

# Study of Emerging Leadership Through Right to Information (RTI)

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Submitted By

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388

## Preface

As an RTI activist I came across many people who have used the law diligently and effectively for personal gains as well as for the gain of the community. Whether it is seeking accountability or compelling the administration to deliver as per the provisions of the schemes and programmes the applicant develops an interface with the administration and the public. I have seen this interface over a period of time empowering many applicants to have a say in the affairs of the public administration. As a number of schemes and welfare programs are being implemented at the local level people are getting exposed to the administration more regularly. Even the national flagship programmes targeting the panchayats and municipalities as the service delivery agencies have compounded the governance at the base level. Hence it is an opportunity for the common man to bolster his position as well as participation in the local body administration. RTI applicants by the very nature of seeking accountability and exposing the administration are increasingly becoming the agency of delivery for the last man. They are seen not only as the bridge between the administration and the suffering non-beneficiaries but also they are considered as the hedge between governance and non-governance. Wherever there is awareness about Right to Information and applications under the Act from the public there we witness an increasing dynamics from non-governance to good governance.

In Odisha, I have witnessed a number of RTI applicants not only impacting upon the governance delivery at the grassroots but also the transformation of the RTI applicants into evolving leadership. First; by recognition from the administration for the continuous mounting scrutiny that compels them to adhere to the rules and next from the public as agency of delivery of goods which otherwise not available. This recognition from both the ends generates the required trust, stature and legitimacy for the RTI activist to play the leadership role in the operational area. It is true that I have seen people evolve out of RTI and take responsibility at a higher and larger sphere outsmarting the very self which was in inhibition.

I take the opportunity of the fellowship program from DoPT, Government of India to have a concrete study on the assumptions I have and to do case analysis to arrive at the conclusion that RTI has opened up an era of leadership where the leader is non-traditional and is from unassuming background. No doubt; many friends from the field of RTI, Orissa Sookhna Adhikar Manch and many NGOs working the field of transparency have given references of RTI leaders in various districts to make my task easy. Last but not the least, the constant guidance and encouragement from Dr C. Sheela Reddy, Associate Professor of Socio-Political Development (IIPA) and Ms. Sarita Nair, Under Secretary to the Government of India has contributed immensely to the quality and girth of the study.

## Index

- Chapter 1 Introduction
- Chapter II Transformation of RTI Activists into Leaders - Some Case Studies
- Chapter III Perception of Stakeholders about the Emerging Leadership
- Chapter IV Challenges in the field of RTI Implementation
- Chapter V Measures to safe guard RTI regime
- Chapter VI Conclusion

# Chapter-1

## Introduction

Right to information (RTI) act, 2005 is a simple tool which helps the citizens to access information from the public authority. As per the provisions a citizen can take photocopy of any document or can seek sample of any material or can inspect any record or work. All the organizations and institutions set up under the constitution or funded by the government or controlled through any law are declared as public authorities and are bound to supply information as per the provisions of the RTI act. Hence, any citizen can seek information under section 6 of the act or can access suo moto declarations under section 4 of the act. Otherwise speaking the act has provisions for suo moto disclosure for the public authorities through which they are bound to declare certain type of information on their own and also it has provisions for the citizens by which they are empowered to seek any information from the public authorities not limited by section 8 and 9 of the act.

The RTI act innocuously speaks of obligation on the part of administration and government to supply information and right of the citizen to seek information. But, it becomes a potent game changer and a catalyst to open up administration for its objective of transparency, accountability, informed citizenship and prevention of corruption. It is obvious that under the RTI regime the common man can access documents to ensure transparency of transactions; can locate flaws and illegal dealings and can expose manifest corruptions leading to fixing of accountability. So right to information is not only seeking information but engaging the administration and the government to be transparent, accountable and non-corrupt. There are many cases where a simple RTI application seeking certain information has exposed the administration for its wrong doings and accountability has been established. It has created political upheavals and destabilized governments. For example the information requirement under RTI act for the "Adarsha Housing Society" in Maharashtra established the fact that there was a massive scam in the allotment of the residential units and certain bureaucrats were sent to the jail for their role in the scam. Even the then chief minister of Maharashtra had to resign from his post as it was found out that his relatives have benefited from the scam. Similarly, information obtained under RTI act has exposed corruption, lapses and inadequate responses in the implementation of almost all welfare schemes and has empowered the common man to fight for his entitlements and to broaden his engagements with the administration and government. It has given boost to evidence based advocacy by the common man and has also ensured convictions of the accused at a better rate. After enactment of the RTI act there are different phases of public participation and varied outcomes. Initially the status quoist administration was very reluctant to share information under the RTI provisions and the applicant had to fight his way to get one application received by the Public Information officer (PIO/APIO) of a public authority. But some diehard citizens took up the cause of transparency and accountability with a vengeance and ensured that the public authority is tamed to accept the reality of an RTI regime where they are open to public scrutiny and discretions are limited by causal prudence and clarifications.

Using RTI as a tool for information, investigation, intervention and ensuring accountable governance through seeking relevant documents is not an easy task. While at the grass roots the endeavour for

proper entitlements or credible information generate a conflict of interest with the local contractors or officials and petty politicians thriving upon percentage system whereby a definite percentage of the entitlements is taken as bribe and facilitation dues, at the upper level the sensitive information relating to corruption and lapses has a great deal of political and financial repercussion. Hence, there is a number of news detailing non-acceptance of RTI application, denial of information on flimsy grounds, delaying supply of information, intimidation by the perpetrators of the corruption and even murder of RTI activists. For many RTI activists applying and securing information at times becomes the first step towards the larger goal of cleansing the system of the wrong doings. They not only obtain the information but doggedly pursue the follow up action programme to see that the guilty is penalized and the wrongs are corrected. In the process, the activists no more remain confined to the RTI regime as only RTI applicants but they metamorphose into a deliverer, a crusader, a fighter and a rallying point against injustice and corruption. In their zeal to ensure transparency and accountability these people have not only withstood the initial resistance and harassment from the administration and vested interest groups but also turned around the rules of engagement of the administration and the people. Depending upon their perseverance and conviction they rise in the socio-political milieu and ensured that a grain of new leadership is shown. RTI activists like Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal, Subash Aggarwal, Sandeep Pandey, Medha Patkar and others became household names for their activities as well as continuous effort to strengthen RTI regime by obtaining landmark judgments from the Information Commission and Judiciary against all odds and reluctance of the administration. Whether it is accepting the file noting as a part of records accessible under RTI act or compelling the higher judiciary to go for suo moto disclosure of their property or compelling the political parties to accept RTI act as a designated public authority the citizens have fought a protracted battle to see that RTI is used as a tool of public empowerment.

At the national level Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal and Aruna Roy are the solid embodiment of RTI leadership. These people not only used RTI as a tool to ensure entitlements for the disadvantaged people and to fight against corruption but also took up campaigns to popularize the act and to capacitate the public in using it as a viable tool for accountability seeking. In the process these RTI activists got nationwide recognition and carried considerable weight in the affairs of the administration and the state. While Anna Hazare ascended to the stature of a national figure and could mobilize the masses for the Janalokpal movement in crores, Arvind Kejriwal formed "Aam Aadmi Party" (AAP) and occupied the Chief Minister post of the state of Delhi. Similarly Aruna Roy became a member of the national advisory council to the Chairman of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and influenced the key legislations like the Forest Rights act and the Right to food act etc. In various states also there is manifest evidence of RTI leadership playing a significant role in the socio-political field of the state. It is common knowledge that the Janalokpal movement and the formation of AAP as a political party heavily depended on the RTI activists throughout the country and a new breed of uncompromising, unconventional, non-traditional socio-political leadership took the centre stage of Indian polity and civil society ushering in an era of informed citizenship.

