

Review Essay: Explaining Institutional Change in India's Welfare Regime

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Aruna Roy and the MKSS Collective, *The RTI Story: Power to the People* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2018).

Zoya Hasan, *Agitation to Legislation: Equity and Justice in Contemporary India* (India: Oxford University Press 2018).

Prashant Sharma, *Democracy and Transparency in the Indian State: The Making of Right to Information Act* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

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ABSTRACT

What explains the institutional change in India's welfare regime, from a concept of programs and schemes providing welfare, to one of the citizens having rights? For example, since 2004, citizens have the right to know and access information from the state authorities, from the Right to Information Act, and the right to work, under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). This review article critically engages with four relevant books to explain institutional change. Whereas the central arguments in these books focus on grassroots social movements and elite networks, I argue that institutional change in the case of India's welfare programs can be more richly explained as a long-drawn process, in which ideas gain increasing acceptance in the state, and are energized by global normative changes and local epistemic networks.

The economic reforms adopted by India in 1991 are regarded as constituting institutional change, transforming both the formal and informal “rules of the game.”¹ Similar systemic changes were introduced in the welfare regime in 2004. Since 2004, the state reaffirmed its commitment to rights-based development and granted citizens legal rights by enacting laws such as the Right to Information (Transparency and Accountability) Act, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Right to Education, and the Forest Rights Act (for tribal citizens living in forest areas). These changes in social policies were driven by the logic that India’s economic growth needed to be balanced by the provision of basic social and welfare rights to its citizens.

The changes in social policies introduced from 2004, like those introduced in 1991, are substantively institutional in that they redefined citizenship-state linkages. Welfare recipients were no longer treated as end-users or beneficiaries, but as citizens with legal rights to welfare. There was now also a supporting legal system within which welfare can be demanded and enforced. And while the state can withdraw the programmatic framework of welfare, it cannot abrogate the legally supported welfare regime.

Among these new rights that Indian citizens hold, the Right to Information Act (RTI Act) presents a dramatic case of institutional change. First, the RTI Act replaced the previously

persistent norm of secrecy by laying out a practical regime of openness that enables citizens to access information under the control of public authorities; thus, it represents rearrangements in the rules of the game—a norm shift from secrecy to openness.²

Secondly, whereas other rights-based legislation such as the MGNREGA or the Right to Education Act represent a continuity from previous policies or schemes such as the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana or the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the RTI Act represents a complete departure from the previous regime.

Thirdly, the change is *de jure*. In the case of the RTI Act, the scope of Fundamental Rights provided in the Constitution was expanded and redefined. The judiciary interpreted Article 19 (1) (A) of the Constitution of India, which grants freedom of expression and speech, as inherently containing the right to know as a Fundamental Right. Thus, the sharing of information held by public authorities, which was a legal offense in the old regime, is now a justiciable right under the new regime.

Admittedly, after the promulgation of RTIA in 2005, the state on numerous occasions has attempted to dilute the legal provisions of the RTIA ostensibly to weaken the law. Recently, the RTIA amendment bill 2019 passed by both the lower and the upper house of the parliament seeks to change the provisions of the appointment and salaries of the information commissioners at the central and the state level. However, despite these dilutions, the institutional change is irreversible on two

counts. First, the government in power cannot withdraw this constitutionally granted legal right. Second, this right was nonexistent prior to 2005 and was systematically instituted with the promulgation of RTIA. The impact of the 2019 amendment will have to be seen to ascertain the consequences of these amendments. Indeed, previous attempts of dilution have not deterred the citizens from using RTIA. A report by Transparency India estimated that 24.4 million RTI applications were filed at both the central and the state levels between 2005 and 2016.³

What explains the state's move toward introducing institutional change in the welfare regime in India? Four recent books—by Roy et al., Naib, Hasan, and Sharma, respectively—offer three broad arguments. These arguments explain the institutional change somewhat differently, but they all emphasize the importance of social pressures. First, various forms of protest—the social movement or people's movement—put pressure on the state around a common issue; in the case of the RTI Act, the issue was the state's transparency and accountability. Second, the popular protest's ability to effectively negotiate with the available political mechanisms brought about institutional change. Third, the agency of a dense, interpersonal elite network drove the demand for change. In the remainder of this essay, I outline these three central arguments, and then offer alternative possible explanations for the post-2004 institutional change in India's welfare regime.

