

Lecture Series on Governance and Politics in South Asia
Department of Political Science

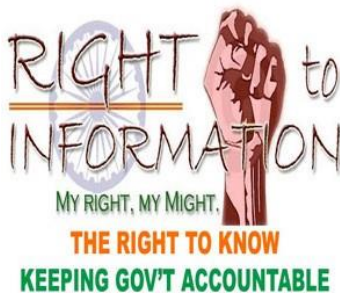
Capturing Institutional Change: The Case of the Right to Information Act in India

by

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Promulgated in 2005, the Right to Information Act (RTIA) in India, sets out a practical regime of seeking and accessing information under the control of public authorities and extends to the entire country (except for the state of Jammu and Kashmir). Historically, in India, the norm of secrecy was deeply entrenched within the state. For the first 58 years of India's independence the governance process and its details were shrouded in secrecy, and knowledge of the internal workings of the state was limited to public authorities. Citizens were denied the right to know from the state. Despite this persisting legacy, the RTIA was enacted, signifying a norm shift from 'secrecy' to 'openness'. What explains this institutional change? Engaging with the historical evidence overlooked in the mainstream literature – I show that the RTIA was path-dependent on ideas of openness that emerged within the state after independence. Initially, these ideas emerged gradually and incrementally as part of opposition politics but, eventually, became part of mainstream politics. I present an alternative perspective on the evolution of the RTIA and contribute conceptually to the broader literature on institutional change.



Dr. Himanshu Jha is with the Department of Political Science, South Asia Institute at the Heidelberg University. Jha's most recent research explores the why, how and what of institutional change by examining the evolution of Right to Information Act in India. Jha is also working in the area of state capacity, welfare and public policy. At the moment he is working on his book manuscript and has widely published in leading area and interdisciplinary journals such as the *Pacific Affairs*, *India Review*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Indian Journal of Public Administration* and *Indian Journal of Federal Studies*. In addition, he has contributed chapters in several edited books. Prior to his academic engagement, Jha was working in the developmental sector in India.

Date: Monday, 26 November 2018

Time: 16:00-18:00

Venue: SAI 317

All are cordially invited!

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