

A CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION &  
ANR.

v.

ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY & ORS.  
(Civil Appeal No. 6454 of 2011)

B AUGUST 09, 2011

**[R.V. RAVEENDRAN AND A.K. PATNAIK, JJ.]**

*Right to Information Act, 2005:*

C ss. 8 (1)(e), 2 (f), 2(i), 2(j), 3, 24 and 9 – Public  
examination – Examinee’s right to inspect his evaluated  
answer books in a public examination or taking certified  
copies – Scope of – Held: Every examinee has the right to  
D access his evaluated answer-books, by either inspecting them  
or take certified copies thereof, unless the evaluated answer-  
books are found to be exempted u/s. 8(1)(e) – Answer-book  
is a document or record in terms of s. 2(i) and as such the  
evaluated answer-book is also an ‘information’ under the Act  
E – Under s. 3, the citizens have the right to access to all  
information held by or under the control of any public authority  
except those excluded or exempted under the Act –  
Examining bodies (Universities, Examination Boards, CBSE  
etc.) are neither security nor intelligence organisations –  
F Disclosure of information with reference to answer-books also  
does not involve infringement of any copyright – Thus, the  
exemption u/ss. 24 and 9 would not apply to them.

G s. 22 – Overriding effect of – Right of an examinee  
seeking inspection of his answer books or seeking certified  
copies thereof – Effect of decision of this Court in  
\*Maharashtra State Board of Secondary Education v,  
Paritosh B. Sheth on such right – Held: Decision of this Court  
in \*Maharashtra State Board and the subsequent decisions  
following the same, would not affect or interfere with the right

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1029  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY

*of the examinee seeking inspection of answer-books or taking certified copies thereof – RTI Act enables/entitles the student to have access to the answer-books as ‘information’ and inspect them and take certified copies thereof – s. 22 provides that the provisions of the Act would have effect, notwithstanding anything inconsistent therewith contained in any other law for the time being in force – Thus, the provisions of the RTI Act would prevail over the provisions of the bye-laws/rules of the examining bodies in regard to examinations – As a result, unless the examining body is able to demonstrate that the answer-books fall under the exempted category of information described in clause (e) of s. 8(1), the examining body would be bound to provide access to an examinee to inspect and take copies of his evaluated answer-books, even if such inspection or taking copies is barred under the rules/bye-laws of the examining body governing the examinations.*

*s. 8(1)(e). – Whether examining body holds the evaluated answer books “in a fiduciary relationship” and thus, has no obligation to give inspection of the evaluated answer books u/s. 8 (1)(e) – Held: Examining body does not hold the evaluated answer books in a fiduciary relationship, qua the examiner – Not being information available to an examining body in its fiduciary relationship, the exemption u/s. 8(1)(e) is not available to the examining bodies with reference to evaluated answer-books and the examining bodies will have to permit inspection sought by the examinees.*

*Right of inspection of the evaluated answer books or seeking certified copies thereof by examinee – Limitations, conditions or safeguards to such right – Held: Portions of answer-books containing information regarding the examiners/co-ordinators/scrutinisers/head examiners or which may disclose their identity with reference to signature or initials, should be removed, covered, or otherwise severed*

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- A *from the non-exempted part of the answer-books, u/s. 10 – Right to access information does not extend beyond the period during which the examining body is expected to retain the answer-books – s. 8(3) nowhere provides that records or information have to be maintained for a period of twenty years*
- B *or more nor override any rules or regulations governing the period for which the record, document or information is required to be preserved by any public authority.*

C *s. 8 – Interpretation of – Held: Is not to be construed strictly, literally and narrowly – When s. 8 exempts certain information from being disclosed, it should not be considered to be a fetter on the right to information, but as an equally important provision protecting other public interests essential for the fulfilment and preservation of democratic ideals.*

D *Enforcement of RTI Act – Held: Should be enforced strictly – Necessary information under clause (b) of s. 4(1) relating to securing transparency and accountability in the working of public authorities and in discouraging corruption to be brought to light – Act should not be allowed to be*