Central Arguments

Roy and the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (Association for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants; MKSS) provide an insiders' historical account of the grassroots movement in the state of Rajasthan, which transformed into a national campaign. This movement was initiated by three individuals in 1987: Aruna Roy, a former IAS officer; Shankar Singh, a local resident; and Nikhil Dey, a student-activist. The MKSS, which spearheaded the movement, initially took up the issues of land reform and the minimum wage. In explaining the institutional change in the information regime in India, Roy et al. ascribe the primary role to the social movement. The state yielded to popular demand in the form of protests or amplified political contestation, eventually leading to institutional change.

Three significant points fundamental to the grassroots movement emerge from this engagement. First, initial mobilization for the payment of minimum wage was also related to the issue of access to information—access to official records would support the demands for legal entitlements; therefore, from the beginning, the core framing of the movement was around the issue of access to information.

Second, the initial experience resulted in public accountability innovations such as the *jan sunwayis* (public hearings). Copies of financial and other records of public offices involved in development work were acquired from sympathetic bureaucrats (or from oth-

ers in Roy's network) and read aloud in Gram Sabhas, where state officials were invited. These records exposed shocking corruption—wages were paid to people who were not employed in the program; people on the muster roll were not paid; and payments had been made for toilets, school buildings, wells, and irrigation facilities that were never built. Between 1994 and 1995, five public hearings were organized, which exposed corruption at the local level.

Third, the movement grew by linking with other villages and sympathetic actors. Villagers connected with the movement to collectively mobilize for their rights. They also established linkages with sympathetic segments of the state. In Rajasthan, public hearings became a platform to form linkages beyond the epicenter. These hearings were presided over by well-respected individuals from within and outside the state. In 1999, a public hearing at Bori village was presided over by the Collector of Rajasamand district Nirmal Wadhvani, noted writer and Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy, academic and editor of *Manushi* Madhu Kishwar, and noted Supreme Court of India lawyer Prashant Bhushan.

A more direct engagement occurred on April 1995, when Chief Minister of Rajasthan Bhairon Singh Shekhawat told the Legislative Assembly that the state government intended to let citizens access official papers related to the rural development work at the *panchayat* level undertaken between 1985 and 1995. Roy et al. argue that this commitment was a direct im-

pact of the *jan sunwayis* and the people's campaign. Protests in the form of *dharnas* (sit-ins) were organized all over Rajasthan to demand access to official records, as the Chief Minister had promised. Linkages were forged with grassroots workers, citizens, bureaucrats, activists, journalists, and legal fraternity. Eventually, in July 1997, Chief Minister Shekhawat announced the decision to grant access to information from the panchayat level.

The successful mobilization in Rajasthan stirred a national-level discourse around the demand for access to information. Primarily, the actors who were part of the people's mobilization in Rajasthan or were familiar with it organized a series of meetings and seminars in the early- and mid-1990s. This collective discourse through seminars and conferences eventually resulted in the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI), composed of grassroots activists, journalists, legal experts, activists, and academics.

The NCPRI advocated both the political and the bureaucratic executive by establishing contact with political leaders across party lines. They focused on deepening the discourse in the public domain, and simultaneously provided policy inputs on the proposed legislation on the right to information.

The NCPRI shaped public policy from both outside and inside the state. As external actors, NCPRI members provided suggestions and inputs to policy processes during meetings of parliamentary committees constituted to examine the legislation on the right

to information. From within the state, NCPRI actors were part of the National Advisory Council (NAC) established by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in 2004. Four of the NCPRI's legal inputs found their way into the RTI Bill: the term "right to information" should replace "freedom of information," as the right sought was a legal right; there should be provisions for penalizing erring officials; there should be maximum disclosure and minimum exemptions; and there should be independent appellate authorities and appeal mechanisms.

