

WHAT DO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ACHIEVE? REFLECTIONS ON THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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Introduction

Political participation in routine electoral politics usually marks the threshold of formal democracy. Within this institutional matrix, social movements have been acknowledged as “major vector(s) for the articulation of underrepresented political interests” (Giugni, etal 1999: xv) for whom achieving substantive democratic goals of economic equality and social justice hinges on sustained collective struggles. This paper attempts to theorize the impact of collective action for movement constituents in particular and the society in general from the empirical context of the Right to Information (henceforth, RTI) mobilizations in Rajasthan. The analyses focuses on (a) the articulation between social movements, states and political society; (b) significance of the cumulative effects of a transparency law; and (c) the implications of a transparency law in engendering state-citizen engagement for broader goals of equality and social justice.

In India, from the 1970s, with the State withdrawing gradually from its earlier vision of social transformation and democratization, grassroots mobilizations articulating a politics in variance with institutional party politics have emerged, marked by “growing awareness of rights, felt politically and expressed politically...” (Kothari 1984: 218). These mobilizations or “non-party political formation”, aspolitical scientist Rajni Kothari had termed them, have gradually carved a space for alternative forms of political action, “as new forms of organisation and struggle meant to rejuvenate the State” (ibid: 219) but also getting “changed, shaped, and redefined

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by interacting with other groups in society as well as their political allies and opponents” (Jenkins & Form 2005: 335).

The grassroots mobilization for a Right to Information in India can be situated within this paradigm where mobilizations have sought to engage the State in order “to make it once again an instrument of liberation from exploitative structures (both traditional and modern) in which the underprivileged and the poor are trapped” (Kothari 1984: 219). Beginning with a demand for transparency and accountability in public works, the movement articulated a broader right to information, which gradually metamorphosed into claims for substantive socio-economic rights, through negotiating with “the structure of the state, prevailing political alliances, existing ideologies and cultural resources...” (Jenkins & Form 2005: 332).

This essay traces the grassroots campaign to claim transparency and accountability in governance, popularly known as the RTI movement, in the specific context of the north-western state of Rajasthan¹ in India. By tracing the process of both emergence and securing of a right, and its subsequent practices, the broader objective here is to locate what social movements achieve in the long run, especially “by the mobilizing force of popular claims to citizenship rights” (Somers 1994: 64)—an understudied theme in research on social movements². Thus, the analyses will go beyond “explanations for how rights-driven social movements constitute themselves” (Somers & Roberts 2008: 386) to explore the constitutive role of social movement mobilization in the process of substantive democratization.

While social movement mobilizations never singularly affect outcomes, when combined with influential state allies, a favourable policy environment and legislative will, movements often succeed in effecting short-term outcomes. However, “movement processes contribute independently or in addition to other potential causes” (Jenkins & Form 2005: 332) to effect long-term social changes. Difficulties arise in identifying the long-term consequences of social movements as these are usually diffused in nature, opaque to movement participants and are always in the making. Achieving substantive citizenship, as I argue here, is one such goal, where tracing social movement action over an extended period of time and space can yield evidence on the contentious claim-making of citizenship rights. The RTI campaign provides an ideal context for interrogating these issues because it draws attention to how civil society organizations—the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan³ (henceforth MKSS) in this case—may broaden their objectives over time and space, once their immediate goals are achieved by

transforming themselves into contentious actors “operating on the boundaries of constituted politics, culture, and institutions” (Tarrow 2012: 13).

Framing and Mobilization in the RTI Campaign: Power and Civic Participation

The founder members of MKSS had decided in 1987, “at the end of a four year drought period in the region”, to establish base at village Devdungri in Rajsamand district of Rajasthan. As Nikhil Dey, one of the founder members of MKSS recollected⁴, most villagers were unanimous in declaring, “*Yahan kuchh nahi ho sakta*” (“It’s not possible to get anything done here”), an almost bodily realization through experiences of deprivation and structured inequality of the power that accrues to bureaucratic officials. The immediacies of local caste and power matrices and the common knowledge of connivance of local bureaucracy with locally powerful social groups determined the conditions of everyday despair and apathy of poor inhabitants in most parts of this region.

