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# TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN JUDICIARY THROUGH RTI

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Sarthak Gupta, LLM, Amity Law School

Dr. Axita Shrivastava, (Ass.Prof. of Amity Law School), Amity University Lucknow,  
Uttar Pradesh

## ABSTRACT

The ideal of transparency and accountability in the judiciary has come to the forefront as a key issue in democratic governments, especially amidst rising public pressure for transparency in institutions of power. The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, has been revolutionary in enabling access to information from public authorities, including courts. Although the judiciary generally functions with great institutional autonomy, the RTI Act brings in a mechanism whereby the administrative activities, allocation of resources, appointment procedures, case pendency rates, and other non-judicial issues can be examined by the public. This paper examines how RTI functions as an effective tool for promoting transparency and encouraging accountability within the judicial system. It discusses the legal reach of RTI within the judiciary, the opposition and hurdles encountered in its implementation, and the technological advancements facilitating its practical application. Application of RTI to judicial fieldwork—by activists, researchers, and citizens—has resulted in significant disclosures regarding inefficiencies, clandestine practices, and the necessity for structural reforms. Moreover, case laws like the historic Supreme Court ruling placing the Chief Justice's office under RTI reflect its increasing role in redefining institutional boundaries. In spite of some exemptions and restrictions, RTI continues to empower citizens by encouraging democratic oversight and upholding the principle that justice should not only be done but also seen to be done. The interplay between legal systems, citizen participation, and infrastructures of information highlights the developing function of RTI in making the vision of an open and accountable judiciary a reality.

**Keywords:** Right to Information (RTI), Judiciary, Transparency, Accountability, Judicial Reform, Public Access, Legal Disclosure, Judicial Independence, Case Pendency, Collegium System, Judicial Administration, Digital Courts, Civic Engagement.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Transparency and accountability are the bedrock of any institution that is democratic, and the judiciary, as the chief protector of the Constitution and final interpreter of the law, has a singularly central role in this establishment. Not only must the judiciary operate fairly and impartially, but it must be seen to operate fairly and impartially in the perception of the public. With time, the call for more transparency and accountability in the judiciary has increased, fueled by democratic values and public interest. This has put the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, at the forefront of judicial reform debates in India. The RTI Act, which was passed to bring transparency to governance and give citizens the power of access to information, has become a major tool in examining the working of public institutions, including the judiciary. Its application to the judiciary has initiated a multifaceted debate on judicial independence versus public accountability.<sup>1</sup> The Indian judiciary has traditionally had a high level of independence, considering the role it plays in protecting democratic values and as a check on the other arms of government. However, this independence has on occasion resulted in a lack of transparency in administrative issues, appointments to the judiciary, declarations of assets by judges, and the general operations of the courts. Citizens, civil society groups, and media have increasingly challenged the secrecy with which some judicial proceedings are conducted. The application of the RTI Act to the judiciary has focused attention on these concerns, providing a mechanism for the public to obtain information on matters such as the criteria for appointment and elevation of judges, delays in case proceedings, and administrative decisions made by judicial organs. In doing so, the RTI has enabled common citizens to make even the uppermost rungs of the judicial hierarchy accountable.<sup>2</sup> One of the most controversial areas of this drive for transparency has been the extendability of the RTI Act to the office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Early on, the judiciary had held out against the release of information under the RTI Act on the grounds that this would threaten judicial independence and interfere with the judges' ability to remain impartial. But the supreme court and Central Information Commission (CIC) judgments set precedence and held that the office of the CJI was indeed a "public authority" under the RTI Act. This judicial ratification has played a key role in establishing the precedent that no public institution, even the judiciary, is exempt from accountability measures offered by law. In spite of these developments, the implementation of

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<sup>1</sup> Sathe, S. P. (2002). *Judicial activism in India: Transgressing borders and enforcing limits*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Jaising, I. (2010). *The right to know and the judicial process*. Economic and Political Weekly, 45(17), 14–17.

transparency under RTI in the judiciary in practice still faces obstacles, ranging from bureaucratic resistance to narrowly drafted exemptions under the RTI Act and fears about misuse of information.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the internal processes of self-regulation within the judiciary, like the in-house mechanism for redressing complaints against judges, have frequently been faulted for being opaque. These processes are carried out behind closed doors and provide minimal redress to complainants, thereby reinforcing judicial unaccountability. The RTI Act, on the other hand, offers a legislative framework by which such secrecy can be questioned and public awareness enhanced. Yet, the effectiveness of RTI in ushering in accountability also relies on the receptiveness of judicial institutions to a culture of openness instead of perceiving transparency as a threat to their operations. Institutional resistance and the absence of strong implementation infrastructure have resulted in unequal access to judicial information between states and courts, thus curbing the transformative power of RTI.<sup>4</sup> Besides, judicial accountability through RTI is not confined to information access but extends to the larger debate on judicial ethics and behavior. Information about judges' behavior, financial disclosure by judges, and reasons behind judicial rulings can be immensely important in restoring and upholding the public faith in the judiciary. Transparency generates trust, and trust is vital for the legitimacy of judicial institutions. The RTI Act can also serve as a bridge between the judiciary and the public and close the perception-reality gap by promoting a discussion between the governed and the governing and subjecting previously unopen areas of judicial operations to public scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> Yet, for this potential to be harnessed to the maximum extent, there must be a sustained effort from within the judiciary itself towards encouraging disclosure of information, computerization of court records, and ease of access to data. It is necessary to recognize the broader context within which the RTI Act functions in relation to the judiciary. In a democratic polity, where the supremacy of the rule of law prevails, the judiciary has to be seen as being impartial, effective, and corruption-free. Transparency by way of RTI reinforces the canons of natural justice and procedural fairness. It acts as a preventive mechanism against arbitrariness and abuse of power. By promoting a culture of openness, RTI adds to the credibility and moral authority of the

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<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI). (2014). *Transparency in the Indian Judiciary: A status report*. CHRI Publications.

<sup>4</sup> CHRI. (2014). *Transparency in the Indian Judiciary: A status report*. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.

<sup>5</sup> Verma, A., & Bhatia, R. (2010). *Transparency in the Indian judiciary: RTI and the Supreme Court*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(12), 25–30.

judiciary. <sup>6</sup>It also promotes accountability of the judiciary not only in administrative matters but also in the general area of delivery of justice, judicial delay, and pendency of cases, which are the major concerns in the Indian judicial system.

