

About Us:

Asthra was inspired by the efforts of students and alumni of NIT Warangal who strived to make NIT Warangal a transparent and accountable system. The trials and tribulations they encountered led them to believe that consistent efforts are needed to change the system. Out of this desire for truth, Asthra was born.

Mission:

To make use of Right to Information (RTI) extensively to make all Institutes of National Importance (INI) transparent and accountable. To expand the same model to all educational institutes.

Vision:

To make the present Indian education system free of corruption through Citizen Action and a role model for transparency and accountability.

Why Asthra and Right to Information?

Asthra is analogous to a “Watchdog”. Its directive plays a role of vital importance in your day to day life. Asthra is not an institution; it is rather a social movement to bring transparency, accountability and integrity to public entities.

Asthra unites the fight against corruption and strives to bring transparency in public administration. Right to information Act, 2005 makes it compulsory for public authorities to publicize 17 items listed under RTI act. These 17 items serve as a basis for promoting transparency within public authority. RTI is hence a tool given by the Government of India for its citizens, to be exercised by them, thereby emphasizing the vital role the vote banks play in the decision making and accountability process. No country has such a great law. So, come let’s be a part of Asthra, exercise our rights and develop our great nation together.

Success Stories:

1. **Proactive Mandatory disclosures via RTI Manual-Section 4(1) b:** Section 4(1) b mentions the 17 mandatory parameters to be published by every public authority. To begin with, Team Asthra was able to push the NIT Warangal administration to account for the initial part of the 17 items mentioned on its website (www.nitw.ac.in). For the first time in its long history, every individual of NITW was granted citizen rights to know, who exactly their Board of Governors are along with their contact address and other specifics. The RTI also facilitated dissemination of various NIT rules and regulations; and the Executive Powers of Director, Registrar and other higher authorities. To an extent the above mentioned has been put up on the institute's website and is finally open to the collective public to review and act upon as they see best. Despite NITW's halfhearted attempt in the disclosure of said 17 items, it is an achievement worthy of mention from the Asthra team.
2. **Tuition Fee Reduction:** A lump sum reduction in tuition fees to the tune of Rs. 3,500 was made possible through the ratification of the NITW fee system. The RTI Act led the administration to reveal the breakup of the fee structure thereby directly benefitting all present and future student of NIT Warangal, through its revision.
3. **TEQIP:** Prior to the RTI filings the NITW website never had any documents related to TEQIP management and its spending. Now however, the website has partial information on how funds of Rs.20 crores have been spent for the upkeep and upgrade of NITW's infrastructure.

Message from Arvind Kejirwal on Asthra:

"I can't tell you how thrilled I am to read about this initiative. Hats off to all our friends for having thought about it and having the courage to practice it!"

"This is perhaps happening for the first time in the country. It will set a precedent for the rest of academia in the country and encourage others also to do so. Having practiced transparency yourself, you are on a very firm footing now to demand similar transparency from the authorities. And if now the authorities refuse to do so, it is bound to raise eyebrows."

"Friends, we salute you and congratulate you for this wonderful beginning. We are all with you in your struggle for transparency, accountability and integrity in public administration."



Open facts:

1. It has been 5 years since the RTI Act, 2005 came into effect and it has still not been implemented within NIT Warangal.
2. Scores of RTI's were filed this past year but no response was received from NIT Warangal for the majority save 2 to 3 RTI's.
3. According to the findings from the recent RTI's, a sum of Rs.2,40,000 was regularly spent every 30 months towards maintenance of the institute's website, when in fact the entire website was designed and developed by the students from graduated batches. No further redesign or maintenance of the website has been carried out since despite continued payments to the contractor.

Updates:

1. Team Asthra wrote to the chairman of NIT Warangal, Prof.B.L.Deekshitulu with CC to Registrar and Director on 31st December 2010 asking to handover institute website maintenance to students and thereby prevent wastage of public funds of Rs.2,40,000. There was however no response either from the chairman or registrar to this request.
2. Team Asthra conducted a one day hunger strike on April 5th 2011 in front of NIT Warangal gate to support Anna Hazare's fast unto death and a rally against corruption was done with active support for Jan Lokpal Bill. The following day there was a second much bigger rally taken from public gardens at Hanmakonda Chowrastha to Adalath in support of this cause.
3. A Beta Version of the Asthra website -www.theasthra.org - is up and running. Users are encouraged to use the newly created "FILE RTI" –a tool which facilitates easy filing of your RTI application. No prior knowledge of RTI is required to use this tool. You are urged to file a report if you hint corruption or embezzlement of any kind across all departments.
4. Team Asthra wrote to the Registrar, who assumes the role of CPIO (Central Public Information Officer), of NIT Warangal on April 15th, 2011 requesting for immediate implementation of RTI act and provide information when requested under RTI. The same letter has been sent to Hon. Minister Mr. Kapil Sibal, Central Information Commission; The First Appellate Authority; Chairman; Board of Governors and NIT Warangal alumni association president. Team Asthra had to write this letter as all our earlier requests from the past one year to implement the same have fallen on deaf ears.
5. Currently in the pipeline, Asthra is all set to open chapters at NIT Nagpur, NIT Suratkal, NIT Durgapur and Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Kadapa.



Respected Faculty of NITW,

It has been a year and a month since Asthra came to be and has through persistence been at the forefront of the student community and alumni's fight to bring transparency & accountability towards better governance and ultimately eliminate corruption from NIT Warangal. Our institute, in its last 5 years, has lost its glory and has been center stage to various reasons for which it should not have been.

Historic events have taken place in this great institute of ours within the past year with students shouldering the responsibility to save this temple of learning. Asthra was started with a commitment and zeal to save this very institution from falling into the clutches of less virtuous people. Even though this initiative has borne illuminating positive results, wide spread negative publicity about Asthra still persists. We at Team Asthra share this open platform with our Faculty who have stood by us through this fight. Hence we find no need to work against tried and true norms taught to us, instead, we chase after a beleaguering and faulting bureaucracy in the hope that the one day our Institute shall triumph in this fight. Team Asthra fights for transparency, accountability and integrity in governance.

Team Asthra has no explicit need to mention how this great country of ours has been down trodden in all spheres with widespread corruption. There isn't any better example other than NITW to quote in the field of education. Why should we destabilize that with corruption and nepotism in an otherwise healthy system and breed chaos? Every faculty member, in tandem with the students and non-teaching staff, has been affected at some point or another in the last 5 years regardless of where their responsibility lies.

Transparency is the need of hour. When our own Indian democracy, notably the largest in the world, starts to decay with corruption everywhere, it is an obligation of institutions like ours to come out with an action plan as an example for the rest of the nation. This movement shall transpire and grow to all sections of society and see similar practices start to evolve in other organizations too. NIT Warangal is an Institution of National Importance (INI) with a mission and an equally large responsibility shared by us all. Our actions speak to our caliber and have a great impact on who we are and who we choose to become. Let us unite diligently and fight for what is rightfully ours! This newsletter provides an excellent medium to elucidate Team Asthra's goals and progress. It is not an organization against any individual rather it was born out of respect for them.

It is our humble request to the faculty, administrative staff and others to come help us, join hands with us in various activities to achieve our mission for a corruption free education system. Let us all work together as a team and stand as an example to this nation. Let us all take this pledge against corruption and be courageous and openly fight against a growing evil.

“United Everyone Achieves More.”