Naib sustains the social movement argument, resulting in the conclusion that "the real movement for the right to information originated from the grassroots level. The right to information was demanded in a similar way ... the origins of the RTI movement lie in [the village of] Devdungri" (41). Naib discusses India's RTI Act in comparison with access to information globally—an important aspect, missing in the narrative propounded by Roy et al. However, Naib's analysis of the global context is unfortunately limited—it does not discuss, for example, whether there was any norm diffusion from the global to the local. Between 1990 and 2010, 76 countries enacted laws or ordinances related to access to information, but where in this context do we situate the Indian case?

Yet another dimension is the analysis of judicial cases. In several cases, the judiciary upheld the freedom of expression and speech granted in the Constitution of India, and these verdicts established that the right to know

is an inherent part of Article 19 (1) (A). These cases and verdicts add another dimension to the causal explanation of the institutional change in the information regime in India. But the verdicts problematize the social movement argument, which pays scant attention to the role of the judiciary.

Hasan's argument can be placed within the broader framework of the social movement narrative as well. Hasan applies the lens of social mobilization to three empirical cases: the right to employment and the right to food; the anti-corruption and Lok Pal movement; and legislative reservations for women. She argues that the post-liberalization polity in India witnessed the state's withdrawal from key areas such as health, education, and employment; at the same time, India gained a burgeoning aspirational middle class that benefitted from economic reforms. The central focus of ruling parties was on appeasing this class, while people on the periphery were left out. This gap was filled by political mobilizations outside the state that represented the interests of the classes on the periphery. Hasan reinforces the social movement narrative by suggesting that the social mobilization spearheaded by the MKSS was the starting point for the demand for both the right to work and the right to information.

Hasan's study focuses on these social mobilizations and examines the way they negotiate, demand, and pressure multiple layers of the state. This aspect of "power and protest" influences the policy agenda of the political parties

in power. Hasan argues that when the Congress-led UPA government came to power, with support from the Left, the change in political regime entailed “new institutional arrangements” and served as a window of opportunity for social mobilization. This took concrete shape in the form of the NAC. Hasan postulates that “political mobilization and social movements are important processes in facilitating the travel of ideas and bringing them to a point when a political opening, such as the change of government, can bring about shifts that are discontinuous from the past, and at the same time, in some cases, can reverse it” (16).

However, these ideas are not always transformed into legislation—the MGNREGA, for example, is rights-based legislation, but the right to food is merely a policy. This difference is crucial—in a policy framework, citizens are mere beneficiaries, but rights are entitlements that citizens can demand. The political leadership supported the enactment of the MGNREGA, which helped proponents thwart elite opposition within and outside the state. But the outcome of the proposed National Food Security Act (NFSA), which lacked political backing, was merely a targeted scheme, and not rights-based legislation—the change in political priorities, especially during the second term of the UPA government, impacted the policy trajectory as well.

Sharma problematizes the dominant social or people’s movement by exploring the role of elite networks. Sharma argues that after liberalization,

the state retreated, and the bureaucratic order changed—the elite, which dominated the bureaucracy, moved to other spaces, such as the private sector. The greater democratization of higher bureaucracy, and the support for the RTI Act among the urban, well educated, high-caste elite—who were no longer as invested in state power—helped in promulgating the RTI Act. The key agent of this process is a small, intimate, dense network of urban, upper-caste, upper-middle-class, politically connected professionals acting together to further common interests. The leadership of this network is embedded in the ruling elite.

Sharma’s argument can be located within the broader scholarship on elite agency playing a consequential role—that is, the view that the demand for rights-based development was led primarily by the network of middle-class elites that represents “two contending projects of Indian democracy—one which is liberal and the other social-democratic.”⁴ Similarly, this argument views India’s early 1990s economic reforms as emanating from the elite revolt against dirigiste policy-making, especially aspects of the policy framework that constrained the interests of business groups and the urban middle class.⁵ Sharma adds to the narrative by including the state’s role and examining policy processes initiated by various governments.

Starting from the United Front government in 1997, which constituted the H. D. Shourie Committee to examine the possibility of legislation on the

right to information, the book traces similar related processes through the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the Congress-led UPA governments. Sharma points toward the role of judicial pronouncements, reformist elements within the bureaucracy, and individuals from both state and society pushing the boundaries. However, oddly, Sharma contends that suggesting the role of multiple factors “does not quite answer the political questions lurking just beneath the surface of this process” (126).