The genesis of mobilization for information as an objective artifact of bureaucratic power was rooted in this complex interplay of already existing structures of social power, in the structures of the bureaucratic field, and networks of political power. “In the year 1994-95”, narrated Kesar Singh of Baghmal village of Jawaja panchayat⁵ in Ajmer district:

Of eighty thousand rupees, about twenty thousand was yet to be paid to me by the panchayat in Jawaja as dues for work done in the panchayat. I then made several rounds to the panchayat office, the BDO (Block Development Office), the SDM (Sub-Divisional Magistrate) and finally the Collector at Ajmer who directed the BDO to release the funds due to me. Even after the Collector’s orders, the BDO along with panchayat functionaries refused to pay me the dues. They all wanted to eat the money; they were all hand in glove.

It was then that Singh approached the MKSS through Sohan Singh, a fellow villager who was associated with the organization, which then decided to inspect the records for Asan village panchayat under Jawaja pachayat samiti. Neither the Rajasthan state RTI law (which came into force in the year 2000) nor the national law had been promulgated then, thus making the inspection of records of work done in the panchayat virtually impossible. Kesar Singh’s is not an isolated instance of the experience of corruption in development works, but a common experience, especially for those whose lives

depend on the welfare entitlements and socio-economic measures undertaken periodically for alleviating poverty and deprivation. This collective experience of embedded structures of dominance and exploitation coupled with lack of state services gradually pointed towards the need to demand transparency and accountability in public works, the latter being a dignified source of succor for a sizable number of the population in times of distress. Thus, the grassroots mobilization for RTI was framed by “‘naming’ grievances” and acted as “accentuating devices that either underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral *what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable*” (Tarrow 1998: 110; emphasis added) within a context of alliances and antagonisms between different groups in political society. That transparency is a collective good for democratic governance was realized through collective action, thus transforming what appeared as a local issue for participants in the movement “to encompass broader interests...that seek substantial social change” (ibid). While these mobilizations gained meaning in the specific context of the movement in Rajasthan, the resultant national RTI Act was a function of broader networks of alliances which in turn “cultivated links between other state actors and the intelligentsia” (Pande 2014, 16), with the formation of the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information (NCPRI) in 1996, six years after the formal founding of MKSS.

State-challengers, as Sidney Tarrow has argued, utilize “resources *external* to the group [which] unlike money or power...can be taken advantage of by even weak or disorganized challengers” (Tarrow 1998: 20; emphasis in original). The formation of the national alliance, NCPRI, in the year 1996, comprising former bureaucrats, journalists, academics, and civil society groups, catapulted the local grassroots mobilization in Rajasthan, decisively led by the MKSS in agitations and sit-ins in various cities of Rajasthan, including the state capital Jaipur and the national capital New Delhi. This led to the movement’s scale being broadened with parallel processes of lobbying with legislators and policy-makers, and agitational politics defining the character of the movement post-1996. Although an RTI law was an important legislative and policy objective of the Congress (I)-led United Progressive Alliance government, which was in power at the Centre from 2004-2014, the meaning of the law for poor rural villagers and its realization as a right was far more embedded in social-structural experiences than the official language of the law could ever communicate. “The informal, fluid world of

social movements”, as Laurel Weldon argues, could mobilize socially and economically disadvantaged groups more easily “because formal institutions tend to disempower and exclude these groups” (Weldon 2012: 2). This was evidenced in many instances where the poor and marginalized felt empowered to voice their viewpoints to educated policy elite, an instance of the biographical consequences of sustained social movement engagement. Thus, “social movements provide a vital form of democratic political representation, through both conventional and newer avenues of political expression” (ibid: 4).