The present study is an endeavour to map the extent of RTI leadership that has transformed into a full fledged leadership in the socio-political context at different levels i.e. the leadership has been shaped in

302

the socio-political context and not in the field of Right to Information only. Odisha being the domain state for the study it will focus upon Panchayat, block, district and state level RTI activists who have transformed into a leadership position by virtue of their action, emerging situation, public recognition and administrative response. It is quite interesting to map the emergence of leadership in RTI activism. Because the transformation from a common citizen willing to unravel the governance mystery and to seek accountability to that of a prominent leader in the locality with social and political stakes is definitely a new breed of leadership quite distinct from traditional political leadership. In Odisha we have seen RTI activists in far off areas like Rayagada, Baragada, Sambalpur, Sundergarh and in coastal areas like Khorda, Ganjam, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Jagatsinghpur etc emerged from humble background and of late have dominated the socio-political life of the respective localities with leadership and public intervention. Whether it is Narayan Majhi, a tribal youth from Sundergarh or Anand Samal a farmer from Sambalpur or Srikanta Tripathy, a village boy from Khurda district the rise of these activists has been phenomenal for their RTI interventions. People look forward to all these new breed of leaders for solution of local issues and they are emerging as rallying point for alternative politics in terms of transparency drive against the established model of intransience governance.

#### **Objective of the study:**

1. This study will map the discourse of selected RTI activists in the state of Odisha through personal interview, field visits and structured questionnaire. It will try to see the elements of general trend that transforms an RTI activist into a leader. It will be a path breaker in terms of concretely mapping the impact of RTI regime in an allied field of leadership creation which is not in the stated objective of the act.
2. It will identify grey areas in the field of RTI implementation through key case studies collected from these activists and their operational areas. As the leadership development involves protracted struggle and engagement with the administration, public authority and information commission on key features of the RTI act and its implementation and interpretation it's a very good source for identification of huddles in the transparency regime.
3. The study will be in a position to recommend amendments in the act and preparing guidelines for different stake holders towards improved RTI regime as well as further leadership building.

#### **Methodology:**

1. The study will identify RTI activists with a wide presence in their area of operation recognized by people and media and also who are involved in multiple issues, organizations and movements to be accepted as leaders apart from their RTI activism. It will select the targeted leadership with due emphasis on gender, social back ground, location and extent of impact.
2. The study will have a structured questionnaire for the RTI activist to map the details of his journey from being a common citizen to that of a leader and will capture his experience in the field of RTI implementation. It will also interact with the family members and the neighbours to do the perception study about the emerging leadership.
3. The study will have a semi structured questionnaire for all other stake holders like the beneficiaries helped by the activist, the public authorities with whom the activist has a

protracted engagement, and the local leadership who recognize the activist as a potential and emerged intervener and leader. Thus the outside perception of leadership building can be captured.

4. It will collect case studies and issues that have bearing on leadership building and also key to the functioning of the RTI regime. It will help identify grey areas in the implementation of right to information act from a practitioner's perspective and will suggest remedial measures urgently needed to safe guard and strengthen the RTI regime for ensuring transparent, accountable and participatory governance.

## Chapter-II

### Transformation of RTI Activists into Leaders - Some Case Studies

Leadership has been described as "a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task". For example some understand a leader simply as somebody whom people follow or as somebody who guides or directs others, while others define leadership as "organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal". But the discourse of a common citizen into a transformed leader in the RTI regime can be theorized through its common elements such as:

**Humble background:** Almost all the RTI activists are simply common citizens without any political or social lineage and were not famous otherwise. They started locally with personal or public issues and tried to solve them through the use of RTI act. Mostly these activists are an educated lot and relied upon persistent questioning and information to put the administration and public authority under scrutiny and ensured accountability for all the omissions and commissions.

**RTI Activism:** Starting with queries for information, solving of problems and exposing the wrong doings the RTI activists helped the public as a catalytic agent of good governance. They took up generic issues like ensuring entitlements under Public Distribution system (PDS), availability of wages under National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and to expedite pending files negating greasing of hands of public officials through bribing. All these acts created good will among the public for the RTI activists and the administration started to recognize these agencies of transparency. With the increasing work, these RTI activists got into informed advocacy on different issues. They got prominence in the field of Panchayatiraj system, Governance and accountability, Implementation of welfare schemes, Training and capacity building, Advocacy and Monitoring etc. Many of them acquired such reputation that the public and administration looked at them as an agency of conflict management and in the process the RTI activists got success in solving local problems. Even the politicians took note of this influential section and in many places the RTI activists are playing significant roles in shaping the polity of the area and issues involved.

**Ground breaking:** Certain events and issues put the normal, neighborhood, inquisitive, righteous RTI activists in a situation where they got recognized for the larger cause rather than their RTI achievements. For example, the RTI applications for the Adarsha Housing Scam or the Delhi Jal Board Water privatisation were never discussed in the public forums but both these issues were of much political significance and it got tremendous leadership dividend for Mrs. Medha Patkar and Mr Arvind Kejriwal. Similarly, in villages and panchayats certain issues of corruption and inaction put the information requirement at the back ground and positioned the RTI activist vis-vis the entrenched leadership thereby generating the scope for emergence of new leadership.

**Scaling up:** It is indeed a matter of ability, foresight and level of conviction as well as extent of area of operation which defined the level of transformation of the RTI activist. No more Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal and Aruna Roy are discussed as RTI activists; rather they are now the voices of the common

man and are known as undisputed leaders in the socio-political arena. We have many examples of upcoming leaders at different levels in the panchayats, blocks, districts, states and at national level. Depending upon the level of engagement the leadership has got exposed to the public, media and administration and has been perceived to be a leader in the appropriate level.

While visiting some of the prominent RTI activists of the state who have matured into leadership of the area we saw the above factors in various scales manifesting in the discourse of the emerging leaders. Here we will be discussing the emergence of some of the RTI leaders as case studies to substantiate our assumption that RTI is a tool for building up citizen leadership and it has manifest results.

**Anand Kumar Samal**



Born on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1983 in a village namely Tribanpur in Rairakhol block of Sambalpur district in Odisha Mr. Anand kumar samal is a shy, reserve farmer and is well known in his locality as an RTI activist. After completion of his graduation Mr. Anand concentrated in farming and ploughed the family land. He was like any other youth of the locality and was living the life of a common man but was different in the sense that he had a strong desire to do something unique in life. In the year 2006 Mr. Anand came to know about a campaign on Right to Information namely "Ghus ko Ghussa" and came to Bhubaneswar to participate in the fifteen days campaign programme spearheaded by "Parivartan" the organization

390  
founded by Mr. Arvind kejriwal. In the camp at Bhubaneswar at the Centre for Youth and Social Development Mr. Anand met a number of likeminded youths, learned about the RTI act and its uses and got the tool to engage the administration by making them accountable to issues of public concern.

Mr. Anand joined hands with the likeminded youths and became a part of Odisha Soochana Adhikar Mancha (OSAM), a platform for RTI activism. Since then he has no looking back. He has decided to commit himself for the public cause. He started to file RTI applications for his villagers on issues like old age pension, entitlements under Public Distribution system, repairing of the tube well and wages under the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme etc. As soon as his queries for information compelled the local officials to expedite their work and people got result in terms of entitlements and exposure of corruption, he emerged as a rallying point for the grievance redressal of the public. Whether it is repairing the Anganwadi centre or payment of dues of the Kendu leaf pluckers or availing subsidized manure through application of RTI, Anand demonstrated the power of this transparency tool and people started to take note of it. His father a retired primary teacher and other family members also encouraged his social work and he took his RTI activism very seriously.