E *misused or abused, to become a tool to obstruct the national development and integration, or to destroy the peace, tranquility and harmony among its citizens – Nor should it be converted into a tool of oppression or intimidation of honest officials striving to do their duty.*

F *Object and reasons of the RTI Act – Explained.*

*Words and Phrases:*

*Term 'fiduciary' and 'fiduciary relationship' – Meaning of.*

G **Respondent No. 1 appeared for the Secondary School Examination, 2008 conducted by appellant-Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). He was disappointed with his marks and thus, he made an application for inspection and re-evaluation of his**

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1031  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY

answer-books. CBSE rejected the same. Respondent No. 1 filed a writ petition seeking a declaration that the action of CBSE in excluding the provision of re-evaluation of answer-sheets, in regard to the examinations held by it was illegal, unreasonable and violative of the provisions of the Constitution of India; for a direction to CBSE to appoint an independent examiner for re-evaluating his answer-books and issue a fresh marks card on the basis of re-evaluation; for a direction to CBSE to produce his answer-books in regard to the 2008 Secondary School Examination and that too into court for inspection by the first respondent; and for quashing the communication of CBSE. The Division Bench of the High Court disposed of the said writ petition along with the connected writ petitions directing CBSE to grant inspection of the answer books to the examinees who sought information, but rejected the prayer made by the examinees for re-evaluation of the answer-books, as that was not a relief that was available under Right to Information Act, 2005. Therefore, the appellant-CBSE filed the instant appeal.

The questions which arose for consideration in these appeals are whether an examinee's right to information under the Right to Information Act, 2005 includes a right to inspect his evaluated answer books in a public examination or taking certified copies thereof; whether the decisions of this Court in *Maharashtra State Board of Secondary Education v, Paritosh B. Sheth* and other cases, in any way affect or interfere with the right of an examinee seeking inspection of his answer books or seeking certified copies thereof; whether an examining body holds the evaluated answer books "in a fiduciary relationship" and consequently has no obligation to give inspection of the evaluated answer books under section 8 (1)(e) of RTI Act; and if the examinee is entitled to inspection of the evaluated answer books or seek certified copies thereof, whether such right is subject to

A any limitations, conditions or safeguards.

**Disposing of the appeals, the Court**

B HELD: 1. The order of the High Court directing the  
examining bodies to permit examinees to have inspection  
of their answer books is upheld, subject to the  
clarifications regarding the scope of the Right to  
Information Act, 2005 and the safeguards and conditions  
subject to which 'information' should be furnished. [Para  
38] [1093-F]

C 2.1. The definition of 'information' in Section 2(f) of  
the RTI Act refers to any material in any form which  
includes records, documents, opinions, papers among  
several other enumerated items. The term 'record' is  
D defined in Section 2(i) of the said Act as including any  
document, manuscript or file among others. When a  
candidate participates in an examination and writes his  
answers in an answer-book and submits it to the  
examining body for evaluation and declaration of the  
E result, the answer-book is a document or record. When  
the answer-book is evaluated by an examiner appointed  
by the examining body, the evaluated answer-book  
becomes a record containing the 'opinion' of the  
F examiner. Therefore, the evaluated answer-book is also  
an 'information' under the RTI Act. [Para 11] [1066-C-E]

G 2.2. Section 3 of RTI Act provides that subject to the  
provisions of this Act all citizens shall have *the right to  
information*. The term '*right to information*' is defined in  
Section 2(j) as the right to information accessible under  
the Act which is held by or under the control of any public  
authority. Having regard to Section 3, the citizens have  
the right to access to all information held by or under the  
control of any public authority except those excluded or  
exempted under the Act. The object of the Act is to  
H empower the citizens to fight against corruption and hold

the Government and their instrumentalities accountable to the citizens, by providing them access to information regarding functioning of every public authority. Certain safeguards have been built into the Act so that the revelation of information will not conflict with other public interests which include efficient operation of the governments, optimum use of limited fiscal resources and preservation of confidential and sensitive information. The RTI Act provides access to information held by or under the control of public authorities and not in regard to information held by any private person. The Act provides the exclusions by way of exemptions and exceptions (under Sections 8, 9 and 24) in regard to information held by public authorities. Having regard to the scheme of the RTI Act, the right of the citizens to access any information held or under the control of any public authority, should be read in harmony with the exclusions/exemptions in the Act. [Para 12] [1066-F-H; 1067-A-B-H; 1068-A]

2.3. The examining bodies (Universities, Examination Boards, CBSC etc.) are neither security nor intelligence organisations and therefore, the exemption under Section 24 would not apply to them. The disclosure of information with reference to answer-books does not also involve infringement of any copyright and therefore, Section 9 would not apply. Resultantly, unless the examining bodies are able to demonstrate that the evaluated answer-books fall under any of the categories of exempted 'information' enumerated in clauses (a) to (j) of sub-section (1) Section 8, they would be bound to provide access to the information and any applicant can either inspect the document/record, take notes, extracts or obtain certified copies thereof. Every examinee would have the right to access his evaluated answer-books, by either inspecting them or take certified copies thereof, unless the evaluated answer-books are found to be

A exempted under Section 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act. [Paras 13 and 14] [1068-C-F]

B 3.1. The principles laid down in decisions such as *\*Maharashtra State Board* that denial of re-evaluation of answer-books or denial of disclosure by way of inspection of answer books, to an examinee, under Rule 104(1) and (3) of the Maharashtra Secondary and Higher Secondary Board Rules, 1977 was not violative of principles of natural justice and Articles 14 and 19 of the Constitution of India, depend upon the provisions of the rules and regulations of the examining body. If the rules and regulations of the examining body provide for re-evaluation, inspection or disclosure of the answer-books, then none of the principles in *Maharashtra State Board* or other decisions following it, would apply or be relevant.

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D There has been a gradual change in trend with several examining bodies permitting inspection and disclosure of the answer-books. [Para 16] [1072-D-E]

E 3.2. A provision barring inspection or disclosure of the answer-books or re-evaluation of the answer-books and restricting the remedy of the candidates only to re-totalling is valid and binding on the examinee. In the case of CBSE, the provisions barring re-evaluation and inspection contained in Bye-law No.61, are akin to Rule

F 104 considered in *Maharashtra State Board*. As a consequence if an examination is governed only by the rules and regulations of the examining body which bar inspection, disclosure or re-evaluation, the examinee will be entitled only for re-totalling by checking whether all the answers have been evaluated and further checking

G whether there is no mistake in totaling of marks for each question and marks have been transferred correctly to the title (abstract) page. The position may however be different, if there is a superior statutory right entitling the

**CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1035  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY**

**examinee, as a citizen to seek access to the answer books, as information. [Para 17] [1072-F-H; 1073-A-B]** A

**3.3. In the cases referred, the High Court rightly denied the prayer for re-evaluation of answer-books sought by the candidates in view of the bar contained in the rules and regulations of the examining bodies. It is also not a relief available under the RTI Act. Therefore, the question whether re-evaluation should be permitted or not, did not arise for consideration. What arose for consideration is the question whether the examinee is entitled to inspect his evaluated answer-books or take certified copies thereof. This right is claimed by the students, not with reference to the rules or bye-laws of examining bodies, but under the RTI Act which enables them and entitles them to have access to the answer-books as 'information' and inspect them and take certified copies thereof. Section 22 of RTI Act provides that the provisions of the said Act will have effect, notwithstanding anything inconsistent therewith contained in any other law for the time being in force. Therefore, the provisions of the RTI Act will prevail over the provisions of the bye-laws/rules of the examining bodies in regard to examinations. As a result, unless the examining body is able to demonstrate that the answer-books fall under the exempted category of information described in clause (e) of Section 8(1) of RTI Act, the examining body will be bound to provide access to an examinee to inspect and take copies of his evaluated answer-books, even if such inspection or taking copies is barred under the rules/bye-laws of the examining body governing the examinations. Therefore, the decision of this Court in *Maharashtra State Board* and the subsequent decisions following the same, will not affect or interfere with the right of the examinee seeking inspection of answer-books or taking certified copies thereof. [Para 18] [1073-B-H]** B  
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- A *\*Maharashtra State Board of Secondary Education vs. Paritosh B. Sheth* 1984 (4) SCC 27; *Parmod Kumar Srivastava vs. Chairman, Bihar* PAC 2004 (6) SCC 714: 2004 (3 ) Suppl. SCR 372; *Board of Secondary Education vs. Pavan Ranjan P* 2004 (13) SCC 383; *Board of Secondary Education vs. S* 2007 (1) SCC 603; *Secretary, West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education vs. I Dass* 2007 (8) SCC 242: 2007 (10 ) SCR 464 – referred to.
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4.1. Section 8(1) enumerates the categories of information which are exempted from disclosure under the provisions of the RTI Act. This exemption is subject to the condition that if the competent authority (as defined in Section 2(e) of RTI Act) is satisfied that the larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information, the information will have to be disclosed. [Para 19] [1074-B-C]

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4.2. The term 'fiduciary' and 'fiduciary relationship' refer to different capacities and relationship, involving a common duty or obligation. The term 'fiduciary' refers to a person having a duty to act for the benefit of another, showing good faith and condour, where such other person reposes trust and special confidence in the person owing or discharging the duty. The term '*fiduciary relationship*' is used to describe a situation or transaction where one person (beneficiary) places complete confidence in another person (fiduciary) in regard to his affairs, business or transaction/s. The term also refers to a person who holds a thing in trust for another (beneficiary). The fiduciary is expected to act in confidence and for the benefit and advantage of the beneficiary, and use good faith and fairness in dealing with the beneficiary or the things belonging to the beneficiary. If the beneficiary has entrusted anything to the fiduciary, to hold the thing in trust or to execute certain acts in regard to or with reference to the entrusted thing, the fiduciary has to act in confidence and expected

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1037  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY

not to disclose the thing or information to any third party. There are also certain relationships where both the parties have to act in a fiduciary capacity treating the other as the beneficiary. [Paras 20 and 21] [1074-D; 1077-B-E]

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*Bristol and West Building Society vs. Mothew* 1998 Ch. 1; *Wolf vs. Superior Court* 2003 (107) California Appeals, 4th 25 – referred to.

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*Black's Law Dictionary* 7th Edition, p 640; *American Restatements* (Trusts and Agency); *Corpus Juris Secundum* Vol. 36A 381; *Words and Phrases, Permanent Edition* Vol. 16A, 41 - referred to.

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4.3. In a philosophical and very wide sense, examining bodies can be said to act in a fiduciary capacity, with reference to students who participate in an examination, as a government does while governing its citizens or as the present generation does with reference to the future generation while preserving the environment. But the words 'information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship' are used in Section 8(1)(e) of RTI Act in its normal and well recognized sense, that is to refer to persons who act in a fiduciary capacity, with reference to a specific beneficiary or beneficiaries who are to be expected to be protected or benefited by the actions of the fiduciary. That kind of fiduciary relationship is not found between the examining body and the examinee, with reference to the evaluated answer-books, that come into the custody of the examining body. [Para 22] [1077-H; 1078-A-E]

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4.4. The duty of examining bodies is to subject the candidates who have completed a course of study or a period of training in accordance with its curricula, to a process of verification/examination/testing of their knowledge, ability or skill, or to ascertain whether they can be said to have successfully completed or passed

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A the course of study or training. Other specialized  
 Examining Bodies may simply subject candidates to a  
 process of verification by an examination, to find out  
 whether such person is suitable for a particular post, job  
 or assignment. An examining body, if it is a public  
 B authority entrusted with public functions, is required to  
 act fairly, reasonably, uniformly and consistently for  
 public good and in public interest. It cannot be said that  
 the examining body is in a fiduciary relationship either  
 with reference to the examinee who participates in the  
 C examination and whose answer-books are evaluated by  
 the examining body. [Para 23] [1078-F-H; 1079-A-B; 1080-  
 A-B]

*Bihar School Examination Board vs. Suresh Prasad  
 Sinha (2009) 8 SCC 483 – referred to.*

D 4.5. Section 8 (1)(e) provides that notwithstanding  
 anything contained in the Act, there shall be no obligation  
 to give any citizen *information available to a person in his  
 fiduciary relationship*. This would only mean that even if  
 E the relationship is fiduciary, the exemption would operate  
 in regard to giving access to the information held in  
 fiduciary relationship, to third parties. There is no  
 question of the fiduciary withholding information relating  
 to the beneficiary, from the beneficiary himself. One of the  
 F duties of the fiduciary is to make thorough disclosure of  
 all relevant facts of all transactions between them to the  
 beneficiary, in a fiduciary relationship. By that logic, the  
 examining body, if it is in a fiduciary relationship with an  
 examinee, would be liable to make a full disclosure of the  
 evaluated answer-books to the examinee and at the same  
 G time, owe a duty to the examinee not to disclose the  
 answer-books to anyone else. If a relationship of fiduciary  
 and beneficiary is assumed between the examining body  
 and the examinee with reference to the answer-book,  
 Section 8(1)(e) would operate as an exemption to prevent  
 H access to any third party and would not operate as a bar

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1039  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY

for the very person who wrote the answer-book, seeking inspection or disclosure of it. [Para 24] [1080-B-G] A

4.6. An evaluated answer book of an examinee is a combination of two different 'informations'. The first is the answers written by the examinee and second is the marks/assessment by the examiner. When an examinee seeks inspection of his evaluated answer-books or seeks a certified copy of the evaluated answer-book, the information sought by him is not really the answers he has written in the answer-books (which he already knows), nor the total marks assigned for the answers (which has been declared). What he really seeks is the information relating to the break-up of marks, that is, the specific marks assigned to each of his answers. When an examinee seeks 'information' by inspection/certified copies of his answer-books, he knows the contents thereof being the author thereof. When an examinee is permitted to examine an answer-book or obtain a certified copy, the examining body is not really giving him some information which is held by it in trust or confidence, but is only giving him an opportunity to read what he had written at the time of examination or to have a copy of his answers. Therefore, in furnishing the copy of an answer-book, there is no question of breach of confidentiality, privacy, secrecy or trust. The real issue therefore, is not in regard to the answer-book but in regard to the marks awarded on evaluation of the answer-book. Even here the total marks given to the examinee in regard to his answer-book are already declared and known to the examinee. What the examinee actually wants to know is the break-up of marks given to him, that is how many marks were given by the examiner to each of his answers so that he can assess how his performance has been evaluated and whether the evaluation is proper as per his hopes and expectations. Therefore, the test for finding out whether the information is exempted or not, is not in regard to the B  
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A answer book but in regard to the evaluation by the examiner. [Para 25] [1080-H; 1081-A-F]

B 4.7. The examining body engages or employs hundreds of examiners to do the evaluation of thousands of answer books. The question is whether the information relating to the 'evaluation' (that is assigning of marks) is held by the examining body in a fiduciary relationship. The submission that even if fiduciary relationship does not exist with reference to the examinee, it exists with reference to the examiner who evaluates the answer-books, has no merit. The examining body entrusts the answer-books to an examiner for evaluation and pays the examiner for his expert service. The work of evaluation and marking the answer-book is an assignment given by the examining body to the examiner which he discharges for a consideration. Sometimes, an examiner may assess answer-books, in the course of his employment, as a part of his duties without any specific or special remuneration. In other words the examining body is the 'principal' and the examiner is the agent entrusted with the work, that is, evaluation of answer-books. Therefore, the examining body is not in the position of a fiduciary with reference to the examiner. On the other hand, when an answer-book is entrusted to the examiner for the purpose of evaluation, for the period the answer-book is in his custody and to the extent of the discharge of his functions relating to evaluation, the examiner is in the position of a fiduciary with reference to the examining body and he is barred from disclosing the contents of the answer-book or the result of evaluation of the answer-book to anyone other than the examining body. Once the examiner has evaluated the answer books, he ceases to have any interest in the evaluation done by him. He does not have any copy-right or proprietary right, or