Susheela Bai, an activist-member of MKSS, came up with one of the rallying slogans of the movement—“hamara paisa, hamara hisab” (“our money, our accounts”), during a representation in Delhi where legal luminaries such as P.B. Sawant, former PM V.P. Singh, officials and the press were present. Sawant was curious, Susheela Bai recalled⁶, about the import of RTI for an illiterate village woman like herself, to which she had replied in what has become movement folklore, how demanding accounts from the government for expenditure meant for welfare schemes in the name of the poor is akin to asking her son for accounts after a trip to the *bazaar*(market). The enunciation of the right in this manner conveys the practical realization of what constitutes public money and how accountability rests with the people in whose name public funds for civic purposes such as a village school are disbursed. This was “law in practice”, communication of the law in its most mundane sense, and is an instance of what Bryan Turner has termed “public and active citizenship” (Turner 1990: 189). What the right meant were, thus, a function of social movement framing, the experience of entrenched institutional and power matrices of local government structures as well as the mundane reality of an economic ethic of transparency in generating trust in both the structures of everyday life as well as for reinforcing the institutional edifice for achieving substantive citizenship. Thus, ‘*soochana ka adhikar*’ or ‘right to information’ was forged as a right not only to claim entitlements for basic sustenance but also as a challenge to the ostensibly neutral bureaucratic power of state authorities. This particular aspect of the movement demonstrates that “social movements may have an impact on the structure of the polity, on the degree to which authority is centralized...and may also contest other system wide features of states, such as, their democratic practices and electoral rules” (Snow et al 2004: 465).

After the Law: Implementation and Its Discontents

It is not often that we find social movements leading to concrete legislative or policy outcomes. In the recent legal and policy history of India, rarely has a social movement by civil society organizations with predominantly grassroots participation resulted in a legislative and policy outcome. The RTI Act of 2005 is an exception and has often been heralded as “the best thing to happen after the Constitution of India”, as Satyanand Mishra, a former Chief Information Commissioner of India, stated in an article in the *Indian Express* on October 13, 2015. The movement participants, while terming their mobilization experiences, feel that the RTI appears as “the second most important movement after the freedom struggle”.. It is possible to situate the long-term, albeit unforeseen enunciations of the right in such pronouncements as a manifestation of “broader changes in the structure of social institutions, the distribution of social benefits, and conceptions of social rights and responsibilities” (Jenkins & Form 2005: 332). The RTI simultaneously inaugurated confrontations with bureaucratic governance mechanisms of the state alongside a proliferation of rights claims for compulsory state provisions for primary education, for natural resources of forest and other indigenous people, and other social security rights such as food security and a guaranteed right to work.

The enactment of the RTI Act in 2005⁷ is a classic case where “bold new movements make claims on elites that parallel the grievances of those with less daring and less initiative” (Tarrow 2012: 152). Transparency as a normative goal for achieving substantive democracy—both as political rhetoric and policy prescription for good governance—was translated into an outcome only through collective action with its ‘unusual property that it demonstrates the possibilities of collective action to others and offers even resource-poor groups opportunities that their structural position alone would not allow them’ (ibid). Once it was realized that substantive entitlements for social rights would forever remain a chimera in the absence of public records and its public verification, the RTI movement generated a unique civic engagement—the ‘*jan-sunwai*’—literally, public hearing, which followed five essential steps, “obtaining government information, converting or simplifying that information, reviewing or auditing public works, motivating people to testify, and conducting the final hearing” (Pande 2014: 73). The movement’s goal of achieving transparency and accountability in governance would have remained insubstantial without this mode

of public auditing, which made “records” of local governance, colloquially understood as *kaagaz* (paper) synonymous with information, an otherwise general and ubiquitous term.

