



Should political parties be brought under RTI Act?

Description

Introduction:

This debate has existed for years now. Most of the political parties(except Aam Aadmi Party) have expressed their opposition to any such move. On the other hand, RTI activists have been voicing their demands of greater transparency in the system by bringing the parties under the RTI (Right to Information) Act.

Against:

- Political parties are independent bodies, they need not be accountable to the public. They were not established by the constitution or an act of the parliament.
- If political parties come under the RTI, it will affect their smooth internal functioning. Rivals may use RTI to malign each other. Also, since the political parties are not connected to the public directly, an RTI would be invalid.
- There are adequate provisions in the Income Tax law and with the Election Commission so that people can have whatever information they want.

In Favour:

- Political parties are central to the functioning of Democracy. Political Parties go on to form the government. The government policies are then governed by the party's ideology. Thereby, it becomes essential for political parties to come under the ambit of RTI.
- Political funding is believed to be the fountainhead of corruption. The citizens have the right to know where the political parties are raising these funds from, how they spend these funds and the basis of their decisions. Crony capitalism will be hugely curbed if political parties are brought under RTI Act.
- Under the IT Act, political parties do not need to disclose donations that they get below INR 20,000. An informal study done in 2010 on 6 key political parties shows that they raised Rs 700 crore. 95% of the amount was raised by amounts below Rs 20,000. There is a high

possibility that the political parties use this loophole to their advantage.

- Political parties declare certain promises in their manifestos. After getting elected, the citizens have a right to know why the promises made by the political parties were not fulfilled.
- The law is very clear that RTI is not just concerned with government bodies alone. It also for Non-Government Organisations which are substantially financed and controlled by the Government. There are numerous subsidies(including Tax exemptions) that the Political parties enjoy, thereby, they are substantially financed by the Government.
- The RTI Act states that wherever there is Public Interest, those organizations need to be transparent and come under the ambit of the law. There are any number of Private organizations today, whether partially funded or fully; schools, hospitals etc. that are under the RTI Act and not just the Government organizations.
- The RTI Act has provisions under section 8 which mention the concept of Competitive Interest. Certain exemptions are provided in cases where it can be proved that divulging information can hurt the Competitive Advantage of the party. This is not just a problem with Political Parties but a lot of Government and Private bodies too.

Conclusion:

In light of the above arguments, it can be easily deduced that the arguments in favor far outweigh the argument against the topic. The RTI Act has all the provisions and mechanisms to deal with any contingencies that may arise in the future. It would bring a high level of transparency in the democracy which is greatly needed at the moment. The reluctance of Political Parties to this move is an obvious indication of unscrupulous means that are used by them.

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Your Turn!

Do you think political parties should be brought under RTI? Express your thoughts through the comment section below. And subscribe to our blog to read answers to the trending GD topics.

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