

## WEBINAR PROCEEDINGS

Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma Institute of Democracy, University of Lucknow organized a webinar on “Right to information, Public Authority and Good Governance” on 2nd May 2020. Participation to webinar was on first come-first served basis to the maximum limit of 100. We received an overwhelming participation of around 150 participants from all over the India comprising of the Professors, Judicial officers and Students.

The webinar was graced and inaugurated by the presence of our Hon’ble Vice Chancellor, Prof. Alok Kumar Rai. Sh. Suresh Chandra, Hon’ble Central Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission, Govt. of India was the Chief Guest and Dr. Parikshet Sirohi, Assistant Professor, University of Delhi was special guest of the Webinar and they were also the main speakers of the event. The Hon’ble Vice Chancellor started the event with discussing the relevance of Information in developing societies. He also talked about initiative of University of Lucknow in creating transparency by putting more and more information in the public domain through its website, so that through Suo-motu declarations accountability can be increased in the institution. He also pointed out the recent contributions of the University in the tough times of COVID-19 which includes:

- Revamping of the University’s website and making online study material available for all. Over 300 teachers have prepared around 3000 e-content which is available in open-access mode. The contents have been accessed by thousands of people from all over India,
- Launching of its own hand-sanitizer,
- Prospect of collaborating with research projects to start its own COVID-19 testing,
- Collaborated with 112 helpline number and started Psychological guidance programs for the Police officers on duty,
- Community kitchens in making and distributing food,
- Around 5000 masks were produced and distributed by LU volunteers,
- Many online programs to be launched,
- TREE initiative,
- Carbon footprint,
- More emphasis on e-learning,
- Release of video cultural magazine which is first of its kind.
- Student OPD.

Lastly, Hon’ble Vice Chancellor congratulated all participants and in the context of RTI concluded his speech by saying “Democracy cannot flourish in the absence of transparency.”

Hon’ble CIC’s lecture of RTI was very comprehensive and informative. He explained every concept associated with the RTI Act, supplemented it with cases and then concluded by sharing his personal experience. He discussed the concept of Public Authority under RTI Act and spoke about the relevance of public authority in Governance. He also quoted Bentham and Austin and said it is the duty of the legislature to make law and further it is the command of sovereign to protect it through accountability and transparency. He further explained the concept of “Public Authority” with the help of principles of Administrative Law. He said justice can only be delivered

when people can have access to information. Access to information is very much embedded with the notion of rule of law, which is a paramount function of administrative law. He further discussed the importance of Article 19 of the Constitution of India in order to understand the Right to information. He discussed the concept of 'other authorities' which was time and again interpreted by Supreme Court in the light of so many celebrated judgements. He further emphasize on the concept of the definition of 'State' for understanding the definition of 'Public Authority', within the scope of RTI Act. He discussed so many of his recent delivered cases as an authority to make concept more interesting. He discussed dozens of recent cases regarding dissemination of information under RTI Act by Central Information Commission. He also explained the entire RTI Act in brief.

Dr. Parikshet Sirohi addressed the participants with his informative and well-prepared PowerPoint Presentation. His gave a good insight on the diverse issues associated with RTI. He spoke on the changing dimensions of the definition of 'State' wherein he talked about the attitude of public servants as well public Information officers in not disclosing information. He further elaborated that secrecy and unwilling attitude of public authorities destroying the very utility of RTI Act. He said misuse of RTI is also very rampant in today's context and elaborated on the very object of RTI Act. He said so many so called RTI activist's use RTI as a weapon to gratify their own interest.

Lastly, after the address of all the speakers was over, the floor was set open for question and answer session. The questions largely related to inclusion of judiciary within the purview of RTI and extent of inclusion of Govt. Servant within the purview of RTI. Other than this, participants who are intending to file RTI or are facing any difficulty on this also placed their doubts before the panel. All the participants were satisfied with the answers and were happy with the event. Dr. Varun Chhachhar, Coordinator, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma Institute of Democracy, University of Lucknow was the host of the Webinar. He summarized the session and thanked the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor for his guidance and support in making this webinar a reality. He further thanked the Hon'ble Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission, Govt. of India, Sh. Suresh Chandra ji for gracing the occasion as a Chief Guest by sparing his valuable and precious time for students and participants from all walks of life. Further he thanked all the participants from all corners of the India for this academic endeavour.

#### **OUTCOMES & SUGGESTIONS FROM THE WEBINAR:**

- Pro- Active Disclosure under section 4 of the RTI Act for all Public Authorities is a must preposition in today's context.
- Spreading awareness about the RTI Act is most important aspect for better governance.
- Improving free flow of information under RTI Act.
- Uniformity among State Governments in implementation of RTI Act.

- Checking Harassment of RTI information seekers and information provider.
- Improving information dispensation mechanism in local bodies.
- Improving management of records.
- Allowing more transparency and accountability for real democracy and Governance.
- Misuse of Right to Information.

(Dr. Varun Chhachhar)  
Coordinator  
Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma Institute of Democracy  
University of Lucknow.