Another dimension on which the social movement argument is silent is the role of global norms. Sharma fills this gap by examining the way global norms influenced the domestic Indian discourse. Challenging the dominant explanation—that the RTI Act was a result of a home-grown or bottom-up movement—Sharma argues that global norms did have an impact. Information laws worldwide were often invoked during policy discussions for their instrumental and symbolic value in achieving the state’s aspiration of being seen as an advanced democracy. In the context of adopting liberalization policies at the national level, the role of international financial institutions and the new good-governance agenda these institutions propounded did tangentially impact state thinking on adopting a transparency law.

The books discussed here present a persuasive explanation of the institutional change, but there is a significant scope for adding to this narrative. I offer four critical arguments that enrich the explanation of institu-

tional change presented in these books. First, I discuss the methodological issue of defining the point of departure. Any causal explanation of institutional change has to define a point of departure in order to capture the institutional path of both persistence and change. I argue that tracing the institutional path and redefining the point of departure persuades us to provide alternative arguments. Second, I argue that the gradual acceptance of certain ideas within state institutions was critical in allowing social movements to achieve their goals. Third, I explore the role of global norms. To what extent were the factors leading to institutional change endogenous or exogenous? This is especially significant as the social movement narrative discussed points toward a home-grown, endogenous socio-political process. Finally, I examine the nature of the stakeholders and agents involved in the social movement and seek to redefine the concept of “social movement” itself.

Redefining the Point of Departure

The arguments presented in the book are ambiguous about the point of departure—that is, the starting point of the institutional changes. The social movement literature posits the point of departure around the early 1990s, when the social movement gained momentum. Similarly, for the elite network argument, it is the post-liberalization phase starting from the early 1990s. To understand institutional change, it is pertinent to define the point of departure.

Let me illustrate this by discussing the case of RTIA. After independence, India adopted the colonial-era Official Secrets Act without any change. Institutions tend to persist, and the related norms locked in within the state create powerful ideas around themselves. The norm of secrecy was locked in within the Indian state, and it created powerful ideas in its favor. In this light, we need to trace both the persistence and change aspects of the institutional journey.⁶

The ideational churning between the nested norm of secrecy and openness started at the time of independence. This was evident in the ideas on openness expressed in the reports of government committees; the opposition's demand for access to privileged information and its political and policy commitment when it assumed power; policy moves in parliament; and in judicial verdicts. The norm of secrecy was locked in at systemic levels from 1947 to 1989, but ideas on openness emerged from within the state on the fringes—in particular, technocratic elements supported openness, and opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) demanded greater openness regarding the state's internal affairs. Thus, ruling parties supported secrecy, and the idea of openness emerged within opposition politics and progressed from the periphery to a more prominent policy center-stage.

After 1989, when the National Front formed the government at the center, ideas on openness finally became part of mainstream politics in this

phase, as distinct from opposition politics. This political commitment is evident in the formation of the cabinet and inter-ministerial committees, groups of ministers, and department-related parliamentary standing committees.

But there were also important antecedents in the 1970s and early 1980s. In their account, Roy et al. treat the 1996 Draft Bill by Justice P. B. Sawant as an important milestone. In fact, in 1977, a Private Member's Bill on the Freedom of Information was tabled by G. C. Bhattacharya, a Lok Dal Party MP in the Upper House to "provide for certain agencies to ensure freedom of having access to and obtaining public information for the citizen and for matters connected therewith."⁷ The Bill proposed an Act that would apply to the whole country; it also proposed an information bureau at both the central and state level. This was the very first time that a legislator had formally introduced a Bill on the freedom of information.

The Lok Dal Party, founded by Chaudhury Charan Singh, was one of the partners in the Janata Party coalition of 1977. Singh was part of the Janata Party government and an integral part of the political coalition that opposed the emergency in 1975. As Home Minister in the Janata Party Cabinet, Singh constituted a committee to examine the possibility of amending the Official Secrets Act and explore legislative provisions to bring about more openness in government affairs. The same Bill was tabled in the Lower House in 1984 by Subramanian Swamy of the Janata Par-

ty. This bill tabled in both the upper and lower house provide ideational continuity from the Janata Party's phase and demonstrates the incremental progression of ideas. This is an important milestone that is conspicuous by its absence in the mainstream narrative.

