

ONE DAY WORKSHOP ON “EMPOWERING MINORITIES USING RTI ACT”

ORGANIZED AT MURSHIDABAD CENTRE

AMU Murshidabad Centre organized One-Day Workshop on “Empowering Minorities Using RTI Act” on February 27, 2017. The workshop started with the recitation of the Holy Quran by Mr. Razaul Haque. Director, AMU Murshidabad Centre, Dr. Badaruddoza delivered the introductory remarks in which he highlighted the recent academic developments of the Centre. While speaking on the subject he cited the behaviour of human gene. He said “all activities of human beings are controlled by their genes and are very important for their metabolic activities. There are also bad genes which are responsible for the serious diseases like diabetes. Similarly, in the society, there are people who are functioning for the development, up-liftment and welfare of the society; and there are also people who are creating chaos of crime, corruption and unjust practices. These bad people are like those bad genes that need to be identified and treated well”. He said that Right to Information Act, 2005 is one possible tool to keep check and balance in the society. It is aimed at bringing transparency in the functioning of the nation and to find those bad genes in the society. He also highlighted how it increases the work load in the government institutions and departments.

During the workshop four technical sessions were held. In the first session, Mr. B. B. Chatteraj, CO, Suti explained the situation of correctional homes in West Bengal. He said a large number of cases are pending and that not in every case the Police Department is responsible. There are lacunas in functioning of Judicial Institutions and in the administrative formalities. He further added that in India, the term ‘minority’ can be interpreted widely. Even the Honourable Supreme Court of India in its various judgements tried to articulate a single definition of ‘minority’ but somehow remained unsuccessful. He said that instead of preferring the minority status on religion basis, we should prefer it on the basis of economic conditions of the individuals. He said that RTI is a tool of empowerment for all irrespective of their social background.

In the second session, Mrs. Avantika Sanyal, Advocate, Calcutta High Court highlighted the milestones of enactment of RTI Act, explaining its objectives, principles and provisions. She said that the Supreme Court, many times, declared that we had freedom of information, which was

part of freedom of expression guaranteed by Article 19 of the Constitution. Without freedom of information, freedom of expression remains meaningless. However, governments have by and large been opaque in terms of making information available in public domain. Speaking on the features and procedure underlined in the RTI Act, 2005, she elaborated the notion of “information” under the Act, fees, format of application, information exempted from disclosure, assistance available to the applicant, time period for supply of information and the procedure for appeals and complaints.

Mr. Sabir Ahmed of Pratichi Institute highlighted the importance of RTI for the disadvantaged groups (minorities). He also presented the educational scenario and occupational pattern in the rural areas of West Bengal, which he said is in the worse form. He said that considering all these statistics, one can understand without any reservation that though the governments are working for the upliftment of the marginalized societies in the rural areas but the actual benefit is still a distant dream. RTI here can help in making the government departments accountable for the implementation of these schemes related to healthcare, education, and employment schemes.

In the fourth session, Ms. Sneha Singh explained the scenarios in which one can file an RTI. She explained the procedure followed in the Appeals and the powers vested on the Central Information Commission. She concluded her presentation with sharing her real life experiences in dealing with RTI issues.

Dr. Mohd. Arif, Course Coordinator – Dept. of Law, proposed the Vote of Thanks and concluded the workshop with his remarks, in which he emphasized that if RTI Act, 2005 is properly implemented then it will single handedly eradicate the issues of corruption in government institutions and bring political transparency.