## 2. GOVERNING RTI AND JUDICIARY

The administration of the Right to Information (RTI) Act in the context of the judiciary is a special and complex dynamic. Although the RTI Act was passed in 2005 with the specific aim of fostering transparency, curbing corruption, and bringing about accountability in public bodies, its application to the judiciary has been both revolutionary and contentious. The judiciary, being one of the three pillars of democracy, has conventionally enjoyed constitutional autonomy and is viewed as the final dispenser of justice. Such a position has tended to give rise to the view that the judiciary must work without interference, even in the matter of administrative transparency. But under the terms of the RTI Act, the judiciary, as any other public authority, is bound to furnish information to citizens, thus subjecting its operations to some degree of public scrutiny. The administration of RTI in the judiciary, therefore, is at the crossroads of legal compulsion and institutional autonomy.<sup>7</sup> The model for implementing RTI to the judiciary is based mainly on the categorization of judicial institutions as "public authorities" under Section 2(h) of the Act. This section states that public authorities are any authority or body set up or constituted by the Constitution, including the Supreme Court and the High Courts. <sup>8</sup>Consequently, they squarely fall within the purview of the RTI Act. Therefore, the citizens are entitled to obtain information about the administration of the judiciary, such as recruitment processes, service rules, financial outlays, appointments to court posts, and infrastructure planning. Nevertheless, the line dividing administrative and judicial functions has played a major role in determining the attitude of the judiciary towards RTI requests. Whereas information pertaining to administrative actions is readily available, questions that touch upon the judicial decision-making process or deliberations between judges have usually been rejected on grounds of judicial privilege and confidentiality.<sup>9</sup> The judiciary's initial hesitation in embracing the applicability of the RTI Act to its administrative affairs highlighted a critical

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<sup>6</sup> Mehta, P. B. (2011). *The rise of judicial sovereignty*. In R. Kothari (Ed.), *Politics and the Constitution in India* (pp. 132–149). Oxford University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Mehta, P. B. (2011). *The rise of judicial sovereignty*. In R. Kothari (Ed.), *Politics and the Constitution in India* (pp. 132–149). Oxford University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Supreme Court of India. (2019). *Secretary General, Supreme Court of India v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal*, Civil Appeal No. 10044 of 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Bhushan, P. (2009). *Judicial accountability and reforms*. Centre for Public Interest Litigation.

debate regarding the nature of judicial independence. One of the most serious flashpoints here was the demand for information pertaining to judges' declaration of assets, particularly at the higher judiciary level. Public interest litigation and RTI applications for this information were initially received hesitantly and rejected on grounds that such disclosure would erode the independence of the judiciary or the dignity of the judiciary. But judicial pronouncements, particularly of the Delhi High Court and then upheld by the Supreme Court itself, settled that even the Chief Justice of India's office is a public authority and therefore falls under the RTI Act. This evolution represented a watershed in the management of transparency within the judiciary in proclaiming that the judiciary cannot be outside the ambit of laws relating to public accountability.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the judicial confirmation of the applicability of the RTI to the judiciary, there has been a persistent challenge in balancing the transparency requirement with judicial confidentiality. Judicial administration under the RTI Act has seen some cases where the courts have read into exemptions in Section 8 of the Act to withhold disclosure. This section provides exemptions from disclosure of information that could affect the sovereignty of India, its security, or its relations with foreign states, and also protects information that could interfere with the process of investigation or the privacy of individuals. The judiciary has often invoked these provisions in cases involving sensitive correspondence, internal notes, and deliberative processes. In addition, courts have highlighted the necessity of safeguarding the autonomy of judicial decision-making by ensuring that judges are able to deliberate freely without fear of public or political pressure arising from RTI disclosures.<sup>11</sup> This leaves a grey area where the legitimate interest in transparency has to be weighed against the safeguarding of judicial integrity. The organizational framework for the application of RTI in the judiciary also includes the appointment of Public Information Officers (PIOs) in the Supreme Court and High Courts.<sup>12</sup> These PIOs are tasked with receiving and replying to RTI applications within a prescribed time limit. In practice, though, the process has frequently been tainted by delays, inadequate records, and at times direct denials without proper reasons. The secrecy surrounding the appointment and working of PIOs in certain courts has led to charges that the judiciary is not entirely wedded to the letter and spirit of the RTI Act. Besides, appeals against the rulings of PIOs are passed

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<sup>10</sup> Mehta, P. B. (2011). *The rise of judicial sovereignty*. In R. Kothari (Ed.), *Politics and the Constitution in India* (pp. 132–149). Oxford University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Rai, M. (2010). *Judicial independence vs. transparency: A false dichotomy?* *Indian Journal of Law and Justice*, 1(2), 23–30.

<sup>12</sup> Bhushan, P. (2009). *Judicial accountability and reforms*. Centre for Public Interest Litigation.

through the internal appeals mechanisms of the courts and normally lead to judgments favoring nondisclosure. This internal structure of appeal, although legal in nature, generates issues relating to impartiality as well as autonomy of the appeals process if the judiciary itself becomes the respondent. The second aspect of administration of RTI and the judiciary lies in the Central Information Commission (CIC), which has acted centrally as the guardian adjudicator for resolving cases when information had been denied by courts and tribunals.<sup>13</sup> The judgments of the CIC have also repeatedly stressed that judicial accountability is an essential ingredient of a good democracy and that transparency has to be extended to the administrative wings of the judiciary. But non-compliance with CIC directives by the judiciary has at times resulted in judicial battles and appeals, thus checking the pace of reform. This tug-of-war between the CIC and the judiciary reflects the tension between oversight and autonomy, and it emphasizes the requirement of a clearer policy framework to guide RTI governance in the judicial space. Although legal precedents favor transparency, enforcement in practice relies significantly on institutional will and administrative efficiency in judicial institutions.<sup>14</sup> The development of e-governance in the judiciary has introduced new opportunities as well as challenges within the scenario of RTI.<sup>15</sup> With courts all over India starting to digitize records, implement e-filing systems, and utilize video conferencing for hearings, there is scope for better information access. Judicial websites now offer up-to-date case status, court orders, and cause lists that can lighten the load of RTI systems through proactive disclosures. But a lot of this digital advancement is still uneven between various states and levels of courts, with district courts frequently not having the infrastructure or administrative strength to implement RTI requirements efficiently. Thus, the administration of RTI in the judiciary also entails issues of resource allocation, technological capability, and training of staff to process information requests in a timely and transparent fashion.<sup>16</sup>

In the larger governance discourse, the RTI Act has undermined old conceptions of secrecy in judicial processes, compelling the judiciary to be more open in its administrative actions. The discussion of RTI and judiciary management is no longer just about access to files—it includes larger themes such as institutional responsibility, ethical openness, and public confidence. RTI

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<sup>13</sup> Central Information Commission (CIC). (2009). *Decision on CJI as a public authority under RTI*. File No. CIC/WB/A/2008/00426.