One incident changed the profile of the low key, shy, introvert Anand into an outspoken, combative RTI activist and he got due recognition as a potential leader from the public and the media. He came to know that the local Block office has not prepared the Suo moto disclosures mandatory under section four of the RTI act and the people are facing various problems in applying for information as there are no display boards mentioning the name and designation of the Public Information officer and the First Appellate authority. Mr Anand approached the Block Development Officer (BDO) who heads the Block and requested him to ensure the preparation of the suo moto disclosure and wall writings as necessary under the act for the public convenience. But to his surprise the public authority did not heed to his request and nobody was bothered to implement the mandatory provision of the act. After waiting for some time Mr. Anand wrote a letter to the BDO and warned that if the provisions won't be implemented within fifteen days of receiving the letter then he will resort to a demonstration before the Block office. To his utter dismay the Block officials paid scant regards for the letter and there was no development in this regard. Now Mr. Anand was forced into an action which he was never acquainted with. He called some friends, invited the media, arranged some finance for a mike and sat on Dharna before the office of the BDO. Slowly the people who had come with grievances to the Block office gathered at the spot and participated in the demonstration against the BDO. As the pitch of the demonstration became louder the BDO was forced to come out of his room and assuaged Mr. Anand that the suo moto disclosure provisions will be implemented within two days. Mr. Anand got his first victory against the administration and got exposure to mass mobilization. It strengthened his resolve for activism and the people and media took note of the emerging leadership.

As the intervention level grew the local youths like Ajay kumar Sahoo, Sanjay Kumar biswal, Bijay Bhusan Pradhan, Arun Kumar Pradhan, Sanjay Sagar, Jitendra Pradhan, Anil Prusty, Sudhir Pradhan and Bhagaban Pradhan etc. joined Anand to spread the RTI movement in the area. A fellowship from Odisha Soochana Adhikar Mancha helped Anand to build the capacity of the youths through training and exposure and ensured the fact that there is a strong local movement towards transparency and accountability. Soon he realized the need for an organization and formed "Soochana Adhikar and

**Samajik Sameekshya Mancha, Rairakhol**” which provided a platform for all the RTI activists in the Rairakhol Block to interact, complement and intervene in various issues of the region. Many of the issues which came for the consideration of the RTI activists in the region related to issues of the farmers and Anand established linkage with eminent farmer leaders of the state like Lingaraj and Ashok Pradhan to salvage the problem of these farmers beyond RTI. He realized the need for uniting the farmers and started organizing the farmers under the banner of “**Santha Bhimabhoi Krushak Sangharsha Samiti**” and ensured that the farmers have their voice heard. They took up the corruption issue of Bansajal Cooperative where thirty lakhs of rupees of the farmers was siphoned off by the management. Right now the struggle is on to get back the money of the poor farmers and also the Samiti is taking up other issues of prevention of farmer suicide, compensation for crop loss and prevention of under rate selling of crops. Now Anand is no more an RTI activist only, he has matured into a full fledged young leader of the area who is shouted in all occasions and is involved in all the developmental issues of Rairakhol. In the process he has developed a strong association with a lot of organizations like Yusuf Meherally Yuba Biradari (Mumbai), National Council for People’s Right to Information (NCPRI), Milita Odisha Nisha Nibaran Abhijan (MONNA), India Against Corruption (IAC), Popular Education and Action Centre (PEACE), National Alliance for People’s Movement (NAPM), Paschim Odisha Krushak sangathan and a number of social organizations.

His recognition as a leader got strengthened when he was offered a ticket to contest as a candidate for the Lok Sabha in 2014 on behalf of the **AAM AADMI PARTY (AAP)**. Anand contested the general election from Sambalpur Lok Sabha Constituency with only one lakh of rupees and secured seven thousand votes. Now from a social activist he has metamorphosed into a political leader but he remembers himself as the simple village guy who uses RTI to help the people. Still he prefers himself to be called an RTI activist rather than a political activist. He has now completed his Masters degree in Sociology and a Bachelor degree in Law but he is determined to continue his social work and to help the people in need through his empowerment drive.

## Anupama Sethy



Anupama Sethy, a young girl of 26 years from the remote village Karatutha in Patapur Gram Panchayat of Kujanga Block in Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha will pass off as any other girl unless you interact and delve into the profile of this dalit lady from the schedule caste community. Armed with a Master degree in Social work in 2013 she is ready to value add her work which she started at the tender age of 18 years. Pushed to the wall by the accident of her father and with a burden to manage the family of five members Anupama joined an HIV-AIDS awareness programme of an NGO JISSR as a manager and got the first exposure to social work. Soon she developed a keen interest in the public affairs and started formation of self help groups in her own locality for financial strengthening of the local ladies. After two years in job, Anupama got to know about one platform "Odisha Soochana Adhikar Mancha" (OSAM) which worked on Right to Information and promoted transparency and accountability in governance. She approached OSAM and obtained a fellowship to work in the remote tribal populated Rayagada district in the south of the state to propagate RTI and to train the youths there. As a young lady of twenty years who has not gone out of her area it was a challenging assignment to work in a district which is at four hundred kilometer distance and the organization as such had

no infrastructure to support her. She went there alone, took a rented accommodation and started her work without any vehicle support. Travelling throughout the district on public transport, approaching the local administration to implement the RTI provisions and training the local tribals to use RTI as a grievance redressal mechanism was a herculean task. She overcame all the difficulties and successfully delivered on her tasks. But while working on RTI she understood the power of this transparency tool and the universal need of good governance.

As her own Block Kujanga was a den of corruption and people suffered from mal-administration, Anupama decided to get back to her village and start working for the local public. Although earning still was a problem she planned to strengthen the SHG groups which she had formed all through the years and be self-reliant. She started filing RTI applications on her own, visited the public authorities to usher in transparency and mobilized the public on accountable governance. Soon she had a team of five persons who worked relentlessly to promote RTI in the region. She herself filed more than fifty RTI applications on Pension cases, Indira Awas, Community Health Centre Complex, Girls school toilet, Public Distribution System, Widows Pension, Disability cases, incomplete road, stipend for Sc/St students, electricity connection, tube well and Below Poverty Level card etc. All these activism compelled the vested interest groups to issue soft threats and worried the parents of Anupama. Again the plan for income through the SHG economic activities did not grow as per the design. Now slowly the pressure was mounting on her to get into a job and leave her activism.

But Anupama had already decided to be in the public life. She had joined Anna Hazare's India against Corruption movement in demand for Jana Lokpal law and subsequently the Aam Aadmi Party headed by Mr. Arvind Kejriwal. So she took up an assignment of community correspondent which provided her some monetary support and also aided her independent work of RTI intervention. Now she is more effective as a citizen journalist. She took up larger issues of corruption and exposed the officials involved in it. Even now she could take up cases directly with the public authorities like the BDO, Tahasildar, and IIC of police station and provide relief to the aggrieved parties. Slowly she became the rallying point for any dispute or grievance of the public of her Panchayat and Block. She got involved into a number of issues and organizations like the Nari Surakshya Samiti (NSS), Mission on Awareness and Social Service (MASS), Nisha Mukti Yuva Sangathan (NMYS), Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) and Milita Odisha Nisha Nibaran Abhijan (MONNA).

Amidst all these perception building, encouraged by the volunteers Anupama decided to contest the general election in 2014 from AAM AADMI PARTY. She applied for the Loksabha seat of Jagatsinghpur reserved constituency and beating other two contenders obtained the party ticket to contest the poll. Almost without any finance in hand she joined the fray with

small support from the party and well wishers. She crisscrossed the constituency with her small band of supporters and fought the money and muscle power of the ruling party bravely. She made a small dent with six thousands and nine hundred votes and now is a potential contender for the future. The journey is not completed yet. With the constant pressure from the family to settle down and the nagging financial requirements to manage the family she is still into a balancing act. Her desire and strong conviction for the public life no doubt will be leading her discourse, but for the public she is already an achiever, a light to be followed and a leader to be looked upon to.