The *jan-sunwais* entailed physically verifying development works recorded on paper within a panchayat with the actual works, in which villagers convened *jan-sunwais* in the presence of district government officials and neutral observers. This unique mode of state-society engagement made the impersonality of the bureaucratic process and its delegated power come alive in the proximity of familiar social and personal village ties, resulting in the close association of the right with the possibility of public dishonouring of powerful individuals and caste groups within village society. Bureaucratic administration with its characteristic impersonality, control and efficiency was made immediate in the personalized power of individual power holders within local society, a phenomenon made possible in a local governance setting, but impossible to achieve for bureaucratic officials as a whole. The fact that the RTI Act has been completely ineffective in penalizing errant officers who fail to comply in providing information within the stipulated period of 30 days shows how social movement outcomes remain limited in effecting substantive realizations of the law. It is also indicative of the fact that civic production with its strategic, emergent quality may lead to variable outcomes, either generating a notion of the public good or reverting to politics as usual. Thus, as Margaret Somers has argued contra Marshall, “the rights of citizenship were notably more localized and unevenly spatially distributed; there was moreover, *an uneven capacity for and consequences of exercising those rights*” (Somers 1994: 69; emphasis added). The effects of movement outcome becomes difficult to map as ostensible gains made might be thwarted in due course due to changing dynamics of the political field.

Jan-Sunwai evolved as a quintessential aspect of the RTI movement and after the enactment of the law became an integral part of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (rechristened as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or MGNREGA under the Congress-I led UPA) as a social audit policy for monitoring the Right to Work programme. Social audit⁸ as a policy mechanism has been written into the NREGA for curbing corruption in the access to and delivery of government funded social sector schemes. As witnessed early in the implementation of both the RTI Act and the NREGA, two sets of contentions were generated between the political and the civil society. Elected representatives and local government officials opposed social audits

organized by the civil society groups for questioning their integrity and functioning, as well as for targeting the local level bureaucracy without questioning the networks of patronage between the district and the state level officers and politicians, an instance of what James Scott has termed as “localism” which “differentiates the village from the world of external elites above it but also, to some extent, from other villages, each of which is a distinctive social sphere” (Scott 2013: 37). While civil society organizations such as the MKSS favoured “improvisation on the ground” (Pande 2014: 160) in framing rules for the social audit, “the state and district level bureaucrats were in favor of an approach strictly attuned to the law” (ibid), thus pointing to the counter-mobilizations by social elites and the political class in thwarting collective mobilizations of the subaltern. Thus, even though the grassroots mobilization led to a transparency law, the afterlife of the law had to contend with the very same structures of power that it had started out to challenge.

The contentions between grassroots mobilizations and institutionalized politics were also manifested in the various strategies that the state government of Rajasthan employed in order to bypass the legalities of both the Rajasthan state RTI law of 2000 and the national law of 2005. One of these was a quintessential attribute of bureaucracy, as Max Weber had noted in his ideal-typical characterization of bureaucratic administration—to delay and therefore make ineffective the process of acquiring information on social schemes run by the government. In Banswara (district), during the 2007 social audit of NREGA works, the District Collector had stated, “not giving information was never a question. We were not sure whether to give it under the RTI Act or NREGA guidelines” (ibid), prompting civil society groups to change strategy and organize a “*samwad yatra*” (dialogue rally)—dialogue with people to spread awareness about social audits and inform people about their entitlements. Thus, the legislative victory gained from grassroots mobilization once again had to contend with the social and political power of local governance structures after the enactment of the law, necessitating continual mobilization against entrenched interests and networks between political and bureaucratic power. These contentions also show how movements generate a form of politics that counter the established sovereignty of state institutions and are not to be treated merely as “collective behaviour”, sporadic and limited in scope.

The transparency law also brought out the constitutive nature of democratic party politics and contentious mobilizations, where

“parties are more usefully seen as creative prompters in the origins, dynamics, and ultimate institutionalization of new social movements than as old actors cast offstage by their movement detractors” (Tarrow 2012: 163). This was especially evident in the way that the Congress(I)-led UPA, under the stewardship of Sonia Gandhi and the advisory body National Advisory Council, of which Aruna Roy, one of the founders of MKSS was a member, provided the necessary legislative impetus to the grassroots mobilizations in Rajasthan. However, post the enactment of the law, the same Congress (I) stalled social audits in 2009 in Bhilwara (district) of Rajasthan, in order not to alienate the traditional voter base of the Congress (I), the Jats. This raises questions whether the synergy between movements and formal politics lead to a “more inclusive democracy or toward a more polarized, fragmented, elite dominated polity” (Weldon 2012: 1)?