<sup>14</sup> Jaising, I. (2010). *The right to know and the judicial process*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(17), 14–17

<sup>15</sup> Mehta, P. B. (2011). *The rise of judicial sovereignty*. In R. Kothari (Ed.), *Politics and the Constitution in India* (pp. 132–149). Oxford University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Jaising, I. (2010). *The right to know and the judicial process*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(17), 14–17.

has been both a legal and symbolic tool that reiterates the principle that no institution in a democracy is superior to accountability. The management of transparency in the judiciary is not therefore simply compliance with a statute but bringing the judicial institution in line with democratic expectations and constitutional values. As India develops further as a participatory democracy, the administration of RTI within the judiciary will be an ever-critical arena of negotiation between the demands of openness and doctrines of judicial independence.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. RTI AS A MECHANISM FOR JUDICIAL TRANSPARENCY

The Right to Information (RTI) Act has become one of the strongest legislative instruments in India for ensuring transparency and accountability in different wings of the government, including the judiciary. In a democratic system of governance where the judiciary is meant to act as a symbol of fairness, impartiality, and justice, the RTI Act becomes crucial to ensure that judicial proceedings are not kept under wraps. Although judicial autonomy is an indispensable sacrosanctity, the changing debate on judicial transparency has understood that independence is not tantamount to being isolated from public accountability. The RTI Act is thus a conduit between the judiciary and citizens whom it governs, providing a legal and systematic way of accessing information about the operations of the judicial establishment. This trend marks a change from an archaically opaque system towards one that is gradually adopting openness in its administrative and procedural levels.<sup>18</sup>

Judicial openness through RTI is chiefly about access to administrative information and non-confidential information that has implications for the public at large.<sup>19</sup> The purview of the RTI Act covers information about court registry working, spending, infrastructure projects, service rules of court personnel, appointment process of judges, case docketing, and time lines. This extent of access allows the public to critically assess how the judiciary is run, how effectively it runs, and whether its internal affairs are consonant with democratic ideals. Specifically, the administrative wing of the judiciary—long viewed as an area that functions without adequate supervision—is now open to public examination under the terms of RTI. Under RTI, citizens are able to call for information regarding the reasons behind inordinate delays in case hearings,

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<sup>17</sup> Bhushan, P. (2009). *Judicial accountability and reforms*. Centre for Public Interest Litigation.

<sup>18</sup> Kumar, R. (2022). *Judicial transparency in India: A study on RTI implementation*. Delhi Law Review, 38(2), 112–128.

<sup>19</sup> Rao, V. (2020). *RTI and judicial accountability: A new paradigm*. Indian Journal of Public Administration, 66(1), 56–70.

the status of outstanding cases, or the grounds for transferring judges or assigning benches.<sup>20</sup> All these aspects serve to cast a light on places that were previously in the dark. One of the most important advances under this mechanism has been an attempt to make the process of judicial appointments and transfers more transparent. The collegium system, which is responsible for appointing judges to the higher judiciary, was in place for many years but worked behind closed doors, frequently criticized for not being transparent or objective. By RTI requests, citizens and activists started demanding information regarding how judges are appointed, what the guidelines are, and what the reasons noted are for appointments or rejections. There was initial resistance from the judiciary, with the contention that disclosures in this manner would undermine the independence of judges and expose them to unnecessary public pressure.<sup>21</sup>

The RTI Act has also been instrumental in seeking financial transparency from the judiciary. Issues regarding the use of public money by the judiciary, budgetary allocations, expenditure on infrastructure, foreign travel of judges, and allowances given to judicial officers have been sought under RTI. These questions make sure that the judiciary is accountable for its fiscal conduct and holds the same standards of accountability as it requires of other public offices. By enabling the citizens to pose questions regarding the budget and spending habits, RTI has reemphasized the rule that the judiciary, although autonomous in function, is not superior to the rules of fiscal propriety and public accountability. In an age where institutional trust among the people is directly correlated to their transparency, financial transparency like this by means of RTI becomes critical to maintaining the judiciary's moral legitimacy.<sup>22</sup>

It has also gone a long way in taking judicial ethics and integrity into the public domain.<sup>23</sup> Applications made under the RTI Act have revealed how disciplinary proceedings, internal investigations, or complaints against judges were either not given attention to or dealt with in secrecy.<sup>24</sup> The internal system of dealing with complaints against judges has frequently been faulted for lacking transparency and for not generating public confidence. RTI has assisted in

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<sup>20</sup> Sharma, T. (2020). *Delays in Indian courts: Causes and solutions through RTI*. Journal of Law and Society, 15(2), 134–149.

<sup>21</sup> Verma, D. (2019). *Balancing judicial independence and transparency in India*. Indian Bar Review, 9(4), 177–193.

<sup>22</sup> Verma, D. (2022). *Trust, transparency, and the judiciary: Financial disclosures under RTI*. Delhi Law Review, 39(3), 143–158.

<sup>23</sup> Rao, V. (2021). *RTI and the moral architecture of the judiciary*. Journal of Constitutional Studies, 15(1), 54–70.

<sup>24</sup> Sharma, R. (2020). *Internal accountability of judges: The RTI lens*. National Law Journal, 8(4), 110–124.

illuminating such mechanisms, and there have been demands for reforms and openness in handling judicial misconduct. Though judicial institutions continue to cite exemptions under the RTI Act in not disclosing some sensitive information, the very fact that the issues are now debated in the public sphere indicates a significant change in the past. It has encouraged the culture of being watchful among the people, and the people are now more aware of challenging the integrity of the system when required.<sup>25</sup>

Along with governance and ethical behavior, RTI has increased the availability of information concerning court processes and case management.<sup>26</sup> It has equipped litigants, journalists, researchers, and members of civil society to inquire about matters such as the volume of pending cases, average disposal time, priority criteria for disposal of cases, and computerization of court records. Such data not only assists individuals in navigating the judicial system more effectively but also brings to light systemic inefficiencies requiring administrative attention. For example, RTI-acquired information has regularly been utilized in policy reports and research studies calling for judicial reform. It supplies the empirical grounding necessary to bring about the augmentation of manpower, improved infrastructure, judicial appointments, and procedural reforms within the courts. This way, RTI indirectly but meaningfully contributes to the larger agenda of judicial reforms by laying bare the strengths and weaknesses of the system in place.<sup>27</sup>

The act of submitting RTI applications itself has become an empowering citizen action.<sup>28</sup> Citizens who had previously felt disenfranchised from the secretive judicial bureaucracy now possess a legal tool to seek explanations. This transition alters the power dynamics between the judiciary and the public. By placing the judiciary in greater accountability to the people, RTI makes the democratic creed that the judiciary is not a self-contained entity but a public service intended to serve the rights and freedoms of all citizens all the more necessary.<sup>29</sup> While challenges persist—most notably in the form of belated responses, sweeping denials, and obtuse exemptions—the mere fact that such a tool exists is the guarantee that the judiciary cannot remain in complete solitude. RTI has established a precedent that the judiciary, though being a

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<sup>25</sup> Verma, D. (2022). *Civic vigilance and the rise of judicial transparency*. Delhi Law Review, 40(1), 143–158.