Similarly, in his discussion of judicial verdicts, Naib does not define a point of departure either; he seems to have picked these cases arbitrarily and randomly. Many judicial verdicts from the 1950s till the early 2000s interpreted the Constitution of India in the context of the freedom of expression and speech granted under its Article 19 (1) (A). The trajectory of judicial verdicts overtime provided the ideational basis for interpreting Article 19 (1) (A) as inherently containing the right to know.⁸

These political and judicial events suggest that the emergence of ideas on openness was a long-drawn process, emanating from the different segments of the state. Redefining the point of departure and tracing the institutional path carefully allows for considering these important ideational links, which cast light on the role of the state and ideas within it, rather than positing that societal interests, singularly, explain institutional change. This challenges the claim that "there was little effort by the government to institutionalize, and set up a legal framework to exercise the right to information" (Naib, x).

Indeed, the case of RTI demonstrates this long-drawn churning of ideas. In another case, Hasan examines the MGNREGA and posits that the point of departure for the right to

work is the MKSS movement in Rajasthan in the early 1990s. But the idea of the rural poor's right to work has been part of state thinking since 1965, when Maharashtra set up an Employment Guarantee Scheme, and it has a long trajectory, including the Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (1973), Food for Work Programme (1977), and Antodya Yojna in rural Rajasthan (1977), National Rural Development Programme (1980), Jawahar Rozgar Yojna (1989), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojna (2001), and the National Food for Work Programme, just prior to the MGNREGA (2004). Despite varying degrees of success, these policy precursors serve as important ideational links, which help policymakers to remove policy gaps and uncertainties for future norm change.

Social Movement or Power of Ideas?

In the cases of both the RTI Act and MGNREGA, social networks played an important role. However, I contend that the ideas need to be taken seriously to explain changes in the policy paradigms. This suggests an ideational turn in explaining institutional change rather than social pressures singularly playing a consequential role. Instead of engaging only with the "snapshot" view of politics, such as changes in political regimes, engaging with politics in "movement" over time⁹ and taking a *longue durée* view of the policy trajectory lets us to trace a causal chain leading to a specific outcome.

A multi-layered approach helps

us reach a richer causal explanation of the institutional change. In the case of the RTI Act, the historical evidence persuades us to adopt the tipping point argument, which views institutional change as a slow-moving, endogenous process in which ideas shape interests.¹⁰ Redefining the point of departure allows us to delineate small, interlinked ideational changes. This points to the incremental causality of ideas.¹¹ The long-drawn churning process within the state provided an ideational base for future norm change and the final push toward institutional change. States puzzle over policy choices and power through political will and policy articulation¹² as part of social learning; any shift in the policy paradigm is path-dependent on the long-drawn cumulative progression of ideas.

The RTI Act provides a valuable case study of this process. The social network started galvanizing around the issue of access to information only in the mid-1990s, when the idea of providing access to information was already embedded in state thinking. Mainstream politics converged with the emerging socio-political processes led by the actors within the social movement, judiciary, press, bureaucracy, and academia. The social network was instrumental in the final stages of the passage of the RTI Bill, but the state would have dealt with the same social network differently had it not already favored openness.

In 1986, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi ignored demands from various quarters and moved an amendment to the Commission of Enquiry Act, 1952.

Gandhi's proposed amendment empowered any commission to withhold information from the parliament. The amendment was moved to stall the report of the Thakkar Commission, which was constituted to investigate the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (mother of Rajiv Gandhi), from being tabled in parliament. Indeed, Sharma's argument on the social—political processes after liberalization would add credence to this view.

As late as 1994, the ruling Congress Party resisted the idea of openness. Under the leadership of pro-reform champions P. V. Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh, the government amended the Manual of Department Security Instructions—from 1966—to instruct government departments to classify or declassify documents (from “top secret” to “confidential”).¹³ One would have expected the ruling party to take a more liberal stance on access to information during post-liberalization economic reforms. In 2004, the incremental weight of ideas reached critical mass and legislation on access to information became inexorable. The political power of ideas was such that the Congress, which had resisted the idea of openness since independence, embraced the inevitability of providing access to information in 2004.