Confrontations between civil society organizations and institutionalized political actors after the legal enactment of the RTI also show the dynamic relationship between “national cleavage structures, institutional structures, prevailing strategies, and alliance structures” (McAdam & Tarrow 2010: 533), which often lead to the formation of new societal coalitions and networks. As the RTI legislation completes more than a decade of its enactment, combating the compulsions of electoral democracy and networks of influence and power in social and political structures, and robust institutionalization and expansion of transparent governance mechanisms are some of the challenges that the movement must contend with. Thus, what social movements achieve in the short term, a legislative and policy outcome in this case might be thwarted in the long term, necessitating an analysis of “multiple causal chains lead(ing) to a plethora of possible effects in a situation where influences other than social movement activity necessarily contribute to the effects” (Tilly, in Giugni et al 1999: 268).

RTI and Socio-Economic Rights: Towards Substantive Citizenship?

In the foregoing, I have argued that for movement participants in the arid and poor districts of Rajasthan, the claims to RTI—although framed in such universal good governance norms such as transparency, accountability, and open government—were made meaningful by the everyday realities of lack of basic resources and the provisions of government welfare entitlements (such as old age pensions, widow pension, food for work programmes, famine relief

works, unemployment wage). By demanding an RTI, contentious actors were claiming citizenship rights not merely in civil and political terms, “but also in social and economic terms...[as] the freedoms and immunities guaranteed in a Bill of civil and political rights remain wholly abstract if people do not have the social and economic resources to be independent citizens” (Plant 1998: 63). However, as the long arc of the movement demonstrates, in a society beset with deep inequalities, patronage politics, and compulsions of electoral democracy, claims to socio-economic rights have at best been realized as government charity, serving solely to sustain at a very base level political participation in periodic elections through voting rights.

Viewed thus, the grassroots mobilization for RTI points to both the essentially proleptic character of citizenship, and the conditions of its possibility by claims on the state so as to generate an active citizenry who do not merely take citizenship rights for granted but realize the significance of rights at the point of their realization. Every little success in the movement’s trajectory, then, is an instance of what T.H. Marshall in his ground-breaking work, *Citizenship and Social Class*, terms as the growth of citizenship, “stimulated both by the struggle to win those rights and by their enjoyment when won” (Marshall, quoted in Waldron 1993: 275). The fact that RTI has inaugurated a regime for other rights claims such as right to education, right to food, right to work, right to hearing, right of forest and indigenous people for natural resources, and a broader transparency and accountability in democratic processes, especially during elections, demonstrates that a right is always a contested terrain to be achieved through sustained collective struggles and becomes ephemeral if not continuously struggled for. In that sense, there is nothing immanent in citizenship rights that do not need periodic questioning and challenging, throwing in sharp relief the disjuncture between formal and substantive citizenship.

To envisage a right through its constitution in and through a social movement also leads us to explore what the law means for constituencies other than those that the movement encapsulated and mobilized. The RTI movement shows that without an active participation in claiming rights, rights fail to have their desired consequences—that of empowerment as well as establishing a stake in the contract between the State and its citizens, “the right of having a share in the making of the laws”, which distinguishes between “the rights of man and the rights of citizen”, the latter being “political rights that are only exercised in community with other men” (Waldron 1998: 308). Thus, the right itself has come to be associated

with a cornucopia of meanings for different social groups, ranging from a right to secure social rights such as education, work and food, to more instrumentalist and particularistic uses of the law for private interest and political gains in routine politics. A claim for public access to government documents was premised, in the first instance, on “the legal status of citizenship [which] is the threshold condition for the enjoyment of the rights and entitlements from which it derives meaning and significance” (Jayal 2013: 109)—a dynamic aspect through which both rights claims and citizenship are mutually constituted. To demand an RTI could, thus, be seen as an instance of engendering long-term social change, where “putative economic redistribution” (Somers 1994: 64) is sought to be translated into real socio-economic rights, which have been trumped for too long by government secrecy and exigencies of the political process.

Along with demands for national transparency legislation, the MKSS in Rajasthan also envisaged ways to influence the political process through its efforts to display how the law could, albeit in a limited way, transform the electoral process where sources of campaign finance have never been proactively disclosed by political parties. During panchayat (local government) elections in Rajasthan in February 2005, MKSS workers contested 12 posts of the sarpanch in the districts of Rajsamand, Ajmer, Bhilwara, and Pali (Khera 2005), where they set standards “for ethical participation in the political process” (ibid: 726) by issuing “*jan ghoshana patra*” (“people’s manifesto”)—“a set of promises that have been arrived at collectively, after a year of discussion on various issues of relevance in their region” (ibid). In order to make the participation of the economically disadvantaged possible in the local government elections, the people’s manifesto also stated “that MKSS candidates and MKSS-supported candidates will not spend more than Rs.2000 on their campaign expenditure...even though the official limit is Rs.5000” (ibid). Employing novel methods of campaigning such as foot marches, street corner meetings, and the *jan manch* (people’s stage), the organization demonstrated how the RTI law, in order to be effective, has to be bolstered by transparent practices in the electoral process. The *jan manch* have been regularly convened during elections to demonstrate the linkages between campaign spending and corruption in development works: “the more that a candidate spends on his campaign, the more money he will want to ‘recover’ once he is elected” (ibid)—a phenomenon multiplied manifold when it comes to national elections with big campaign expenditures. It is obvious, then, why political parties in India have resisted inclusion under the purview of the RTI Act, although there has

been a sustained campaign by civil society groups to bring donations to political parties under the RTI law⁹. This method of contentious action seeks to evolve conditions for universal citizenship premised not merely on universal suffrage but by generating “the necessary precondition for the *responsible* exercise of the franchise” (Waldron 1993: 291; emphasis added), although “a very small beginning in one part of rural Rajasthan” (Khera 2005: 727).

The significance of a transparency law in those areas where the campaign had its widest impact—Rajsamand, Pali, Ajmer and Bhilwara—has manifested the way the law is being used to achieve substantive citizenship. For many participants in the RTI movement, especially poor women from backward areas of Rajasthan, the context of collective action was educative in several ways. Gyaarsi Devi of Barah village in Kota (district) recollected how she overcame inhibitions arising out of women’s socialization within the household when she participated in rallies and sit-ins during the movement and learnt “how to interact in the public sphere”¹⁰, and of “the rights guaranteed in the Indian Constitution”. Jagruk Mahila Sangathan (Enlightened Women’s Organization) was formed in 2002, of which Devi is a leading activist, with a network spreading over three states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. Devi’s case, like that of a majority of women participants in the mobilizations, demonstrates that women’s particular claims to active citizenship were forged through their activist experiences in the public sphere—through a combination of political and civic education. The movement for RTI also made it possible for the poor and the marginalized, whose life-world is ordinarily determined by upper caste dominance (“*uncche jat ka dabav*”), to participate in various collective action programmes. Kheema Ram Salvi, a *Dalit* from Sangawas village of Vijayapura panchayat in Rajsamand district, in a candid interview with me¹¹, claimed to have filed the most number of RTI applications from Rajasthan, thus using “RTI extensively to expose many-sided corruption and irregularities” (Dogra 2011: 47). Thus, the meaning of a right to information was forged through participation in the public sphere as well as in negotiating routine political and social experiences that allowed the formation of citizenship “developed from below” (Turner 1990: 189).

