



HANDBOOK ON THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT (2nd edn. 2008).
By P. K. Das. Universal Law Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. Pp. xxii
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THE RIGHT to Information Act, 2005 is a comprehensive legislation enacted to confer statutory rights on the citizens of India for seeking information from any public authority. This has opened up new vistas of governance through ensuring transparency and accountability in administration. The right to information (RTI) ensues from the right to know, which has been avowed by the Supreme Court in *State of UP v. Raj Narain*:¹

In a government of responsibility like ours where the agents of the public must be responsible for their conduct there can be but a few secrets. The people of this country have a right to know every public act, every thing that is done in a public way by their public functionaries. They are entitled to know the particulars of every public transaction in all its bearings.

The Supreme Court has asserted that right to information can be used to elevate a 'democracy' to 'participatory democracy.' In *Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India and Ors. v. Cricket Association of Bengal and others*,² the apex court observed thus:

True democracy cannot exist unless all citizens have a right to participate in the affairs of the polity of the country. The right to participate in the affairs of the country is meaningless unless the citizens are well informed on all sides of the issues in respect of which they are called upon to express their views. One-sided information, disinformation, misinformation and non-information all equally create an uninformed citizenry, which makes democracy a farce when medium of information is monopolized either by a partisan central authority or by private individuals or oligarchic organizations. This is particularly so in a country like ours where about 65 percent of the population is illiterate and hardly 1 percent of the population has an access to the print media, which is not subject to pre-censorship.

A successful democracy posits an 'aware' citizenry. In *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India*,³ the right to information was elevated

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1. AIR 1975 SC 865.
 2. (1995) 2 SCC 161.
 3. (2004) 2 SCC 476.



to the status of a human right, necessary for making governance transparent and accountable. It was also emphasized that governance must be participatory.

The book under review, the 'Universal's Handbook on Right to Information Act' is a consolidated work, which is divided into thirteen parts. The book opens with an introductory study in its first part. The second part is a commentary on the Right to Information Act, 2005 with its Rules and Regulations. The third part deals with the other related laws, viz., the Official Secrets Act, 1923, the Public Records Act, 1993 with Rules, 1994 and the Freedom of Information Act, 2002. It attempts to trace the legal history of the right to information in India. The fourth, fifth and sixth parts encompass the relevant provisions of the allied Acts and Rules, the International Conventions and Declarations, and the National Reports and Guidelines. It is commendable that the author has done a good job in consolidating all important materials in one document.

The relevant extracts from rulings of the Supreme Court, high courts and of the CIC on right to information are contained in the seventh, eighth and ninth parts, respectively. But the important rulings of the state information commissions are not included in the book. This would make the user unable to understand the areas of conflict between the state commissions and the CIC. The tenth part explores related state laws on right to information including relevant Rules, Bills and Notifications. The next part is on 'fee structures of states' which also provides required knowledge as to the working of the legislations in the different states. The twelfth part is on important notifications and allied information regarding CIC. This is helpful to understand the commission's status as the final appellate authority under the RTI Act. The final part includes specimen forms for eliciting information, frequently asked questions and subject index, which would enhance the utility of the book as a ready reference. It is indeed praiseworthy to note that the first edition of the book having been published in 2005, with updated reprints in 2006 and 2007, the author and the publisher took a timely effort in bringing out its second edition in 2008 itself.

The efforts put into publishing this Handbook on Right to Information must be commended for contributing to public awareness and making it a ready reference, to the researchers, students and academicians in the concerned field. It would also be useful to RTI activists, NGOs, lawyers and administrators in their tasks ahead. The book is affordable by all, being moderately priced.

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