**Shrikanta Kumar Tripathy**



From Salatara village of Gediapalli Panchayat in Bolagada block of Khurda district Mr. Srikanta Tripathy, son of late Muralidhar Tripathy is now a busy person. In his thirties, the man is the most sought after person by the officials of the block as well as the villagers of the area and even the political parties depend upon him for solving the local disputes. Seven years ago Mr. Tripathy was only a humble farmer being awarded by the department of the fisheries for the fish cultivation in the leased village pond. His cable T.V. business and tent house work kept him

busy for the rest of the time. His chanced introduction to the RTI act changed the discourse of his life. From friends he heard that there is an act which can end the intransience of the government and can end the monopoly of the officials over information. He approached the Odisha Soochana Adhikar Mancha for proper training on RTI act and offered himself as a volunteer to the movement.

Within days, Mr. Tripathy realized the power of the transparency act. He filed RTI applications on various issues relating to the problem of the common man like old age pension, water and sanitation, electrification under Rajiv Gandhi rural electrification scheme, stipends to SC/ST students and support for the physically challenged persons, road construction, distribution of job cards under NREGA scheme, suo moto disclosure under RTI act and many other welfare schemes. His probing questions and search for accountability through seeking of proper information and consistent activities put the local officials who were involved in all kinds of corruption in a fix. They first tried not to provide information under the provisions of the act on flimsy grounds. But Shrikant's doggedness and subsequent orders of the information commission ensured that the officials no more deny information to the applicants.

Then there was a ploy to stop Shrikant by filing two false FIRs against him. One was filed by the executive officer of the Panchayat and the samiti member for destroying the records while inspecting it and another was filed through some villagers while seeking sample for the quality check under the act. Both cases are sub judice and he is on bail. Even the villagers were motivated to stop him from asking for information spreading the rumour that his applications were hindering the development projects in the area. But, by this time Shrikanta has a good following in the Panchayat. Now there are more than forty youths who are practicing RTI and have come together under the banner of "Gediapalli Suchana Adhikar Mancha". Again the exposure of corruption as well as the benefits from the RTI applications were overwhelming. People have realized that RTI has the potential to empower themselves against the authoritarian administration and it's the key to participatory governance. Even the officials have accepted the fact that Gediapalli is transforming into an "RTI Panchayat" and they term it accordingly.

Shrikanta now is the focal point in the RTI activism of the Block. He has also helped Odisha Suchana Adhikar Mancha to spread the RTI message in the state of Odisha. His applications have fetched many success stories. A drinking water project of rupees thirty lakhs in Salatara village which was completed on paper only got its life out of his application. Similarly, sixty-nine old age pensions, stipends, completion of the pending road work and many other things came as achievement to him. It's not a simple journey. A number of training programmes for the local public, mobilization of the villagers for dharana in demand for legitimate entitlements, legal fight against the vested interests, taking on the challenges from the political touts and above all

402

withstanding the financial pressure to be employed gainfully have all catered to increasing the strength of Shrikanta. Now he is the leader nobody can ignore. Whether it is village dispute, compliance from the administration, developmental work or political campaigning in local body elections he has a say in everything. Of course, it is not by design of himself but by the public pressure to see him amidst thick of the events that his discourse in the public life has been dictated.

### Narayan Majhi



An electrical Diploma engineer by training, Mr. Narayan Majhi a tribal youth from the village chhamunda in Phulwari Panchayat of Badgaon Block in Sundergarh district of Odisha was a shy tribal youth interested in social work. He was invited by social activist Laxmi Singh to a youth training programme at Sundergarh organized by the Yusuf Meherally Centre in the year 2007. There Mr. Narayan learned the practice of RTI act from the trainer Mr. Nishikanta Mohapatra. Then there is no looking back. Till now he has filed more than two hundred and fifty RTI applications and has organized social audits on implementation status of Forest Rights Act, Public Distribution System, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Narayan has become

the rallying point against injustice and corruption in the block. The local youths and RTI activists like Utkal Mohapatra, Dillip pruseth, Gangadhar saa, Puspanjali Seth, Sushila Dung Dung, Sunil Sahoo, Pulin magur, Babuli karsel, Ghanashyam Tania, Prasant Tirkey and others now look forward to Narayan Majhi for guidance.

Narayan came to fame with his queries on water drawn by the scan steel factory. The factory was drawing water from the Safai river from the upper end by blocking the water with a small bridge illegally and as a consequence the farmers at the lower end were deprived from water to irrigate their own land. Although there was farmer unrest on the issue it was Narayan's application that provided the information that the company is drawing water illegally. Then Narayan approached the district collector with the help of the local journalists and the company was fined for its illegal work. His application on the rejected claims of the tribals under the Forest Rights act ensured that the rejected applications on technical grounds were reconsidered and after removal of the deficiencies like absence of annexure, signatures or photo IDs again land was allotted to the claimants. His intervention with the block administration and the PDS authorities ensured that the walling depicting the required information under suo moto disclosure were done in the whole of the block. Narayan's RTI application also stopped the electricity bills and withdrew the claims of the department under the Rajiv Gandhi Vidyut Yojana in twenty five villages as there was billing without the connection.

Now managing his own small business, Narayan is at the fore front of helping others with his tool of RTI. Even the people from the administration look forward to Narayan as a helping hand to reply the RTI applications and to implement the developmental programmes in the area. His pleasing personality and ever readiness to help others have endeared him in his community. His knowledge of the administration also is always handy for the illiterate villagers and tribals who look forward to him as the problem solver. Now Narayan's popularity and leadership has been acknowledged as he was chosen as the state executive member of the AAM AADMI PARTY, Odisha unit. His role as the inspiring agent of empowerment is acknowledged through the emergence of a number of RTI activists in the area. Again he is a constant figure in all the intervention activities for the development of the district and state by any forum showing his compatibility as a leader.

**Naseem Ahmed Shah Ansari**



Mr. Ansari, the son of a retired primary school Head Master from village Anasara of Dhanitri panchayat with a physically challenged brother and a divorcee sister is a social worker since his youth. He founded "young India" organization in the year nineteen eighty nine just at the age of thirteen. The organization has done a number of works in his native Gopa block of Puri district. Being highly educated with a post graduate degree each in Public Administration, Rural Development, Business Administration and diploma in personnel management he is highly articulated and has a good grasp of the administration. Mr Ansari learned about the RTI act from the "Ghoosh ko Ghoosa" campaign organized by Parivartan organization in forty-eight cities of the country in the year 2006. It took no time for him to realize the fact that RTI is the tool for empowerment and is an effective instrument for seeking accountability from the administration and the government for its omissions and commissions. He has by this time already filed two hundred and seventy two RTI applications. It is not the quantity of the applications but the intention to bring cheer to the deprived sections and to put the local

-408-

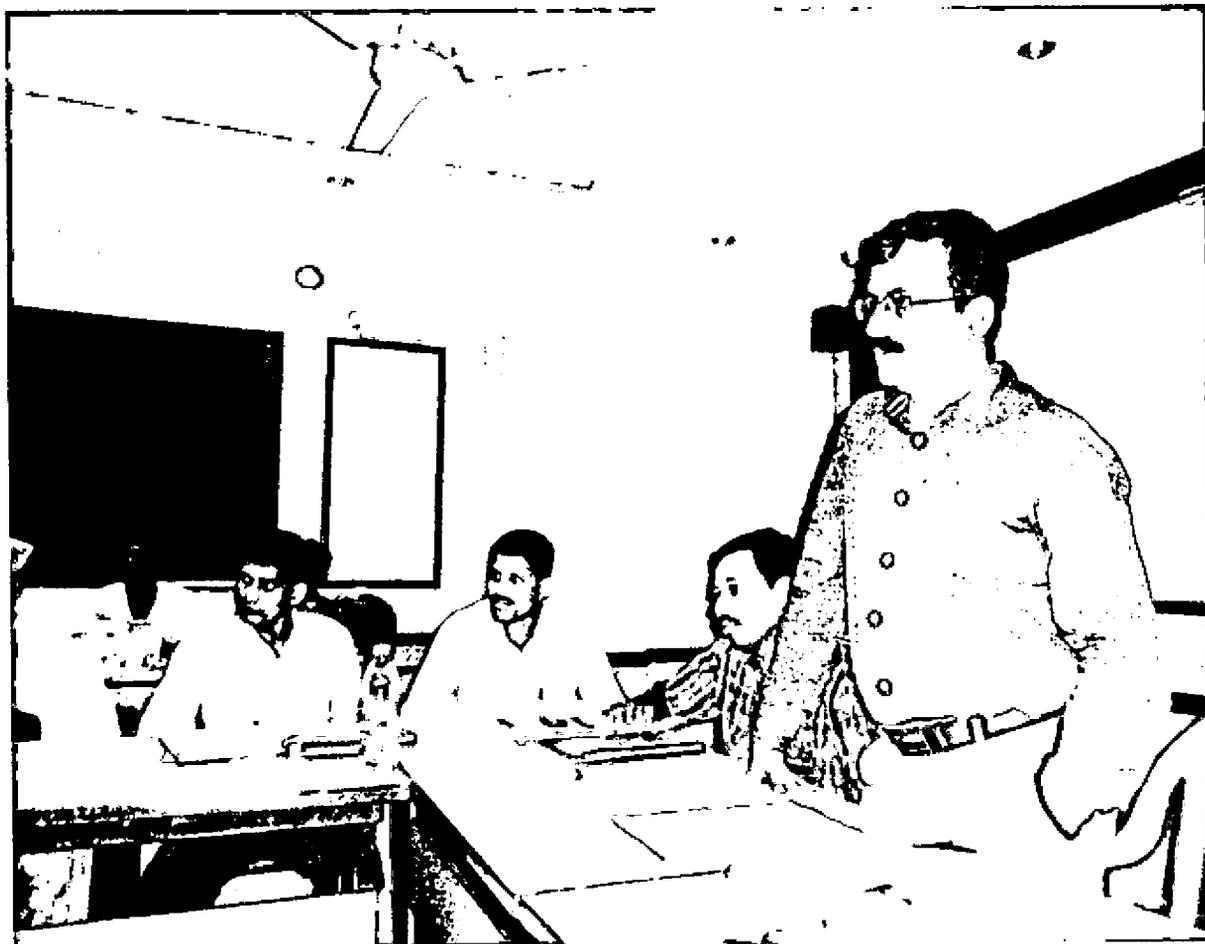
administration under public scrutiny that has put him in a different parlance among the RTI activists.

The Dal corruption amounting to 2000 crores in the mid day meals scheme programme put Ansari under the lime light. Mr. Ansari asked for the Dal sample under RTI act and presented it before the Chief Minister's office. The rotten Dal which was 71% infected and was not proper to eat was further investigated by the vigilance department and now some people are behind the bars. His endeavour ensured that about 4000 mothers got their money under the Mamata Scheme in the year 2009 in Gopa block. His RTI applications have resulted in fourteen penalties for the local administration and Gopa block has received prominence for public scrutiny of all the projects and programmes. Of course; there were attacks on him to dissuade him from asking inconvenient questions and exposing the administration for its wrong doings. But Ansari is not deterred by all these threats. Rather his resolve to serve the people has been strengthened further.

Increasing his activities to new areas he has established a local community radio station through the help of the central government. He is running the "Namaskar Campaign" through the community radio to expose the administration through its RTI replies. His radio programme is covering 10-15 kilometre area in Gopa block and has gained accolade from the local public. With 23 paid staffs and one hundred volunteers in Gopa, Kakatpur and Astaranga blocks Mr Ansari and the Young India organisation is conveniently playing the role of a local leader in terms of engaging the local issues and problems.

He is concerned about the voice of voiceless and wants to empower and influence the community. His "Chala School jiba" (Let us go to school) project ensuring zero drop out in ten villages of Gopa village has earned applause for him. For the villagers in his operational area he is the guide and the motivator. He is in the process of starting a community television for the people of his block to strengthen his efforts further. His works have been recognized by the outside world through awards like Manthan South Asia awards, Emblionth South Asia award and the National Community Radio award.

## Nishikanta Mohapatra



Mr Nishikanta Mohapatra, an M.Phil. from JNU, New Delhi met Mr Arvind Kejriwal in the year 2003 and joined the RTI movement as a member of Parivartan a non registered platform created by the Ex-IRS officer. As a native from Bhubaneswar in Odisha he worked in Delhi for a brief period to implement the provisions under the Delhi Right to Information Act, 2001. As soon as the RTI act, 2005 got enacted he shifted to Odisha and started to work on implementing the transparency act in his home state. He anchored the "Ghoosh ko Ghoossa" campaign as the technical expert promoted by Arvind's Parivartan and managed by the state level NGO CYSD. In the process he came in contact with a number of NGOs in the state and was offered an individual fellowship from the funding agency "Concern Worldwide" to work on RTI intervention. Mr Mohapatra capitalized on the support and formed a team of ten members under the banner of "Odisha Soochana adhikar mancha (OSAM)" to educate and empower the masses through the tools of RTI. Soon OSAM organized training programmes in various villages of a number of districts and encouraged the citizens to file RTI applications to good effect.

Having witnessed the success of RTI as a tool of accountability and empowerment, the Odisha Sookhana Commission invited Mr Mohapatra to anchor a massive RTI campaign covering thirty districts and six major cities. The district administration and the local NGOs organized the programme in partnership. It was a huge success as around forty four thousand people visited the RTI shibirs under the campaign and around thirty three hundred RTI applications were filed in different departments. The campaign also ensured 108 master RTI trainers trained by Mr Mohapatra and further training of 720 RTI facilitators by those master trainers. Thus; Mr Nishikanta got a huge exposure to the public and earned reputation as an RTI activist and trainer. His training hand book on RTI also got recognition for him.

Now Nishikanta with his young team mates like Mr Kalyan Anand, Mr. Shrikanta Tripathy, Mr Jimuta Mishra, Mr Ranjan Sahu, Mr Anand Samal, Miss Anupama Sethy, Miss Shushila Dungdung, Mr Narayan Majhi, Mr Amiya Dash, Mr Suryakanta mohapatra, Mr Sumanta Karna, Mr Satya narayan Nanda, Mr Shishira Satpathy, Mr Prasanta Satpathy and Mr Chintamani Pradhan etc were a formidable force in the field of RTI and social work. Then came the Jana lokpal movement and all these RTI activists spear headed the local campaign in demand for the tough act against corruption. They even undertook a state wide awareness yatra against corruption comprising fifteen volunteers and spreading over thirty districts in thirty-four days. It generated a good ground response and strengthened the network of the RTI activists. Soon the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party ensured that Mr Nishikanta Mohapatra with his ample RTI experience and statewide network among the youths was chosen as the state convenor of the nascent political party. At present; he continues in that position and has transformed into a politician from the tag of RTI activist.

