Abstract—Information is essential for the smooth working of a real democracy. It facilitates clandestine deals, arbitrary decisions, manipulation, etc. when there is transparency in all the matters of the government. The citizens of India have the right to get informed regarding the functioning of the country. The RTI Act 2005 gained relevance so that information in the country can be communicated with clarity and honesty to its citizens. It is the duty of the authority to provide people freedom to access any file, document or any information pertaining to their operations. This research paper is based on a study of how people are aware of the RTI Act 2005. In the concluding part, we have made some recommendations on how the government can make the RTI Act more effective within the people and how the government and citizens of India can go hand-in-hand with each other for a better India.

Keywords: Awareness of people, Democracy, Right to Information Act 2005, Transparency within information.

1. INTRODUCTION

12th October 2005 saw the introduction of the Right to Information Act, which covers the whole of India, except to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. It gives the citizens of India the right to look into the works and documents, records or any other copies or publications by the Government undertakings except as stated under Section 8. It is the duty of the Public Information Officer (PIO) to provide with information that is requested by the public. When information is communicated to its people regularly, there will be openness and transparency in the democracy. It is the duty of the government to provide with the details regarding their working or new policies or information and details of initiatives that are to be introduced by them. Government should also take responses and opinions from people so that they feel as a part of the Government and they would be willing to abide the laws and rules. This helps in maintaining unity within the people and also smoothens the functioning of the democracy.

Many authors have contributed their works on various areas of the Right to Information, 2005. Our paper mainly focuses on the Awareness of the Right to Information Act among the rural public. The following include the objectives of our current study:
To study on how the educational qualification and awareness of the RTI Act among the rural public of Kerala is associated.

To understand the profession wise awareness of the RTI Act.

To evaluate the gender wise awareness of the RTI Act.

To examine how age is associated with the level of awareness.

Even though the Act came into force on 2005, there are still people who are not even aware of this Act and its benefits. Government representatives should take initiative in educating and communicating various Acts that are beneficial to the people.

The current study mainly aims in studying the level of awareness about the RTI Act, 2005 among the rural public in Kerala. We conducted research in Kollam, Ernakulam, Palakkad and Kottayam districts. With the study it would help the Government in understanding the people’s awareness about the Act. Also, the Government can introduce awareness programs to its people for educating them about the Act and its benefits.

RTI Act allows the citizens to get any information that they require, at minimum cost and within a span of 30 days. Government should communicate every detail of their new initiatives that they come up with to its people so that their responses and acceptance can be known. If this system is kept alive, then it leads to transparency between the people and their Government. Government can introduce new methods or applications to keep its people updated and informed. More representatives from people should be selected so as to communicate the information effectively. Concerned authorities should conduct meetings at regular interval to study the problems with the people and take actions on how their conditions can be improved.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the article, the author stated that information is a power that is being vested within the hands of the people and it was also identified that the Right to information has helped in empowering and recognizing the various rights of the people [1]. According to the study it was stated that the RTI Act alone can have a positive impact on people and highlighted the importance of RTI laws for the better enhancement of transparency and accountability in the democracy, thereby reducing the opportunity for corruption [2]. The study conducted by the author stated that there has been a lacking in the initiative from the government as a result of which there is less awareness, less usage and not much improvement in seeking information by the citizens. They also included that there is lack of trained Public Information Officers (PIOs) and infrastructure supporting the same [3]. From the article it was seen that lack of transparent operations was one of the major causes for corruption in the State, and in the research they have communicated that access to information needs to be ensured in a democracy in order to understand the functioning of the Government [4]. This article reveals that transparency and accountability are required for democratic governance and the RTI Act plays a big role in the quality life of the poor. It was also examined that the implementation of the Act was difficult as they lacked preparedness to welcome the Act [5]. According to this article, the author highlighted the guidelines of the RTI Act; the issues relating to the Act and also studied what relation exist between the RTI Act and good governance. It was also suggested that the government should allocate funds for the publicity of the RTI Act and the effective
implementation of the same [6]. The article examined that greater transparency helps in establishing the trust
between government and its citizens. In addition to that, the article also stated that the citizens, NGOs, and the
media have the very right to know every information regarding the government by adopting transparent
procedures and method of delivering the service to its citizens [7]. This Article shows that many social
backward groups including students, self-occupied and housewives are unaware of the RTI Act. The study also
indicated that RTI can be used as a tool so as to eradicate corruption in civil services and public utility services
so that there exist a transparent democracy [8]. This article looks upon identifying the major indicators of
corruption in India and how these corruptions can be eradicated with the help of a powerful weapon: the RTI
Act. The article also stated that there should be partnership between the government and the citizens so that the
country will have a transparent and accountable governing system [9]. According to this research study
indicated that the RTI Act has succeeded in reducing asymmetries in information and reduced corruption. It was
also revealed in the study that RTI was used to fight against corruption and demand for the rights of the citizens
[10]. The authors have stated in the study that due to various challenges the main objective of the RTI Act have
not yet achieved. To provide clearness and honesty in the works of the administration, the existence of Right to
Information is critical and it is only possible with the support and participation of people, NGOs, civil society
groups and other officials [11]. In the article, the author states that the RTI Act is a very important tool for the
strengthening of the democracy and it is with the introduction of this Act there exist transparency within the
government and the people. Citizens are now using the RTI Act to get informed regarding public funds, reports
on ongoing projects, details of passport, license and much more [12]. This article explained the importance of
the RTI Act in India as a tool that checks corruption. It was also stated that there is a mission of RTI which lay
as a map detailing how the citizens can gain access to information which will promote good governance in the
State [13].

