



Jan Soochna Portal

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This article is based on **“A milestone in greater transparency, accountability”** which appeared in The Hindu on 14 September 2019. It talks about Jan Soochna Portal that has brought a sea change to the narrative of good governance.

Recently, the government of Rajasthan had launched **Jan Soochna Portal (JSP)**, which is in **concurrency with the spirit of Right to Information Act (RTI)**. This virtually makes JSP a **Janta Information System**.

JSP envisages public disclosure of data, which is the furtherance of civil society reforms initiated by the RTI, making it in synergy with good governance.

Thus, JSP is **worthy of emulation by other States** so as to implement the **narrative of minimum government and maximum governance**.

- The portal aims to provide information to the public about government authorities and departments empowering them with access to useful information.
- JSP integrates data regarding the employment guarantee programme, sanitation, the public distribution system among others, by not only explaining the schemes but also providing real-time information on beneficiaries, authorities in charge, progress, etc
- **Information kiosks** in village panchayats and **self-service e-Mitra centres** in the towns will be established to enable the people to access the information.
- **Grievance redressal officers** will be appointed so that citizens can keep a check upon the accountability aspect of the State government.

Need for JSP like Initiative

- Although, there has been a rapid release of public information on various government-run websites, this information has often been parcelled, dispersed and difficult to parse (*comprehend*).

It means the focus has been more on showcasing data and records rather than releasing structured information. This makes it difficult for the citizenry to get desired information.

- National Judicial Data Grid which provides information regarding the pending cases, was launched on a similar framework. It has led judiciary to concentrate on the disposal of old pending cases with considerable success.

Benefits of JSP

- **Centralization of information:** As a one-shot portal for public information on government programmes, the JSP can advance the objective of transparency.
- **Inclusiveness:** The access points of information that are open and free, is a step towards good governance.
- **Democratization of information:** Since the information is available on the Internet, every citizen, right down to the municipal ward and panchayat, has access to the information.

JSP has made people, including the marginalised sections, **a part of the governance process.**

- **Better delivery of public services:** JSP will help in **better targeting, expediting industrial and environmental clearances.**

JSP vs RTI

- The RTI Act had dealt with the citizen's right to know about public information and required public authorities to expeditiously provide information **on request from the citizenry.**

However, through JSP, **there is no need for anyone to take recourse to the RTI Act and await a response.** As all information can be accessed immediately, free of cost.

- While RTI filings have increased exponentially and RTI-activism has become part and parcel of civil society, but there have been **dilutions in the Act** pertaining to the appointments of information commissioners, therefore impinging on their autonomy.
- Also, the **response rate to RTI requests has also slowed down** over the period.
- Apart from these issues, it is important to note that **Section 4(2) of the Act**, which specifically enjoins upon public authorities to publish information proactively, **has not been implemented holistically so far.**
- Therefore, the public disclosure of information through JSP have **brought a sea change** in accountability and has led to the possibility of a well-informed citizenry on the workings of the government.

Challenges for JSP

- Challenges related to the existing **digital divide in India** need to be addressed.
- **Digital illiteracy:** While digital connectivity and literacy have increased over time, these have **not adequately translated into digital knowledge of public affairs.**
- Given the size of **India's bureaucratic architecture**, maintenance of JSP is itself is a big challenge.

The challenge would be to ensure that the information flow remains unhampered over time.

Way Forward

- To reap the full potential of the platform like JSP, it is important to **educate the citizenry about the use of data** on the portal.
- Also, the union government should provide a single portal through which disclosures of all public authorities could be accessed, to facilitate easy availability of information.
- Apart from it, a lot more needs to be done to usher in accountability in governance, including **protection of whistleblowers, decentralization of power and fusion of authority with accountability at all levels.**

Transparency must be accompanied by accountability, and that is where the JSP has great value and significance since it places the power of making the State government accountable to everyone who accesses the information made available on the portal. **This makes JSP a milestone in increasing transparency and accountability in governance.**

Drishti Mains Question

The Jan Soochna Portal launched by the government of Rajasthan is a remarkable achievement in furtherance of the right to information. Comment.

Source: