

The Miracle of the Right to Information Act

Namaskaar to all the members of the Mountain Children's Forum! I am a member of the Josh Bal Panchayat, Someshwar Almora, Uttarakhand.

When I heard about PABAM through SUDHA–Almora, I was delighted to learn that there is an organization that works only for children and it shares important information with us— information that we normally would not learn about in school, we learn through the MCF. All the members in our bal sangathan (children's group) read the *PABAM* magazine every month.



Our *bal sangathan* was created in June 2010 and the first training we got was on the Right to Information Act (RTI). This law was new not only to us but also to the members of our community. When we undertook a survey to measure how many people had heard about or used the RTI Act, we found no one knew anything about it, though some people had heard the name.

We were given a full training on the RTI by Bachi Singh Bisht, facilitator of the SUDHA organization. They even supported and guided us on how to write RTI applications. We now know that using this fundamental right we can make miracles happen.

After understanding about the RTI, I used the Act to fix a problem. My problem was not a personal problem but a problem of the entire village. Everyone in my village had a ration card but after the village panchayat elections two years ago all the ration cards were collected and sent to the block office and we were told that new ration cards would be issued. But even after two years the cards hadn't reached, which was causing problems for the community as well as the ration-shop owners.

The biggest sufferers were the people who had BPL and Antyodaya cards (people who are very poor and live below the poverty line). Finally I got tired and went to talk to the Village Pradhan and ask him to help, but it was of no use.

I then filed the first RTI application of my life to the Block Development Officer asking for information as to why the cards had not been made. After 26-27 days the Village Pradhan and the Village Development officer came to my house and said "If you had told us that you were going to ask for information I would have made your ration card earlier." The Village Development officer said, "How can we make so many ration cards so soon?" For a few minutes I did not know what to say. Then I said I'm not asking you to make the ration cards, I'm only asking you too tell me why the cards have not been made. All you have to do is give me the reason.

Their real reason was laziness and carelessness, and that they could not tell us. That is why they had to make all the ration cards. They suffered a little but the whole village benefited. The work that had not happened for two years was completed in 2 days.

I have used this Right to Information Act and benefited from it. I hope each citizen will use this Act and not ignore it. They can feel liberated and use the Act.

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Studies in class 12

Age 16

Josh Bal Panchayat

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