<sup>26</sup> Iyer, M. (2021). *RTI and judicial transparency: Progress and challenges*. Journal of Governance and Public Policy, 9(2), 34–49.

<sup>27</sup> Verma, D. (2023). *Judicial bottlenecks and RTI-driven reforms*. Delhi Law Review, 41(1), 120–136.

<sup>28</sup> Mukherjee, A. (2021). *RTI as a tool for democratizing the judiciary*. Journal of Civic Engagement and Legal Reform, 14(2), 67–80.

<sup>29</sup> Singh, P. (2022). *From secrecy to service: RTI and the changing face of the Indian judiciary*. Indian Journal of Democratic Studies, 10(1), 35–50.

cornerstone of democracy, is also answerable to the democratic ideals of transparency and openness.

This transformation in judicial transparency, nurtured through the RTI Act, is not merely an issue of administrative change; it is a reassertion of the role of the judiciary in a participatory democracy. It represents a deeper cultural transformation in which the justice system is being subjected to the same level of integrity and responsiveness that it expects of others. By instituting the right to question, to ask for information, and to know how courts operate, the RTI Act has emerged as a vital tool in bringing the judiciary in line with the values of justice, equity, and democratic accountability. It has shown that transparency is not an enemy of judicial independence but its best friend when exercised with responsibility, justice, and dedication to public service.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. IMPLEMENTING RTI IN JUDICIARY

The application of the Right to Information (RTI) Act to the judicial system is a giant leap towards actualizing the values of democratic governance and public accountability.<sup>31</sup> The judiciary, traditionally a citadel of independence and integrity, has of late faced increasing public scrutiny, not merely for the impartiality of its verdicts but for the secrecy surrounding its administrative and procedural processes. While judicial autonomy cannot be traded off in a constitutional democracy, the doctrine of accountability requires that the judiciary, as with all public institutions, must come under some norms of transparency. The RTI Act provides a systemic and legislatively authorized method to actualize this transparency so that citizens can have access to information on how the judiciary operates, distributes resources, takes administrative decisions, and carries out internal procedures. The application of RTI in the judiciary has thus become a symbolic and practical step towards bringing judicial institutions in line with democratic aspirations.<sup>32</sup>

The implementation of RTI in the judiciary entails structural and attitudinal changes. Structurally, every judicial institution—ranging from the Supreme Court to the district courts—

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<sup>30</sup> RTI Foundation of India. (2021). *RTI and the judiciary: Transparency in the justice system*. <https://www.rtifoundationofindia.com>

<sup>31</sup> Sen, A. (2021). *Democracy, transparency, and judicial reforms: The Indian experience with RTI*. Indian Journal of Constitutional Law, 14(2), 33–47.

<sup>32</sup> Verma, D. (2023). *Judicial openness and public accountability in the age of RTI*. Delhi Law Review, 41(2), 110–124.

is required to appoint Public Information Officers (PIOs) and Appellate Authorities, keep information in accessible formats, and voluntarily disclose certain types of information as prescribed under Section 4 of the RTI Act.<sup>33</sup> But this formal requirement generally faces institutional inertia. Most courts, especially at the lower judiciary levels, do not have the facilities, cyber connectivity, or specialized staff to easily handle RTI applications. It also varies quite widely as to how different courts understand their own role under the Act. Whereas some High Courts have established specific RTI cells and keep issuing information on line, others tend to be stingy, taking the plea often that there was no clarity over what could be disclosed under what circumstances and what had to remain protected. This disparity in implementation is a symptom of deeper institutional resistance and the lack of a single policy that informs the judiciary's adherence to RTI norms.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most contentious issues of applying RTI to the judiciary has been how much internal judicial procedure can be open to public scrutiny.<sup>35</sup> While there is a broad agreement that administrative issues—appointments of staff, tendering processes, spending on infrastructure, and case allocation—ought to be subject to scrutiny, issues arise when RTI is invoked to request information regarding judicial deliberations, draft judgments, or internal judge-to-judge communications. The judiciary has all along held that such disclosures would interfere with the autonomy of judicial reasoning and violate the sanctity of court proceedings. Consequently, courts frequently resort to exemptions under Section 8(1) of the RTI Act, more so the provisions concerning the fiduciary relationship, cabinet papers, and information which would prejudice the course of justice. Application of RTI in such a subtle and sensitive ecosystem is a balancing act where transparency should be sought without encroaching upon the constitutional principle of an impartial and independent judiciary.<sup>36</sup>

Despite these challenges, there have been notable developments that signify progress in implementing RTI within the judiciary. One of the landmark moments came when the Supreme Court ruled that the office of the Chief Justice of India is a public authority under the RTI Act

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<sup>33</sup> Chandran, R. (2021). *Transparency versus autonomy: The Indian judiciary and RTI*. Indian Journal of Public Administration, 67(3), 200–214.

<sup>34</sup> Bose, A. (2022). *Judicial compliance with RTI norms in India: Challenges and inconsistencies*. Law and Governance Review, 17(1), 44–59.

<sup>35</sup> Singh, M. (2021). *Secrecy versus accountability in the Indian judiciary*. Indian Journal of Legal Reform, 11(2), 101–115.

<sup>36</sup> Khan, R. (2022). *Balancing transparency and independence: RTI and judicial processes*. Journal of Constitutional Affairs, 13(3), 118–132.

and hence subject to its provisions.<sup>37</sup> This ruling not only strengthened the law's obligation of the judiciary to obey RTI but also conveyed a strong message that no public authority is beyond the accountability framework of the law. Ever since this judgement, there has been a gradual but perceptible movement towards greater transparency in some of these areas, like judges' asset declarations, collegium decisions, and administrative orders. But the real disclosure of information remains selective and short of the depth and detail that genuine transparency would demand. This selective openness has generated controversies regarding whether the judiciary is really committed to transparency or only going through a procedural compliance to satisfy public pressure.<sup>38</sup>

Applying RTI in the judiciary also raises the question of proactive disclosure, which is a basic mandate under Section 4 of the RTI Act.<sup>39</sup> Proactive disclosure implies that information must be voluntarily published by public authorities without the need to await an RTI application. In the judicial sphere, this would involve data on cases pending, disposal rates, court calendars, judge availability, and institutional policies. Some courts have accepted this idea and have begun posting pertinent information on their websites. Yet most are behind, and the data posted is frequently old, incomplete, or inaccessible due to site design flaws and lack of user-friendliness. The enforcement of RTI therefore also depends on the judiciary's IT infrastructure and the willingness to go for computerized information management systems that promote transparency, not curb it. Without sound IT support, trained personnel, and a cultural orientation toward openness, the potential of RTI in the judicial system cannot be fully exploited.<sup>40</sup>

The training and sensitization of the judiciary officers and court personnel is another major consideration for the implementation of RTI in the judiciary. As the judiciary has been historically working in a hierarchical, closed setup, the entry of RTI necessitates a shift in the mindset of those who run the court system. Training sessions to make judicial officers aware of their roles under the RTI Act, the limits of what can be disclosed, and the procedures for dealing with RTI applications are essential for effective implementation. Such training is sporadic and inadequate in most jurisdictions. Without adequate sensitization, there is a tendency among

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<sup>37</sup> Supreme Court of India. (2019). *Secretary General, Supreme Court of India v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal*, (C.A. No. 10044/2010).

<sup>38</sup> Bose, A. (2022). *Judicial transparency or tokenism? A critique of selective openness under RTI*. Law and Governance Review, 18(2), 60–74.

<sup>39</sup> Kaur, H. (2021). *Proactive disclosure and RTI in Indian courts: Challenges and opportunities*. Indian Legal Review, 8(2), 45–59.

<sup>40</sup> Sharma, A. (2021). *The IT infrastructure challenges for RTI compliance in the Indian judiciary*. Indian Public Policy Journal, 23(1), 95–107.

court officials to consider RTI as a nuisance or a danger rather than a democratic right. This attitude tends to lead to late responses, evasive answers, or abuse of exemption clauses to withhold information that ought otherwise to be in the public eye.<sup>41</sup>

The appellate and review mechanism under the RTI Act further adds to the implementation complexity. In case of rejection of RTI applications by judicial authorities, appeals are typically dealt with internally, and issues regarding impartiality and conflict of interest arise. In others, appeals go as far as the Central Information Commission (CIC), who can issue directives opposite to what the judiciary stands for. This creates jurisdictional conflict where the judiciary can refuse to comply with CIC orders, creating more legal battles and institutional tensions. These nuances emphasize the requirement for a more rational policy that spells out the scope and limitations of RTI within the judiciary without compromising the right to know or the independence of the judiciary. One possible strategy would be to create an independent watchdog institution within the judiciary itself to resolve RTI cases and provide consistent application of norms of transparency across all tiers of the judicial hierarchy.<sup>42</sup>

The success of RTI implementation in the judiciary is also contingent on active involvement from civil society. Legal academia, legal scholars, activists, and journalists have all contributed to promoting transparency in judicial working to a significant degree.<sup>43</sup> By making effective use of RTI, they have placed significant issues in the public arena, including delays in judge appointments, disparity in bench allocation, and absence of gender or caste diversity on the bench. These disclosures have, in turn, resulted in greater public debate and policy suggestions to reform the judiciary. Hence, rolling out RTI to the judiciary is not simply an administrative affair—it is an involving process based on ongoing interaction between the judiciary and the people. The legislation outlines the architecture, but it is the institutions and citizens' combined will that brings life to its ideals.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Yadav, K. (2021). *Judicial transparency and RTI: Changing mindsets and practices*. Journal of Indian Legal Studies, 15(1), 22–34.

<sup>42</sup> Gupta, R., & Sharma, A. (2020). *Strengthening transparency in the judiciary: A systemic approach*. Journal of Public Administration, 23(4), 67–81.

<sup>43</sup> Mehta, S., & Singh, A. (2021). *Activism and transparency: The role of civil society in the judicial RTI movement*. Social Justice Review, 18(4), 123–138.

<sup>44</sup> Verma, N., & Mehta, R. (2020). *The intersection of law, transparency, and public participation in the judiciary*. Indian Law Review, 22(2), 32–45.

## 5. JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Judicial accountability mechanisms have become a focal point of contemporary legal and democratic discourse, particularly in the context of ensuring transparency and public confidence in the judiciary.<sup>45</sup> The judiciary, as the custodian of constitutional values and fundamental rights, must be held to the highest standards of integrity, impartiality, and independence. Yet these very ideals can be diluted if there are not strong mechanisms for examination of judicial behavior and institutional function. The Right to Information Act, 2005, has been a means by which citizens have the opportunity to be involved in monitoring judicial operation, but RTI does not provide the entire scope of judicial accountability. Rather, it works in tandem with a number of formal and informal mechanisms that collectively form the system within which the judiciary is supposed to be held accountable for its behavior and decision-making, without jeopardizing its independence.<sup>46</sup>

A large portion of judicial accountability has to do with the internal regulatory mechanisms that courts have evolved to address complaints against judges, particularly in the higher judiciary.<sup>47</sup> One of such mechanisms is the in-house process followed by the Supreme Court and other High Courts. Under this process, preliminary scrutiny of charges against incumbent judges is permitted by their peers, with results not usually made public. Though the mechanism was supposed to uphold judicial dignity and autonomy, it has often come under fire for being opaque and lacking transparency. The public is not privy to the complaint nature, complainant identity, or the findings of such investigations. Such lack of transparency has eroded public confidence in the effectiveness of internal systems of accountability, and it has created mounting calls for increased openness, particularly if judicial misconduct or ethical breaches are implicated. In this regard, the RTI Act has given citizens and media a legal instrument to ask for information regarding such procedures, although the information is routinely denied under exemptions on grounds of privacy and institutional integrity.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Sharma, R., & Gupta, A. (2021). *Accountability in the judiciary: Public confidence and the rule of law*. Journal of Legal Ethics, 19(2), 34–47.

<sup>46</sup> Joshi, N., & Verma, P. (2020). *The judiciary and transparency: Examining the intersection of accountability and judicial independence*. Journal of Constitutional Law, 14(1), 85–102.

<sup>47</sup> Singh, R., & Kapoor, M. (2021). *Judicial accountability and the RTI Act: A study of internal and external oversight mechanisms*. Indian Public Law Journal, 12(1), 25–40.

<sup>48</sup> Kumar, V. (2021). *The Right to Information Act and judicial accountability: A legal analysis*. Journal of Public Law, 32(3), 58–73.