## Chapter-III

### Perception of Stakeholders about the emerging leadership

The universe of the RTI activists comprises of the local authorities, public, RTI activists, and Social organizations working in the field of transparency and accountability, information commission and the RTI applicants who are seeking information. Even the movements, political parties, associations and groups requiring information or investigating any acts of omissions and commissions constitute the RTI domain. Hence the shaping up of the RTI activists into leadership position or the transformation of the common man into a mass leader gets reflected in the associations he is associated with. Otherwise speaking, the response of the other stakeholders towards the RTI activists defines the leadership of the person under scrutiny. While looking after the case studies of the selected RTI activists whom we presume to be leaders in their own respect we have taken due care to collect the response of all the stake holders to substantiate their claim to the leadership. Analysis of these responses will give substantial material for the present study.

Mr. Jagnyeswar Pradhan an electrician in the Public Health Division of Rairakhol Block lauded Anand Samal's contribution and stated "People trust him, particularly the farmers rely upon him for his simple personality and helpfulness." Mr. Jitendriya Jhankar retired Head Clerk from the office of the Divisional Forest office credited Mr Anand as the person who brought the RTI act into the district and popularized it among the public. The Panchayat Executive officer of Tribanpur who is also the Public Information Officer, Mr Manoj Kumar sahu listed the RTI queries of Mr Anand on Indira Awas Yojana, Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension and Madhu Babu Pension Yojana which are generic in nature and praised Mr Anand for his humble but determined persuasion of the causes of the downtrodden. Mrs Reetanjali Naik, Tankadhara Behera, Sushila Baa, Nirod prava mohanty, Mahendra kumar Biswan, Sudhanshu Sekhar swain, Sanjay Sagar and other members from the public were in consensus about Anand's leadership in the area and his commitment to the cause of RTI. The members of Maa Suanidevi Kala Parishad opined that Anand is a selfless worker and the people respect him for his simplicity. In case of any problem he helps the members in their administrative engagements. Jadunath Behera who runs the RTI clinic in Bansajal holds Anand as the master who inspires him. Again the members of AAP consider him as the future of the district and repose full faith in his leadership.

Similarly, people of Kujanga Block now recognize Anupama sethy as an effective leader. Her conviction, helping nature and daring act of confronting the wrong doer head on has put her in a different parlance. Mr Naresh kumar Choudhury, the Head Master of Tentulia Prathamika Vidyalaya lauded Anupama's effort as a selfless honest social worker and her help in sanctioning the Girl's toilet for the school. Debaki Nayak, the President of Patapura Panchayat Mahasangha sees Anupama as the future leader of their area. Rasmita Swain, the community resource person for the TRIPTI project of the State Government lauded Anupama's role as a community mobiliser for the project and her sincerity for the public welfare. The ASHA didi, the ABDO cum PIO Mr Debendranath Swain and the local representatives vouched for Anupama's

clarity of thought and impact of intervention. Monalisha Parida the block chairman accepted the fact that RTI has brought in good administration but he lamented the effort of some section to use it as a tool of harassing the officials. Padmalaya swain, the master book keeper in the TRIPTI project appreciated Anupama's role as a change maker and wished her political success. Rasmi ranjan Mohapatra, reporter Naxatra news is a great admirer of Anupama and is hopeful that she will change the face of the Jagatsinghpur constituency.

At Gediapalli panchayat, the Head master in charge Mr Laxmidhar Panda lauded RTI and remembered that his own General Provident Fund case was solved through filing RTI application. Mayadhar Patra, a physically challenged RTI activist lauded Shrikant's role in promoting RTI in the area. Mr Jitendra kumar Swain, mechanic from Samuka village has himself filed thirty RTI applications and declared that he was motivated by Shrikant into RTI activism. Baidhar Sahoo, Executive officer of the Gediapalli panchayat complained of excess RTI applications and vague information hindering supply of information. Subash Chandra Sahu, the Gram Rojgar Sewak of the Gediapalli Gram panchayat depicted Shrikanta as a dynamic and daring person always ready to fight for justice. The Panchayat Samiti member Mr Bainsidhar Biswal from Biju Janata Dal and the local political leader recognized the contribution of Shrikanta in the development of the area and also underlined his influence over the public as a great mobiliser against corruption and inaction of the administration. Bhagabat mohapatra the defeated PS candidate and a social worker decried the false cases against Shrikanta Tripathy and demanded security for the RTI activists. Jogeswar Panda, a reporter of the Sambad News paper knows Shrikanta for the last eight years and has seen his evolution as a leader. Although people from various fields are interested in him, his identity as the RTI activist is the most prominent .

Purandar Sa, the executive Officer of Phulbari and Jorangloi Gram Panchayat praised Narayan Majhi as a good soul and a very active citizen. His intention is always to help others. All his RTI applications seek information regarding public cause. Puspanjali Seth the National Service Volunteer of Nehru Yuva Kendra is an inspired person under the guidance of Mr. Majhi. She described the development of many local volunteers as a result of Mr. Majhi's guidance, workshops, leadership camps, training programmes and frontal attack on corrupt practices. Mr.Dillip Kumar Pruseth, the Block coordinator of the NGO SEWAK has filed many RTI applications on PDS, MDM and NREGA and he also recognized Narayan's role in the development of the area and his emerging leadership.

Similarly Naseem Ahmed Shah Ansari is a well recognized person in the Gopa block. His multifarious activities although brought affection from the public, his role as an RTI activist created an altogether different identity for him. Now he is a state wide recognized person and is sought after for any cause that requires the presence of state leaders from various fields.

4/10

Whether it is the movement against the private Vedanta University or the multi crore chit fund scam in the state he is a frontal organizer in all these issues. There is no doubt that Mr. Ansari has emerged as a leader in his own right.

It is interesting to note that the officials who had a general distrust about the RTI activists as trouble mongers and accused them of unwanted interference in their routine job are now slowly accepting the inevitability of the RTI regime and have started to co-operate the RTI regime as well as the activists. Although in some places still the administration is adamant and intransigent, in most of the places the dogged attitude of the RTI activists have smoothed the administration to be pro-disclosure. Similarly; the public has a very high opinion about the RTI activists. It is the public which has helped the RTI activist to transform into a public figure and a leader. By inviting them to various functions and training programmes, the social organizations and the government have helped the RTI activists to make their presence felt at different spheres. The success stories and the benefit to the public as well as exposure of issues of corruptions through the RTI applications have also attracted media headlines and thereby wider public acceptance helping in emergence of transformed RTI leadership.

## Chapter-IV

### Challenges in the Field of RTI Implementation

All the RTI activists cum leaders were unanimous that in order to achieve the stated objective of the RTI regime a lot of obstacles are to be removed. Starting from the attitude of the officials in the public authorities which is attuned to the era of secrecy to that of availability of proper training and infrastructure everything is to be improved. The experience of the RTI applicants with the administration and the culture of the present information denial paradigm demand a lot to be done. Attack on the RTI activists by the vested interest groups, inability of the administration to give protection to the victims, poor record management system and above all the failure of the Information Commission to deliver quick justice has all augmented the problem further. From the interview and case studies the inconveniences can be categorized as follows:

**Rigid attitude of the PIOs against the information seeker and non cooperation in receiving the RTI application:** Very often the officials dissuade the RTI applicants from seeking information or return them on minor technical grounds with the impression that the inconvenience will discourage the applicant to be active. They also reject the application on flimsy technical grounds to delay the supply of information if it involves any issue of corruption. The officials also try to provide misleading information to cover their mal administration. Mr. Anand Samal as well as Mr. Ansari provided a number of examples where the common applicant was frustrated for non-receipt of application and the subsequent protracted struggle that was required to compel the PIO to receive the application. In case of Mr. Shrikanta Tripathy two fabricated FIRs were lodged by the panchayat officials to prevent him from filing RTI applications involving issues of corruption.