In its implementation, India’s Transparency law has witnessed limited and localized successes. The grassroots struggle in Rajasthan has seen the law being used for demanding transparency in development works, students agitating for teachers and better infrastructure in schools, workers using the law in rural works to

demand the statutory minimum wages, and sustained struggles to either contest government's moves to dilute the Act or combat wresting of the autonomous functions of Information Commissions, where selecting Information Commissioners has become an act of political patronage.¹²As a right, though RTI has neither been realized universally nor unambiguously, its making in the specific context of the movement in Rajasthan has meant that other rights such as the right to work (NREGA) have been iteratively constituted and fortified in the process. As Niraja Jayal has noted, it "has been particularly successful in Rajasthan" (Jayal 2013: 190). The practice of the law is, thus, constrained by the specific social, economic and political configurations in a regional set-up, and given the diversity of such configurations in a country as vast as India, it may be argued that articulating the general nature of a right as a public good engendering common purposes of trust, equality, justice and democracy still depends on sustained mobilizations by civil society organizations within specific configurations of political and social power. In a processual framework, the right can thus be seen both as inaugurating a sense of empowerment, even though as a limited temporal experience, as well as generating newer contentions, marked by the contest between preservation of political and social power and realization of a right in the letter of the law. Perhaps a greater impediment to the substantive realization of the law is the fact that policies such as the social audit of public funds, especially in the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Rajasthan, have remained "entirely unworkable [as] it goes against the basic tenets of audit, which calls for a total separation of the implementing and the auditing agencies...this principle stands completely violated—everyone from the social audit facilitators at the Panchayat level to the grievance redressal authorities have been drawn from the very system it is supposed to audit" (as reported by Sowmya Sivakumar, October 3, 2010, *The Hindu*). This has generated further contentions within political society, thus pointing to the essentially contested character of substantive citizenship rights, as these 'necessarily involve resources- and the quality and quantity of resources will depend on politics' (Plant 1998: 65).

Conclusion

The process through which the abstract idea of information was grasped by ordinary, predominantly unlettered groups in parts of Rajasthan is marked by the alliances and antagonisms between

different groups within political and civil society. The securing of a right could be seen as a means to political or civic ends rather than rights bestowing statuses to groups, that is, a right only becomes meaningful at the moment of its realization rather than as a passive identity of the human condition. Thus, it is as members of political society that the civic ends of an RTI were made concrete through what Peter Hart-Brinson has articulated in a theory of civic production, where the civic is “a variable, contingent outcome of social action that is produced through micro- and meso-level processes by individual and organizational actors engaged in a ‘contentious performance’” (Hart-Brinson 2012, 131).

Sociology of rights helps us in appreciating that rights take on meanings for different groups and agents for the ends they serve or as means to an end; in that sense, an RTI and its juridical meaning functions differently for different groups. Those groups for whom socio-economic rights are only a chimera, the right functions as a means to an end, hence having a normative political purpose of accountable governance; for others the right merely serves an instrumental purpose for redressing narrow private interests without an expansive notion of what constitutes a public good. Indian Transparency law is still in a nascent stage, compared to the substantially longer trajectory of Freedom of Information laws in countries such as Sweden and Finland, where the law still faces problems ‘of implementation or oversight [leaving] access [to information] largely unfulfilled’ (Bjorkstrand & Mustonen 2006: 5). The grassroots mobilization for Right to Information in India will continue to frame state-society relations as “rights can be understood as a kind of communal discourse that reconfirms the difficult commitment to live together even while engaging in conflicts and struggles” (Minnow, quoted in Somers & Roberts 2008: 399).

The case of the RTI mobilizations in India could be illustrative of certain broad concerns for analysing what social movements achieve. In a democratic polity, with political parties, interest groups, contentious actors, civil society organizations, constituting the political field, it is perhaps difficult to argue that social movements independently determine outcomes in contentious claim-making. What social movements achieve are, perhaps, spatially and temporally limited successes, determined by “complementary action from like-minded state actors, including elected officials, appointed officials, and state civil servants” (Amenta & Caren, in Snow et. al. 2004: 473). Long-term changes accruing from social movements, such as substantive citizenship, could only be mapped historically and comparatively.