Aside from internal disciplinary procedures, parliamentary oversight is another theoretical path of judicial accountability in India. According to Article 124(4) of the Constitution, a High Court or Supreme Court judge can be removed only through impeachment by Parliament on the basis of established misbehavior or incapacity. Although this is the sole official external check on the superior judiciary, the procedure is so stringent, infrequent, and politically complicated that it is nearly never utilized successfully. The impeachment process is a multi-step procedure, which includes the presentation of a motion signed by a certain number of Members of Parliament, inquiry by a judicial committee, and adoption of the motion by a two-thirds majority in both Houses of Parliament. Due to political sensitivity, the high bar of evidence, and the overall reluctance to confront the judiciary in an open manner, this mechanism has become symbolic and ineffective as a routine method of judicial accountability. Consequently, the public and civil society have increasingly looked to mechanisms such as RTI to fill the accountability gap.<sup>49</sup>

The aspect of judicial accountability is in the area of financial and administrative disclosures. Judges, as public officers, must have standards of high financial integrity. Judges' voluntary disclosure of assets was met initially with resistance by the judiciary on grounds of privacy and the risk of misuse of information revealed. Despite this, persistent pressure from the public and recourse to RTI eventually led to some success, with the judiciary finally agreeing to put up asset declarations of judges on their websites. Nevertheless, the way the information is delivered differs vastly, and in some cases, the revelations are obscure, unclear, or incomplete. The RTI process has hence become effective in extending the limits of what is regarded as public information and nudging people in the direction of a culture of transparency even where people used to believe that things were confidential. However, the judiciary still uses its discretion regarding the level and form of such disclosures, and most consider that this partial openness does not satisfy the democratic public accountability framework's expectations.<sup>50</sup>

Lack of transparency in the area of judicial appointments and promotions has been an issue of fierce controversy for many years. The collegium system, where senior judges recommend judges to the higher judiciary, is an in-house process without public input or objective criteria. Critics have maintained that the system is elitist, secretive, and prone to nepotism. The RTI Act has been instrumental in bringing about this transparency, with activists and academics making

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<sup>49</sup> Patel, A., & Joshi, N. (2020). *Judicial misconduct and ethical breaches: The case for transparency*. Journal of Constitutional Reforms, 18(4), 95–111.

<sup>50</sup> Sharma, V., & Gupta, R. (2021). *Financial integrity and judicial accountability: A critical review*. Indian Legal Review, 52(4), 110–125.

requests to obtain information on the criteria for selection, grounds for recommending or rejecting candidates, and intra-governmental communications on judicial appointments. While the judiciary has on occasion produced some information—particularly after the Supreme Court verdict upholding the applicability of RTI to the Chief Justice's office—there remains a strong resistance to making the collegium files open to public examination. The struggle between transparency and judicial autonomy is most apparent in this area, underlining the necessity for better organized and more accountable appointment processes.<sup>51</sup>

Judicial accountability also reaches into the functioning and effectiveness of courts. One of the increasing issues in the Indian judicial system is the pendency of cases and excessive delay in the administration of justice. People tend to remain in litigation for years without any conclusion, and this creates a general public feeling of systemic inefficiency. By RTI, people and associations have started requesting information regarding case pendency, disposal time, adjournment grounds, and hearing frequency. Such information has been found critical in identifying the underlying structural problems besetting the judiciary, such as understaffing, absence of infrastructure, and procedural logjams. Judicial performance assessment, based on publicly available information, becomes a reform and improvement tool. Though there have been some courts which have gone ahead and published regular reports and statistics, others are opaque and this underlines the significance of RTI as a tool for mandating institutional disclosure.<sup>52</sup>

Media and civil society groups also operate as informal but effective judicial accountability mechanisms and frequently use the RTI Act to reveal discrepancies or unethical behavior within the judiciary. Investigative reporting, supported by RTI information, has been instrumental in triggering public discourse on judicial integrity, transparency in court proceedings, and abuse of judicial office. Legal think tanks and advocacy groups have also made RTI applications to reveal procedural fairness gaps, absence of representation, and administrative inefficiencies. These efforts prove that judicial accountability is no longer limited to internal assessment or occasional instances of parliamentary scrutiny; instead, it is now formed by an engaged and

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<sup>51</sup> Verma, R., & Gupta, R. (2021). *The need for reforming the judicial appointment process in India*. Indian Legal Journal, 47(3), 123–134.

<sup>52</sup> Ravi, V., & Kumar, R. (2020). *Institutional disclosure in the judiciary: The RTI effect*. Journal of Indian Judiciary, 25(3), 145–160.

educated citizenry making use of the RTI Act to seek transparency and justice in one of the nation's most influential institutions.<sup>53</sup>

## 6. TECHNOLOGY AND RTI IN JUDICIARY

The harmonization of technology with the Right to Information (RTI) paradigm within the judiciary has made revolutionary differences in the manner in which transparency and accountability are addressed and achieved within the justice system. As the judiciary starts to upgrade its infrastructure, digital tools and technology platforms have come to function as the main facilitators for greater access to information, simplifying the processes of courts, and reducing bureaucratic obstacles that normally hamper the efficient application of RTI. The growing digitalization of court documents, RTI application filing through online portals, e-courts, and computerized data management systems have greatly enhanced citizens' ability to request and obtain information, thus supporting the principles of an open and transparent judiciary. In a nation like India, where public trust has always been undermined by judicial delays and systemic lack of transparency, technology's role in reinforcing the RTI mechanism comes as both opportune and a necessity.<sup>54</sup>

A key contribution that technology makes when applied to the arena of RTI and judiciary transparency is to digitize the court records and judgments. Gone are the days when accessing case statuses and court documents was through manual searches, physical trips to court campuses, and dealing with opaque bureaucratic tiers. Digital court management systems like the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) and the e-Courts Mission Mode Project have exposed a huge quantity of judicial information online to be accessed by everyone. All this through these platforms. One can now access judgments, monitor case status, view calendars of courts, and inspect pendency and disposal rate data of cases. So much transparency now minimizes formal RTI applications' dependency because it instils proactive disclosure of information as an integral tenet of Section 4 of the RTI Act. By providing such information readily, technology serves as an anticipatory check against corruption and inefficiency, allowing the judiciary to

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<sup>53</sup> Verma, R., & Singh, M. (2020). *RTI and public participation in judicial accountability: A modern approach*. Journal of Public Law, 38(4), 89–105.

<sup>54</sup> Mehta, P., & Kumar, R. (2020). *The role of digitalization in transforming the RTI framework in India*. Legal Reforms Review, 12(3), 123–139.

operate in a more transparent and accountable way.<sup>55</sup>

The introduction of e-filing systems for RTI applications to the judiciary has also streamlined the process of requesting information. Citizens previously had to personally go to Public Information Officers (PIOs), fill out paper applications, and sometimes wait weeks or months for a reply. With the establishment of online RTI portals, especially for the Supreme Court and some High Courts, applicants are now able to submit requests, pay fees, and receive replies online. This process minimizes delays, maximizes ease of access, and facilitates improved record-keeping and tracking of RTI applications. Additionally, it provides a digital trail that encourages institutional accountability and discourages arbitrary rejection or procedural failure. The internet platform also provides appeal procedures, whereby wronged applicants are able to move their appeals to First Appellate Authorities or even on to the Central Information Commission.<sup>56</sup> Technology therefore provides for the complete cycle of an RTI application—lodging to disposal—to be traced and audited to the last detail.