**Threats from local contractors and officials if anybody asks for any inconvenient information that has the potential to expose corruption:** At times the threats from local contractors who are in collusion with the administration also is a major factor of worry for the RTI applicants. Frequent attacks, threats apart the general perception of these people that the applicants are against them is a concern for the transparency seekers. Especially; information from the Police Stations, Panchayats and Block offices are resisted by the vested interests as it involves illegal transactions and maladministration. Here the parties gang up to harass and harm the applicants to dissuade them from questioning the acts of the administration. At times; the applicants are pressurized to withdraw their RTI applications and falsely submit that they no more require the information or already has been satisfied with the response of the public authority. Mr. Shrikanta Tripathy suggested that the interest groups who generally put pressure on the applicant should be taken to task and must be booked for intimidation and threatening the applicant.

**Misbehaviour and intimidation by the Information Commissioners in defense of the administration and discouragement to the applicants:** As the information commissioners very often represent the establishment and are themselves not attuned to the objective of the RTI act at times they treat the applicants as the trouble makers and advise them not to seek information as it will hinder the pace of

project implementation. This is a crude joke on the applicant and it is also a reality witnessed with many commissioners. As in number of cases even if the Commission accepts that there is a delay in supply of information but imposes no penalty upon the erring officials, the trust of the applicants from the efficacy of the act is on decline. Even going against the spirit and articles of RTI act, very often the information commissioners let the officials go without penalty as they seek apology or put forth the argument that they are not aware of the provisions of the act. In some cases the RTI activists gave examples that the Information Commissioners are intimidating the poor and the common man if they are insisting upon quality information which is inconvenient for the administration. The Information Commissioners are acting on behalf of the administration because of their bureaucratic background and there has to be a transparent process to appoint honest and upright persons as the Commissioners. It should not be a parking lot for the ex-officials.

Ms. Anupama Sethy opined that the PIOs and 1<sup>st</sup> Appellate authorities should be taken to task for all their omissions and commissions and no leniency should be shown to them for non-supply of information. She was astonished about the cases where the commission ordered to supply information without cost to the applicant as already 30 days have passed but did not penalize the person who has caused the delay. So she emphasized the need for proper appreciation of the cases in light of the law. She also underlined the need for time bound disposal of cases thereby giving speedy justice to the public.

Mr. Srikanta Kumar Tripathy opined that the leniency of the Information commission towards the defaulting officials and the inordinate delay in giving the decisions are killing the Act. Slowly the officials have started to ignore the RTI applications as there is least chance of being penalized and given the delay the applicants are also dissuaded from filing appeals. Even the Information Commissioners' arbitrary decisions are bringing more harassment to the appellant than the officials. Now it is coming out that the Information commission is becoming a toothless body day by day both in intention and by the administrative design. Again citing example of his own case where two false FIRs were filed against him only to prevent him from seeking information that had a direct bearing on exposing the corruption he lamented that there is no protection available for the RTI activists.

**Lack of knowledge of the RTI act among the various stake holders and inadequate intervention by the public authorities to enhance the RTI knowledge:** All the RTI leaders are agreed upon the fact that the staffs of the Public Authorities as well as the public are not adequately trained to use the RTI Act. Very often the PIOs and the First Appellate Authorities even the staffs of the Information Commission are not aware about the rules framed by the competent authorities and the process thereof. Even in judiciary the people in the administration are unable to distinguish an RTI application from an application to seek the records. Accordingly; the general public is also not aware of their rights under the Act. They are very scared to put probing queries or to seek accountability from the Public Authority in fear of losing their entitlements under various welfare schemes. Mr. Nishikant Mohapatra recommended widespread capacity building and emphasized upon training to bring awareness about the transparency law

-413-

among the officials and the common men. Ms. Anupama suggested inclusion of RTI as a chapter in the school syllabus to ensure informed citizenship from the beginning and to widen the concept of open, accountable governance.

Mr. Ansari while underlining the difficulties with the information commission also emphasized the lack of knowledge regarding the RTI act among the officials as prime reason for non-supply of information. He also pointed out that the temperament of the administration is tuned against openness and suo-moto supply of information. They are still accustomed to the era of official secrecy act and are yet to get adept with the transparency regime. Even Mr Narayan Majhi from Sundergarh lamented the fact that after nine years of enactment of the Act the APIOs and PIOs are yet to fully understand the nuances and rules of the Act.

Mr. Nishikanta Mohapatra, the RTI activist and convenor of Aam Aadmi Party, Odisha criticized the state government for the pathetic implementation of the RTI Act in the state. According to him the state government presently in the face of a series of scams is reluctant to usher in the open and accountable RTI regime in the state.

**Incompatible Rules:** The RTI activists assailed the state government rules to charge Appeal Fees i.e. Rs. 20 for First Appeal and Rs. 25 for Second Appeal which directly contradicts the provisions under the Act. Even the State Government is charging information cost to the BPL card holder which is against the stated position of the Act. The High Court rules also brazenly flouts the enacted Act as it charges exorbitant fees from the applicants. Mr. Anand Samal condemned the Appeal fees charged from the applicant for the first appeal and the second appeal by the state government while the central government has no such provision. He also criticized collection of information cost from the BPL families is in direct contradiction of the RTI act which the state government should immediately withdraw to promote RTI regime in an inclusive manner.

**Inaction of the State Government:** The State Government intentionally is preventing the ushering in of RTI regime in the state by delaying in appointment of sufficient number of Information Commissioners. Again it is encouraging appointment of Pliable Ex-bureaucrats and incompetent persons as the Information Commissioners. There is an allegation that the government is not providing competent and adequate staffs to the commission. It is being run by the persons supplied by the service provider with a minimum remuneration compromising the quality of the man power. To compound the problems further the government is not interested to take action against the defaulting officials who fail to supply information and there is a number of cases where the penalty amount is yet to be realized despite the order of the commission. The government is yet to come out with simple mechanisms like telephonic registration of RTI applications as the illiteracy is quite high in the state. Accordingly, there are a

414  
number of complaints before the commission signifying the problem of non receipt of the application.

The government is reluctant in provisioning for adequate budget for proper infrastructure, man power, software, training and information management in the era of RTI. It has failed to widely campaign and bring awareness about the Act.

**Poor Record Management System:** In many Public authorities like the Panchayats, Tahasils, Blocks and Police Stations it is a herculean task to manage the records properly. At places due to lack of space or dilapidated structure or non recruitment of staffs the records are just piled up in some rooms. Apart from infrastructural inadequacy, the record management system is out dated and not in synchronization with the requirement of the RTI Act. Very often the applicant receives the information with the remark that "the information is not available at the office" or "not found by the PIO". Even the Information Commission expresses its helplessness with the way the information is handled at various public authorities.

## Chapter-V

### Measures to safeguard RTI regime

All the RTI activists cum emergent leaders were more or less unanimous about the ability of the RTI act to empower the common man and woman. They were also hopeful that the RTI regime will be a big blow against corruption, maladministration and nepotism. It will ensure transparency and will seek accountability from the administration provided certain steps are taken immediately to stop the slide in the RTI regime. The desirable steps can be enumerated as:

**Transparent process of selection of adequate number of Information Commissioners and time bound declaration of decisions in cases before the Information Commission:** With increasing number of applications and few information commissioners the RTI regime has got mounted with pending cases. On an average; we wait for one year to get a hearing from the commission. Again the Commissioners are also taking a lot of time to complete the appeals with multiple hearings as there is no limitation of time for them to complete the hearings. Apart from delay in hearing the incompetence of the information commissioners at times is also creating problem for the overall regime of RTI as they are lacking in nuanced appreciation of the objective of the Act. In many cases the commissioners require proper training both on the act as well as on handling the applicants who are from various backgrounds without knowledge of legal etiquettes. They must be trained to behave with the applicants in a dignified manner and to encourage them for the transparency and the accountability drive.

**Sufficient budgetary provision for information management and trained staff:** It's a pity that the Public authorities have no budgetary assistance for information management and no infrastructure for information dissemination. The administrative model has remained the same even after the enactment of such a progressive Act like RTI and there is very few scope for development if no focused initiative will be taken in this field. The government must provide adequate budget for training of the staffs in all public authorities and also train the general public on use of the transparency law for better appreciation of the act. Many public authorities are without staffs, infrastructure and mechanism to manage the information properly which prevents them from supplying quality information in time. Even the good intentioned officials find it quite difficult to meet the information requirement of the public. Far from total computerization of the documents, there are many public authorities where there is no technical man power even to manage a computer. Inadequate electricity supply to some panchayats is also creating problems for proper information management. Therefore, the public authorities must be equipped both financially and infrastructure-wise to properly respond to the need of the RTI regime.

**Deployment of simple mechanism to accept RTI applications and ensuring 100% acceptance of the information queries:** Online application or application through tele-calling can boost the cause of RTI applicants as it will reduce the discretion of the officials not to accept the applications. The experiment by the Bihar Government to receive the applications through

4/18

Jankari Call Centres has gone a long way in solving the problem of non-acceptance of the applications. Behavioural training and strict supervision of staffs engaged in implementation of RTI act will also go a long way to facilitate the transparency era. Here also the record management system and auto receipt mechanism can help the applicant to be harassed by the PIOs and APIOs for non receipt of the RTI application.

**Inclusion of RTI as a chapter in the school syllabus:** To ensure informed citizenship from the beginning and to widen the concept of open, accountable governance we need to include the chapter of RTI in school syllabus. As we have witnessed an era of secrecy under the British rule and the same administrative culture dominates our working in the field, there is a strong need to change the culture of secrecy. There is no better method than educating our future generation into an era of openness and transparency through school syllabus. It will not only promote the culture of transparency and accountability in all spheres, it will also help in reducing corruption and inaction from all sectors.

**Training for change in attitude of the APIOs/PIOs and promotion of suo moto disclosure:** Attitudinal change of the staffs of the public authorities is a must towards the information seeker for proper implementation of the act and ensuring suo moto information supply. Although there is the provision for suo moto information dissemination by the public authority under section four of the information act, very few actually do it. Rather they try to hide every information in order to harass the common man and to maintain the hallowness around the government and its machinery. Small queries like allotment orders, award of old age pension, release of funds, status of complaints and availability of forms under various schemes go unheard by the concerned officials. Even at times the public finds it quite difficult to know the procedure under various welfare schemes to avail of the benefits. It encourages the middleman to play a role pampered by the corrupt administration. Hence, suo moto disclosure by the administration and propagation of required information in local languages will go a long way in meeting the information requirement of the public. Even description of job charts and proper display of roles and responsibilities of all the officials to some extent will mitigate the problem of the public as they will be approaching the right person for the right task.

**Inclusion of RTI performance into the annual service report of the officials:** Strict action against the officials who deliberately undermine the mandate of the act is the requirement of the time. Many RTI activists complained that the leniency by the information commissioners not to penalize the responsible officials has encouraged them to violate the act more frequently. They are extending flimsy grounds like ignorance of the law, non availability of the file, vacation time etc. to cover up their deliberate denial of information. Again where ever they are penalized also, it is of little worry for them as it is not going into their record of performance. Hence the activists suggested that inclusion of RTI performance into the service record will create the desired impact on the officials to deliver on dotted line.

## Chapter-VI

### Conclusion

The present study has been quite enriching. It delineates a common man's journey through the rigours of development and governance entities and the manifestation of his work through the recognition from all the stake holders. The simple RTI applicant with his or her undying spirit to uncover the mystery of administration and to expose the maladministration clings to the tool of the transparency Act and slowly transforms himself into an RTI activist. He helps create other RTI applicants and spreads the success stories achieved through the route of RTI. He also organises camps, training programmes on RTI for various sections of the civil society and the administration, takes the help of media to disseminate the information accessed through the RTI application and fights for empowerment of the deprived sections through access to entitlements. It also leads to collaborative efforts among the RTI activist and the movements in various fields requiring authentic information from the administration which is generally not supplied to the affected public for obvious anti people tinge involved in it.

Thus the activists created organizations, netted different social activists from different fields and also solved local problems while taking leadership of the area. Here emerges the new leadership; completely unconventional, unexpected and non-calibrated. Right to information act not only has brought in an era of transparency, accountability and informed citizenship it has also tried to redefine the relationship between the administration and the common man, thereby providing opportunity for the emergence of new leadership and focused intervention. Also the growth of social media and the wide sharing of information regarding the activities of persons hitherto unknown to others has added to the leadership building process. Even the mainstreaming of RTI into various projects and programmes of the civil society institutions, CSR activities and Political Parties have provided avenues for the RTI activists to expand their area of operation and impact over the administration.

The present study finds that all the RTI activists in Odisha who have transformed into leadership positions have very similar back ground in terms of socio-economic condition, educational attainment, exposure to RTI, positioning in the RTI movement, treatment from the administration, political discourse and acceptance by the public. They are educated, middle class, aspiring youths from the RTI movement spearheaded by Mrs Aruna Roy and Mr. Arvind Kejriwal. They have worked in the field using RTI as a tool for more than six years on an average starting from the inception of the Act. These youths as RTI activists have fought against the administration and issues of corruption in deliverance of welfare schemes and brought succor to the common man in the locality. They are all exposed to the Jana lokpal movement spearheaded by Anna Hazare and to some extent also were picked up by the Aam Aadmi Party as their candidates in the elections that followed the movement. But one thing is clear about all these emergent leaders that they don't have any god father as is the case in traditional or legal-rational leadership theories. They can only be categorized as charismatic leaders but without the individual

# **Annexure I:**

## **Structured Questionnaire for the RTI activists**

1. Family background:-
2. Educational Qualification:-
3. Age:-
4. Sex:-
5. Profession:-
6. Year in which first application was filed:-
7. Source from which came to know about RTI:-
8. Approximate number of RTI applications filed:-
9. Important achievements through RTI filing:-
10. Problems faced while seeking information from experience:-
11. Defining moment in your activism:-
12. Involvement with any organization:-
13. Any platform if created by the activists & details thereof:-
14. Any movement/action programme being related:-
15. Political role if any:-
16. Engagement with the administration if any:-
17. Response from local ward members, Sarapancha, MLA , MP if any:-
18. Number of associates if any:-
19. Achievement of associates if any:-
20. Suggestions on RTI:-
21. General Suggestions if any:-



## **Annexure 2:**

### **Questionnaire for the public for the RTI Leadership Study**

1. Do you know the activist?
2. How did you come to know about the person (the source)?
3. Since when/How long do you know him/her?
4. Has he/she groomed any RTI Activist in the locality?
5. If yes, who are they and what are the issues/ areas of their activism?
6. Can you remember any major incident relating to him/her?
7. What is your perception about the activist?
8. What is the perception of the Public about the activist?
9. Can you tell something about his family?
10. Does he relate to any organization or political party?
11. Do you know in which capacity he/she is related to the organization/party?
12. Have you gone for any assistance from him?
13. Does he/she help anybody in anyway?
14. Has he/she been able to influence the local administration in any way with regards to compliance with RTI?
15. Does he/she have any problem?
16. As per your suggestion what should he/she do in the future?
17. Has he/she organized any mass programme, rally, social audit, demonstration or protest in your area?
18. Has he/she contested any election?
19. If he/she has contested any election, then how much votes he/she has pooled?
20. Other comments if any?