Kerala showed the highest proportion of “Yes” responses, with 17 respondents (85 percentage) agreeing and only 3 respondents (15 percentage) disagreeing. Mumbai also recorded a strong majority for “Yes,” where 15 respondents (75 percentage) agreed and 5 respondents (25 percentage) disagreed. In Delhi, 12 respondents (60 percentage) supported “Yes” and 8 respondents (40 percentage) chose “No.” Overall, out of the 100 respondents across all regions, 68 (68 percentage) gave a “Yes” response, while 32 (32 percentage) gave a “No” response, indicating that the majority of individuals expressed agreement.

This table depicts that the respondents located in Kerala are more aware about RTI Act followed by Tamil Nadu, Mumbai and others.

**Table5 Support stronger protection for RTI activists**

REGION	NO OF RESPONDENTS	YES/%	NO/%	TOTAL
Andra Pradesh	20	14(70%)	6(30%)	20(100%)
Tamil Nadu	20	7(35%)	13(65%)	20(100%)
Kerala	20	8(40%)	12(60%)	20(100%)
Mumbai	20	12(60%)	8(40%)	20(100%)
Delhi	20	11(55%)	9(45%)	20(100%)
Total:	100	52	48	100

The table presents the responses of 100 individuals from five regions. In Andhra Pradesh, out of 20 respondents, 14 (70 percentage) answered “Yes,” while 6 (30 percentage) answered “No.” In Tamil Nadu, the majority gave a negative response, with 7 respondents (35 percentage) saying “Yes” and 13 respondents (65 percentage) saying “No.” Kerala showed a similar pattern, with 8 respondents (40 percentage) in favor and 12 respondents (60 percentage) against. In Mumbai, 12 respondents (60 percentage) chose “Yes,” while 8 respondents (40 percentage) chose “No.” Delhi displayed a slightly positive tilt, with 11 respondents (55 percentage) agreeing and 9 respondents (45 percentage) disagreeing. Looking at the overall total, 52 respondents (52 percentage) gave a “Yes” response, while 48 respondents (48 percentage) gave a “No” response, indicating a nearly balanced distribution with a slight majority favoring “Yes.”

This table depicts that the respondents located in Andra Pradesh are more aware about RTI Act followed by Mumbai and others.

### **Impact on Social Transformation**

The RTI Act has changed the way citizens and the government interact. It has given people the confidence to ask questions. It has exposed many scams and brought hidden issues into public discussion. It also made officials more careful about record-keeping and accountability. At the same time, it has increased public participation in governance.

### **Challenges and Criticisms**

Even though RTI is powerful, there are many problems. Government offices sometimes delay or deny information. Some RTI activists face harassment or violence. There are also complaints that people misuse RTI for personal disputes. Recent amendments have made the law weaker, especially in terms of the independence of Information Commissions.

### **Obstacles in Carrying Out the RTI Survey**

While conducting the survey on RTI awareness and usage, several challenges were encountered. Many respondents were unaware of the RTI Act or hesitant to discuss their experiences due to fear of repercussions. Some found it difficult to understand the survey questions, especially in areas with low literacy rates. Accessing accurate information was also a challenge, as some officials were reluctant to share data or delayed responses. Additionally, logistical issues such as reaching remote locations and language barriers made the data collection process more complex. These obstacles highlight the ongoing difficulties in spreading awareness and implementing RTI effectively at the grassroots level.

## **Case Studies**

### **Case 1: RTI and NREGA in Rajasthan**

Under the **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)**, the government guarantees 100 days of wage employment to rural households. However, many workers faced issues like delayed or non-payment of wages. In Rajasthan, villagers used the **RTI Act** to access official records such as muster rolls and wage payment lists. These documents revealed the presence of **“ghost workers”**—fake or duplicate names on the payroll meant to siphon off wages illegally. By exposing these irregularities, the villagers were able to demand and receive their rightful payments. This case highlighted how RTI can empower marginalized communities to claim their rights and reduce corruption at the grassroots level.

### **Case 2: RTI and the 2G Spectrum Scam**

The **2G Spectrum Scam** involved the alleged irregular and corrupt allocation of telecom spectrum licenses in 2008, resulting in massive financial losses to the government. Several **RTI activists and citizens** filed applications requesting details about the allocation process and license issuance. Although many requests were initially denied or met with resistance, persistent RTI use and media attention helped bring the issue into the public eye. The transparency triggered by RTI played a key role in investigations and legal action against government officials and corporate players involved. This case demonstrated the RTI Act’s potential to expose large-scale corruption at the highest levels of governance.

### **Case 3: RTI and Transparency in School Funds**

Parents and community members in states like Delhi, Mumbai, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu used RTI requests to obtain detailed information on how schools were utilizing government grants and funds. Many schools received significant amounts for infrastructure, midday meals, and educational resources, but there were widespread concerns about misuse or mismanagement of these funds. Through RTI, parents could access budgets, expenditure reports, and audit documents. This transparency enabled them to hold school authorities accountable, leading to improved fund management, better quality of education, and increased community participation in school affairs. It also encouraged authorities to follow proper procedures and reduce financial irregularities.

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#### **Scope of the Study**

- ✓ The study focuses on the evolution, implementation, and impact of the RTI movement in India.
- ✓ It examines how RTI has empowered citizens in accessing government information and promoting transparency.
- ✓ The research includes analysis of landmark cases, government responses, and the role of civil society organizations in the movement.
- ✓ The study primarily covers perspectives from key states, public institutions, and citizens who have actively used RTI.

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#### **Limitations of the Study**

- The research is limited to the period from the introduction of the RTI Act (2005) to the present and may not capture all historical precursors to the movement.
- Due to time and resource constraints, the study may not include all states or all citizen experiences across India. Only covered in 100 respondents from the different geographical area.
- Access to some official data and internal government processes may be restricted, affecting comprehensive analysis.
- The study relies partly on secondary data sources, which may include biases or gaps in reporting.

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#### **Current Relevance & Future Prospects**

RTI is still very important in India. In the digital age, it can be linked with e- governance to make information easier to access. At the same time, issues like privacy and data protection need attention. Future reforms should focus on making RTI simple to use, protecting activists, and training officials to respond properly.

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#### **Conclusion**

The RTI Movement is a good example of how a social movement can change society. It started with people in small villages asking for their right to know and became a national law. The RTI Act has made government more open and has empowered citizens. Even though challenges remain, RTI is a powerful tool for democracy and will continue to play an important role in India's future.

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