Transparency is also made possible by technology through the display of real-time data dashboards and computerized performance indicators. Most judicial sites now post information on vacancies of judges, pendency of cases in various benches, disposal rates of cases over time, and cause lists of cases to be heard in future.<sup>57</sup> Such details, if provided regularly, enable the public and civil society to assess the working and efficiency of the courts. Secondly, scholars, policy analysts, and legal experts can use this information to carry out empirical research, recommend reforms, and hold the judiciary responsible for its administrative actions. This transparency through data is possible only due to technological innovations in court data management and digital archiving. The advent of legal tech applications and public interest websites that compile judicial information and render it searchable further enhances the effect of this information revolution, making the judiciary more accessible than ever. Live-streaming of court hearings, especially in constitutional cases before the Supreme Court, is another technological advancement that directly serves the purposes of transparency and public participation. Although this initiative is not strictly part of the RTI, it is in the spirit of open justice and provides a live window into how courts operate and decisions are reached. Citizens,

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<sup>55</sup> Patel, A., & Nair, R. (2021). *Judicial transparency in the digital age: The role of e-Courts and data grids in improving access to justice*. *Legal Information and Technology Review*, 19(2), 112–127.

<sup>56</sup> Jain, S., & Singh, K. (2020). *The digital transformation of RTI processes in the judiciary: E-filing and appeal mechanisms*. *Public Administration Review*, 34(2), 78–94.

<sup>57</sup> Chandran, S., & Gupta, A. (2021). *The impact of real-time data and transparency on public trust in the judiciary*. *Indian Journal of Law and Technology*, 30(2), 90–102.

law students, media, and legal professionals can now watch proceedings without having to physically be in court. This initiative closely aligns with the goals of the RTI Act, in that it demystifies judicial life and encourages a better comprehension of legal arguments, judicial thinking, and application of constitutional principles.<sup>58</sup> Through the use of digital platforms to stream court hearings, the judiciary sends an unmistakable message that it is prepared to be put under the scanner and held accountable in the court of public opinion.

Even with these strides, it is still challenging to completely leverage technology in reinforcing RTI in the judiciary. There is extreme inequality in technology use across various levels of the judiciary, particularly between urban High Courts and rural courts. Whereas the Supreme Court and some enlightened High Courts have updated websites and electronic RTI services, numerous subordinate courts remain reliant on manual approaches. This information gap handicaps the uniform implementation of RTI provisions and restricts the public's access to judicial information uniformly. Poor IT infrastructure, shortage of trained manpower, and opposition to digital transparency by some sections of the judicial administration further widen these gaps. These gaps need to be bridged through sustained investment in technology infrastructure, capacity building, and policy-level commitment to transparency.<sup>59</sup>

Another aspect of concern is the privacy and protection of sensitive judicial information in the online environment. With increasing judicial data being placed online, issues related to data security, confidentiality, and ethical use of information become more pertinent. Courts need to establish strong data governance policies that weigh the necessity for transparency against the responsibility to safeguard individual privacy and avoid abuse of information.<sup>60</sup> This involves anonymizing sensitive information, protecting digital portals from cyber attacks, and creating transparent policy on what kind of information can be made public. Cautious and thoughtful management of this digital shift is key to ensuring that the application of technology serves to strengthen, rather than undermine, the ideals of justice and equality. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning software also have the potential to revolutionize how judicial information is processed and revealed under RTI. These technologies can be applied to classify RTI requests automatically, forecast response timelines, and create summaries of judgments for simplified

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<sup>58</sup> Sharma, S., & Singh, V. (2020). *The integration of live-streaming in judicial procedures: A step towards greater accountability*. Legal Innovation and Society, 14(3), 56–70.

<sup>59</sup> Kumar, R., & Mehta, K. (2021). *Bridging the gap: The need for technology infrastructure and training in Indian courts*. Journal of Legal Administration, 8(2), 33–46.

<sup>60</sup> Reddy, K., & Agarwal, P. (2022). *Privacy concerns in judicial data management in the digital age*. Cyberlaw Journal of India, 5(2), 97–110.

public comprehension. AI-powered legal research platforms can assist citizens in locating relevant legal documents, identifying precedents, and understanding court procedures, thereby reducing the information asymmetry that often exists between legal professionals and the general public. While deployment of such instruments is in its early stages in India's legal system, they are the future frontier in technology and RTI integration, promising to democratize legal knowledge and institutional transparency further.<sup>61</sup>

As the Indian judiciary goes on to digitize its functioning, the collaboration between technology and the RTI system will be even more essential in integrating transparency into the core of judicial institutions.<sup>62</sup> By adopting technological innovation, the judiciary can come closer to the vision of an open, responsive, and accountable justice system—one that not only dispenses fair judgments but also functions in a way that is visible, comprehensible, and accountable to the public it serves. Through digital means, the potential of RTI is taken beyond paper and procedure and becomes a dynamic and integral part of the judiciary's day-to-day interaction with citizens.<sup>63</sup>

## 7. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND FIELDWORK

The actual uses of the Right to Information (RTI) Act in the area of judicial transparency exceed legislative documents and court interpretations—they come alive most forcefully in the hands of individuals, journalists, lawyers, activists, and civil society groups who employ the Act to discover real-time information regarding the functioning of the judiciary.<sup>64</sup> By means of calculated field research and the submission of RTI petitions, these stakeholders have actively pushed the limits of accountability through the judiciary, showcasing the ways in which the Act functions as an evolving instrument for democratic participation. As applied, RTI has made information, hitherto trapped by institutional concealment, available to citizens so that they can ask questions, seek explanations, and seek systemic changes grounded in evidence. This

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<sup>61</sup> Sharma, S., & Joshi, K. (2021). *AI and the future of judicial transparency: Opportunities and challenges*. Legal Tech Review, 3(1), 134–148.

<sup>62</sup> Sharma, S., & Joshi, K. (2021). *AI and the future of judicial transparency: Opportunities and challenges*. Legal Tech Review, 3(1), 134–148.

<sup>63</sup> Gupta, S., & Verma, R. (2020). *Data governance in the judiciary: Balancing transparency and privacy*. Journal of Legal Technology, 9(4), 55–67.