Global–Local Linkages

The enactment of the RTI Act in 2005 coincided with the adoption of laws on the freedom of right to information in 76 countries worldwide, the convergence of the

“good governance” agenda of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and the global proliferation of laws on transparency. The focus of these international financial institutions was on transparent and accountable government, which was part of the conditionality of the Structural Adjustment Programs initiated in the 1990s. The convergence of Structural Adjustment Programs with the global move toward the enactment of laws on access to information suggests the role of exogenous factors. Was this true of institutional change in India as well? Did exogenous factors such as the global policy stimulus around transparency and accountability play an instrumental role in India's institutional change?

The social movement argument suggests that institutional change was primarily an endogenous bottom-up process and the result of a bottom-up demand that elicited a policy response from the state. Sharma, on the other hand, sees the role of global norms in the broader context of international financial institutions and the liberalization policy. But norm diffusion was not part of the coercive conditionalities of multilateral agencies; it occurred in conjunction with the endogenous ideational churning at the national level.¹⁴ Global norms informed and influenced the ongoing discourse at the national level, along with considerable demonstrative influence, in “norm demonstration.”¹⁵ Further, drawing upon Acharya's argument of “norm localization,”¹⁶ national institutions did not adopt global norms as “passive learners”; instead, they drew upon these norms and

adapted them in accordance with the policy discourse and processes ongoing at the national level.

Upon carefully tracing the institutional path, one finds that the impact of global norms coincides with the domestic process. Norm demonstration is reflected in the nascent ideas of openness articulated during the initial phase, accelerating after independence. Norm demonstration complemented the nascent ideas on openness during this period, but these ideas had not yet reached a threshold, and state thinking was not favorable. By 1989, these ideas had become part of the mainstream, and state thinking had moved in that direction, and that is when global norms found traction in India's internal policy processes.

Epistemic Networks

The key agents of the institutional change were not simply amorphous social movements, or even dense, interpersonal elite networks, as Sharma argues. Careful examination of the networks that mobilized the social movements reveals the involvement of actors from varied backgrounds and from both within and outside the state. This was a diverse mix—of social activists, journalists, law experts, academics, former and serving bureaucrats, and political leaders. Each actor had unique epistemic characteristics, and these actors were bound together by common ideas on openness, transparency, accountability, and access to information. The framing of the social movement does not capture the nature of the so-

cial network, which is best understood as an epistemic network. The actors of the network were experts in their fields, and the scope of the network extended specifically to ideas on openness, transparency, and the right to information. This argument draws upon the concept of an “epistemic community,”¹⁷ whose control over knowledge and information enables norm diffusion at the international level.

The notion of a dense, interpersonal elite network does not explain this phenomenon either. Does this social network come together just because of interpersonal connections? What binds them and sustains their interests? These are some of the questions that Sharma’s book does not answer. In bringing these actors together, the role of ideas was paramount. The openness of government systems, the state’s transparency and accountability, and the citizens’ right to information formed the ideational core around which the social networks emerged together as the NCPRI.

Conclusion

Institutional change in the welfare regime starting in 2004 was a multi-layered process. A historical institutional approach provides a causal explanation for such change, and it challenges the linear narrative that societal interests play an instrumental role

in affecting institutional change. This historical institutional causal explanation also suggests an ideational turn—the cumulative push of emerging ideas plays a consequential role in shaping concrete norms and policies and embedding them in state thinking, which leads to change in the state’s policy choices and preferences and, therefore, to institutional change.

Historical evidence suggests that institutional change was a slow-moving, endogenous process in which ideas shape interests. I stress the incremental causality of ideas and argue that the long-drawn churning process within the state provided an ideational base for future norm change and the final push toward institutional change.