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to study the awareness of the Right to Information Act among the rural public of Kerala, we conducted
a research study in the districts of Kottayam, Kollam, Ernakulam and Palakkad. Random sampling was used to
collect the date from 200 respondents, where 50 samples were collected from each district. The study was
conducted to understand the level of awareness about the RTI Act among public in association with the gender,
educational qualification and certain other factors. We collected data with the use of a structured questionnaire,
where questions were asked on their level of awareness, intimacy of public in government affairs, how well was
the information communicated to their people, any initiatives from the side of the government to communicate
about the Act and their support towards the RTI Act. Data and opinion were collected and analysed so as to
draw inferences on their level of awareness of the Right to Information Act, so that suggestions can be provided
to improve the situations.
IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

50 samples were collected from each district where a total of 200 were used for our research study. IBM SPSS 21 was used to analyse the same and chi-square test was used to arrive at conclusions based on the hypothesis proposed. Percentage analysis was done with the help MS Excel 2007.

Interpretation on the Demographic factors

1. Gender of the respondents

From Fig. 1: Gender of the respondents, it is seen that female respondents is more aware of the RTI Act than male respondents.

Figure 1: Gender of the respondents

2. Educational qualification of the respondents

Fig.2: Educational qualification shows that respondents of higher secondary educational qualification and graduates are more awareness about the Act than other qualified respondents.

Figure 2: Educational qualification of the respondents
3. Occupation of the respondent

From the Fig. 3: occupation of the respondent, it is viewed that self-occupied respondents are more aware of the Right to information Act than other occupied public.

Figure 3: Occupation of the respondents

Interpretation on the testing of hypothesis

I. Gender-Awareness test
We proposed the null hypothesis as there is association between the gender and their level of awareness, which according to Table 1: Gender wise awareness, proved to be right. So we reject the alternate hypothesis stating there is no association of awareness with gender (chi-square with 1 degree of freedom, \( p=.135 \)).

Table 1: Gender wise awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square Tests</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>2.236</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity Correction(^a)</td>
<td>1.761</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>2.274</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>2.225</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table No. 1.1: Cross tabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of the respondents</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Qualification-Awareness test

Null hypothesis stated there is an association with awareness and qualification of the respondents and Table 2: Qualification wise awareness indicates that qualification and awareness are associated thereby rejecting the alternative hypothesis (chi-square with 4 degree of freedom, \( p=.280 \)).

Table 2: Qualification wise awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square Tests</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>5.076</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Cross tabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification of the respondent</th>
<th>Below SSLC</th>
<th>SSLC</th>
<th>Higher Secondary</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Post graduate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Age-Awareness test

Null hypothesis of the study stating age and awareness are associated proved to be right, which resulted to the rejection of alternate hypothesis stating there exist no association between age and awareness (chi-square with 4 degree of freedom, p=.665).

**Table 3: Age wise awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square Tests</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>2.388</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Cross tabulation</th>
<th>Age of the respondents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>31-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Act: Yes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Act: No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. Occupation-Awareness test

Here, the null hypothesis was stated that the occupation and awareness are not associated and from Table 4: Occupation wise awareness, it was seen that the null was rejected there by accepting the alternate which shows the existence of association between occupation and awareness (chi-square with 5 degree of freedom, p=.044).

**Table 4: Occupation wise awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square Tests</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>11.410</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1: Cross tabulation</th>
<th>Occupation of the respondents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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V. DISCUSSION

In order to understand the demographic factors of the respondents their gender, educational qualification and age group have been represented graphically in the above figures. From Figure 1, it is understood that female are more aware about the Act as compared to male respondents. Figure 2 shows the increased awareness of the Act among the higher secondary qualified respondents. And Figure 3 brings out the information that self-occupied respondents are more aware of the Right to Information Act. To understand the association between level of awareness about the Act and gender of the respondent, chi-square test was used. From the test it was seen that we rejected the alternative hypothesis and accepted the null, stating that there exist a significant association between the level of awareness and the gender of the respondent (p=.135). From Table 1.1, it can be finalized that more female respondents are aware of the Act than the male respondents forming a strong base that gender has an association with the awareness level. With a p value of .280, we accepted the null hypothesis (Table 2). Table 2.1 shows the association between the level of awareness and the educational qualification of the respondents providing a suggestion that respondents with a higher secondary educational qualification has more awareness of the Act.

Age of the respondent and their level of awareness have an association which is explained in Table 3, where we reject the alternative hypothesis (p=.665) and accept the null stating the existence of a statistically significant association between age and their level of awareness. Table 3.1 proves the same by showing that respondents of age group 41-50 are more aware of the RTI Act as compared to other age categories. Least aware are respondents of 51-60 and above 60 age group. Table 4.1 supports the Table 4 showing that there exist an association between occupation and the level of awareness of the respondents. We have rejected the null hypothesis, having a ‘p value’ of .044 (Table 4) and accepted the alternate which stated that the occupation and awareness are associated. It can also be seen that the self-occupied respondents are more aware of the Act.

Testing of hypothesis came out with the result that the level of awareness of the respondents has association with the age, educational qualification, gender and occupation. Directly interviewing the respondents with the help of a structured questionnaire was the technique used for data collection. Responses helped in analyzing the level of awareness and their opinion and support towards the Right to Information Act, 2005. Even though the Right to Information Act was passed before 13 years, proper use of the Act has not yet happen. Government should take more initiatives to improve the awareness level of the people by conducting camps, awareness programs or classes for the same. Public should be given more preference so that they will be more about their rights and the benefits of each law introduced.
VI. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This present has got certain limitations which are stated as follows:

- We considered only 200 respondents which is comparatively less in number. We recommend future researches with more samples so that broad conceptions can be drawn.
- Samples were collected only from 4 districts of Kerala, which paves way for future researchers to conduct research in the same area with wider area of study.

References