<sup>64</sup> Patel, R., & Kumar, V. (2020). *Activists and the Right to Information: Exploring the impact on judicial transparency*. Transparency and Governance, 8(2), 175–188.

experiential application of RTI within the judicial arena unveils an impressive realignment of power between the public and previously closed judicial institutions.<sup>65</sup>

RTI has been employed to compile information on a variety of judicial activities with direct corollary for legal and administrative reforms in fieldwork contexts. One of the most prevalent types of inquiry is regarding delays in the justice delivery system.<sup>66</sup> Applicants have employed RTI to gather statistics regarding case pendency at different levels of the judiciary—district courts, High Courts, and the Supreme Court. The data so obtained has played a crucial role in providing a true picture of judicial backlogs, not just indicating the total number of pending cases, but also causes of delay, rate of adjournments, and average disposal periods. This information has been at the heart of various research studies, public interest litigations, and government reports seeking to change procedural norms, campaign for judicial appointments, and enhance infrastructure in the judiciary. RTI fieldwork has therefore emerged as an empirical technique of identifying inefficiencies and suggesting concrete solutions based on actual data.<sup>67</sup>

RTI applications have also been applied practically to analyze the transparency of the collegium system and judicial appointments. Activists and reporters have made requests for access to collegium members' correspondence, meeting minutes, and recommendations or objections on appointments and transfers of judges. Judicial institutions have mostly opposed these disclosures, citing exemptions on internal deliberations and fiduciary relationships, but the mere act of making such requests has led to public discussion and institutional pressure for greater transparency. Field-level initiatives have led to the partial disclosure of collegium decisions on the website of the Supreme Court, including reasons for recommending or not recommending particular candidates. This shift, although partial in nature, has been directly affected by the continued use of RTI by individuals and pressure groups who continue to demand a more open appointment system.<sup>68</sup>

Another significant use of RTI in judicial field work has been examining the financial and administrative matters of the courts. Requests for information have been submitted to reveal

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<sup>65</sup> Sharma, S., & Gupta, M. (2022). *Power dynamics in judicial transparency: RTI as a realignment mechanism*. Indian Journal of Law and Policy, 7(1), 34–45.

<sup>66</sup> Kumar, A., & Singh, R. (2019). *Delays in justice delivery: How RTI contributes to understanding judicial inefficiencies*. Indian Journal of Law and Governance, 13(4), 68–83.

<sup>67</sup> Sharma, S. (2021). *Using RTI to streamline judicial systems: Evidence from field research in India*. Transparency and Legal Reform, 15(1), 29–45.

<sup>68</sup> Reddy, A. (2021). *RTI activism and the evolution of judicial appointments in India*. Indian Constitutional Law Review, 18(3), 154–168.

what is being done with funds assigned to courts—whether on the development of infrastructure, judicial education, overseas visits by judges, or upkeep of court buildings. RTI has allowed citizens to seek information on approved posts vs. filled posts, purchase of digital infrastructure, and expenditure trends in certain judicial projects. This has frequently revealed discrepancies, under-spending of funds, and inefficient use of resources. It has also challenged the management styles in judicial administrative offices. By recording these deficits, users of RTI have found themselves in a position to mobilize pressures for improved budgeting, targeted recruitment, and the modernization of infrastructure, particularly in lower courts where the tightest stretches of resources are most apparent.

Legal aid services have also come within the ambit of RTI-based fieldwork. Data have been requested regarding the number of legal aid recipients, the criteria for the selection of legal aid lawyers, state legal services authorities' funding, and the monitoring of legal aid schemes' performance. Field-level studies conducted through RTI have brought to light discrepancies between the declared goals of legal aid and the reality on the ground, including insufficient availability of lawyers, poor public awareness, and bureaucratic delays in the allocation of counsel to deserving litigants. By exposing such systemic problems, RTI has enabled civil society bodies to push for improved implementation of legal aid schemes and to bring the judiciary within the reach of the marginalized and economically weaker segments of society.<sup>69</sup>

Beyond institutional and structural questions, RTI has been instrumental in probing judicial behavior and ethics. Practical uses have been to obtain details regarding in-house complaints made against judges, inquiries done, and the results of such proceedings. Though courts have repeatedly refused disclosure citing privacy and internal policy, sustained RTI activism has led to the very issues being out in the public. Consequently, more has been said recently about the necessity of a judicial complaints commission, more defined guidelines on judicial behavior, and improved transparency in the manner in which the complaints are dealt with. Field work of this nature illustrates how RTI is not only employed to access information, but also to subject individual members of the judiciary to accountability in the public eyes.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Singh, J., & Yadav, N. (2019). *The role of RTI in enhancing legal aid access for marginalized communities*. Journal of Human Rights and Justice, 14(1), 73–86.

<sup>70</sup> Rai, A., & Mehta, R. (2023). *Bringing judicial accountability into the light: The role of RTI in exposing judicial behavior*. Law and Ethics Review, 30(1), 67–80.

At a larger scale, research institutions and research organizations have integrated RTI-based methods in field research on the functioning of the judiciary. RTI applications have been filed by law students, academics, and policy researchers as part of empirical studies to collect information related to issues such as gender representation in the judiciary, marginalized communities among judges and court employees, and regional language usage in courts. These questions have yielded significant findings and suggestions, most of which have been made available in reports and journals, and added to the literature on judicial inclusion and reform. RTI activities based in the field have thus emerged as tools of investigation but also as instruments of scholarly and policy-level change.<sup>71</sup>

## 8. CONCLUSION

The Right to Information Act has been a revolutionary instrument in bringing about transparency and accountability in the judiciary, filling the gap between the public and an institution traditionally viewed as inaccessible and opaque. Although the judiciary has a key role to play in enforcing the rule of law and protecting constitutional values, it is equally important that it be answerable to the citizens whom it serves. The RTI Act has facilitated a democratic conversation by permitting people to inquire, ask questions, and judge judicial performance, especially in administrative, budgetary, appointments, and procedural delay-related aspects. In spite of some drawbacks and institutional hesitation, the widespread application of RTI by citizens, activists, media persons, and researchers has resulted in meaningful changes—between the partial release of collegium orders and better digital access to court records and increased public sensitization. The infusion of technology has also increased the efficiency of RTI in court proceedings, making it simpler for people to submit applications, access documents, and engage in the quest for transparency. As democratic institutions mature, it becomes ever more important for the judiciary to adopt transparency not as a threat to its autonomy, but as a prerequisite for upholding public confidence and legitimacy. RTI, when genuinely followed and backed by strong digital infrastructure and institutional willingness, can see to it that the judiciary remains not only a keeper of justice but also an exemplar of integrity, transparency, and accountability in a democratic country.

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<sup>71</sup> Kumar, A., & Desai, R. (2023). *Policy-driven changes in judicial diversity: The role of RTI in institutional reform*. *International Law Review*, 35(1), 22–37.

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