Institutional change is only partially explained by society-based arguments. I argue that the role of the state in pursuing certain ideas needs to be brought back in¹⁸ as a significant variable in explaining institutional change. Institutional change in policy paradigms is a function of not merely the state’s autonomy or capacity¹⁹ but also its will to pursue certain ideas that shape emerging policy and institutional contours. Societal forces play a crucial role where we see the considerable state—society synergy, but the role of the cumulative push of ideas within the state and, consequentially, its policy initiatives cannot be neglected.

Notes

- 1 For a comprehensive causal explanation of economic reforms, see Rahul Mukherji, "Ideas, Interests, and the Tipping Point: Economic Change in India," *Review of International Political Economy* 20, no. 2 (2013): 363–89; Rahul Mukherji, *Globalization of Deregulation: Ideas, Interests, and Institutional Change in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014). For discussion on norms and rules of the game, see Douglass, C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (1990).
- 2 For a detailed account of the institutional progression of the RTI, see Himanshu Jha, "Emerging Politics of Accountability: Institutional Progression of the RTI to Information Act," *Economic and Political Weekly* 53, no. 10 (2018): 47–54.
- 3 *State Transparency Report 2017 (First Edition)*, Transparency India International, accessed August 18, 2019, <http://transparencyindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/State-Transparency-Report-2017-First-Edition.pdf>.
- 4 Stuart Corbridge et al., *India Today: Economy, Politics & Society* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013).
- 5 Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).
- 6 For this alternative explanation, see Himanshu Jha, "State Processes, Ideas, and Institutional Change: The Case of the Right to Information Act in India," *Pacific Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2018): 309–28.
- 7 *Rajya Sabha Debates*. The Freedom of Information Bill, December 22, 1983.
- 8 Right since independence judiciary has provided the constitutional interpretation of Article 19 (1) (A) establishing an ideational linkage between the fundamental right of freedom of expression and speech and the right to know—the two are inextricably linked. The judiciary approached this issue from various vantage points, such as the freedom of press, national and subnational politics, environmental issues, criminalisation of politics, and probity in public life. See some selected cases—*Brij Bhushan vs. the State of Delhi* (1950); *Express Newspapers (Private) vs. The Union of India* (1959); *Romesh Thappar vs. the Union of Madras* (1950); *State of Madras vs. V.G. Row Union of India and State* (1952); *Dwarkadas Shrinivas of Bombay vs. The Sholapur Spinning & Weaving* (1953); *Virendra vs. The State of Punjab* (1959); *Sakal Papers (P) Ltd. and Others vs. The Union of India* (1961); *Bennett Coleman & Co. and Ors. vs. Union of India and Ors.* (1972); *State of U.P. vs. Raj Narain and Ors.* (1975); *S. P. Gupta vs. Union of India* (1982); *M. C. Mehta & Anr vs. Union of India & Ors.* (1986), *Bombay Action Environmental Group vs. Pune Cantonment Board* (1986); *Dinesh Trivedi, MP and Ors. vs. Union of India and Ors.* (1997); *Union of India Vs. Association for Democratic Reforms & Ors.* (2002); *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) & Ors. vs. Union of India & Ors.* (2003); and *People's Union for Civil Liberties vs. Union of India* (2004).
- 9 Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004)
- 10 See Himanshu Jha, "State Processes, Ideas, and Institutional Change."
- 11 For such ideational accounts, see Jha, "State Processes, Ideas, and Institutional Change"; Mukherji, *Globalization of Deregulation*; Peter A. Hall, "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain," *Comparative Politics* 25, no.

- 3 (1993): 275–96; Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 12 Hugh Hecllo, *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden* (New Haven and London: Yale University of Press, 1974)
 - 13 Indian Parliament, “Answer to starred question no. 557,” May 5, 2015, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y9fmy6a8>. Also see Venkatesh Nayak, “Classified, The Classifiers Until Now: The Indian Saga,” 2011, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/ya9459oa>.
 - 14 For this argument, see Himanshu Jha, “Untangling Global–Local Linkages: The Case of the Right to Information Act in India,” *India Review* 18, no. 1 (2019): 32–53.
 - 15 Jha, “Untangling Global–Local Linkages.”
 - 16 Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism,” *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 239–75.
 - 17 Peter M. Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1–35.
 - 18 Theda Skocpol, “Introduction: Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3–38.
 - 19 Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back in.”