Notes

1. Rajasthan is a state in the Indian Union, situated in the north-western part of the country and is India's largest state by area, comprising 33 administrative divisions or districts. It was formed on March 30, 1949 with Jaipur as the state capital being the largest in terms of area. The Jats are the largest caste groups in the state (see, Saxena 1987, p. 456), making it the "dominant caste" in sociologist M.N. Srinivas's terminology.
2. A vexed question in social movement research has been to map what social movements achieve—both as concrete immediate outcomes and their effects in the long run. Indeed, this question of social movement outcomes or consequences of social movements has been acknowledged as a relatively recent research question in social movement scholarship worldwide (Amenta & Caren 2004; Tarrow 2012). This is because of ambiguities in deciding the level at which consequences of movements needed to be mapped as well as the kind of methodology that needed to be adopted in order to trace the trajectory from emergence to mobilization to outcome.
3. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, based in Devdungri village of Bhim Tehsil in Rajsamand district of Rajasthan was formed on May 1, 1990. Founded by ex-bureaucrats Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Shankar Singh, the organization, by its own appellation, is a non-party political organization, primarily working on issues of workers and peasants and their social and economic rights. The RTI campaign was primarily led by this organization in the four districts of Ajmer, Bhilwara, Pali and Rajsamand in central Rajasthan, which networked with other civil society organizations at the local, state and national levels, leading to the formation of the alliance National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) in 1996. Both MKSS and NCPRI has worked in tandem ever since in drafting the national RTI Act 2005 and overseeing its implementation.
4. Interview with author, School for Democracy, *Badi ka Badia*, Rajsamand district, Rajasthan, February 4, 2015.
5. Panchayat refers to the three-tiered system of local administration in India, known as Panchayati Raj, which was brought into effect through the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992, which delegated local governance through the gram panchayat (village level), mandal parishad or block samiti or panchayat samiti (block level) and zila parishad (district level). This system of governance was envisaged as a mode of democratic decentralization where local issues were sought to be governed through local governance mechanisms. There are elected representatives as well as officials and functionaries in the panchayati raj institutions. The Balwantrai Mehta Committee, headed by MP Balwantrai Mehta, the first committee appointed by the Government of India for recommendations on rural self-governance, recommended three sources of funding for panchayats: local body grants, as recommended by the Central Finance Commission, funds for implementation of centrally sponsored schemes, and funds released by the state governments on the recommendation of the State Finance Commissions.
6. Interview with author, Jawaja, Ajmer district, Rajasthan, February 18, 2015.
7. The Indian Parliament passed the RTI Bill on May 5, 2005; the Bill was notified on June 15 and came into effect on October 13, 2005 after receiving Presidential assent.
8. Social audits are complementary to the annual financial audits undertaken by

the central and state governments. Its purpose is to review the 10 entitlements under the NREGA: right to 100 days employment per year for every rural family; provision of a job card; right to demand work and get work within 15 days or otherwise be entitled to unemployment allowance; right to get work within a 5-km radius from their residential quarters; the right to select the work in a gram sabha (village council); the right to minimum wages; the right to payment within 15 days, or else right to compensation; the provision for worksite facilities—water, shade, medical kits, and crèches; the right to transparency and proactive disclosure of public records; and the right to audit works and expenditures in social audits.

9. Even as recent as 2013, the Central Information Commission (CIC), the apex adjudicating body for the RTI Act 2005, had issued an order “that six national parties—Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Nationalist Congress Party, Communist Party of India-Marxist, Communist Party of India, and Bahujan Samaj Party—have been substantially funded indirectly by the central government and were required to appoint public information officers as they have the character of a public authority under the RTI Act” (As reported on NDTV, December 17, 2013).
10. Interview with author, School for Democracy, *Badi ka Badia*, Rajsamand district, Rajasthan, February 5, 2015.
11. Interview with author, Vijaypura, Rajsamand District, Rajasthan, February 22, 2015
12. See, for details, Shailesh Gandhi, “Regressive forces are undermining the RTI. We must stop them”, Scroll.in, May 12, 2015.

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