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1041  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY

confidentiality right in regard to the evaluation. Therefore, the examining body does not hold the evaluated answer books in a fiduciary relationship, qua the examiner. Therefore, an examining body does not hold the evaluated answer-books in a fiduciary relationship. Not being information available to an examining body in its fiduciary relationship, the exemption under Section 8(1)(e) is not available to the examining bodies with reference to evaluated answer-books. As no other exemption under Section 8 is available in respect of evaluated answer books, the examining bodies will have to permit inspection sought by the examinees. [Para 26] [1081-G-H; 1082-A-F]

5.1. When an examining body engages the services of an examiner to evaluate the answer-books, the examining body expects the examiner not to disclose the information regarding evaluation to anyone other than the examining body. Similarly the examiner also expects that his name and particulars would not be disclosed to the candidates whose answer-books are evaluated by him. In the event of such information being made known, a disgruntled examinee who is not satisfied with the evaluation of the answer books, may act to the prejudice of the examiner by attempting to endanger his physical safety. Further, any apprehension on the part of the examiner that there may be danger to his physical safety, if his identity becomes known to the examinees, may come in the way of effective discharge of his duties. The above applies not only to the examiner, but also to the scrutiniser, co-ordinator, and head-examiner who deal with the answer book. The answer book usually contains not only the signature and code number of the examiner, but also the signatures and code number of the scrutiniser/co-ordinator/head examiner. The information as to the names or particulars of the examiners/co-ordinators/scrutinisers/head examiners are therefore, exempted from disclosure under Section 8(1)(g) of RTI

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- A Act, on the ground that if such information is disclosed, it may endanger their physical safety. Therefore, if the examinees are to be given access to evaluated answer-books either by permitting inspection or by granting certified copies, such access would have to be given
- B only to that part of the answer-book which does not contain any information or signature of the examiners/co-ordinators/scrutinisers/head examiners, exempted from disclosure under Section 8(1)(g) of RTI Act. Those portions of the answer-books which contain information
- C regarding the examiners/co-ordinators/scrutinisers/head examiners or which may disclose their identity with reference to signature or initials, shall have to be removed, covered, or otherwise severed from the non-exempted part of the answer-books, under Section 10 of
- D RTI Act. [Para 28] [1083-B-H; 1084-A]

- 5.2. The right to access information does not extend beyond the period during which the examining body is expected to retain the answer-books. In the case of CBSE, the answer-books are required to be maintained for a
- E period of three months and thereafter, they are liable to be disposed of/destroyed. Some other examining bodies are required to keep the answer-books for a period of six
- F months. The fact that right to information is available in regard to answer-books does not mean that answer-books would have to be maintained for any longer period
- G than required under the rules and regulations of the public authority. The obligation under the RTI Act is to make available or give access to *existing information* or information which is expected to be preserved or
- H maintained. If the rules and regulations governing the functioning of the respective public authority require preservation of the information for only a limited period, the applicant for information would be entitled to such information only if he seeks the information when it is available with the public authority. The power of the

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1043  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY

Information Commission under Section 19(8) of the RTI Act to require a public authority to take any such steps as may be necessary *to secure compliance with the provision of the Act*, does not include a power to direct the *public authority* to preserve the information, for any period larger than what is provided under the rules and regulations of the public authority. [Para 29] [1084-B-G]

5.4. Section 8(3) nowhere provides that records or information have to be maintained for a period of twenty years. The period for which any particular records or information has to be maintained would depend upon the relevant statutory rule or regulation of the public authority relating to the preservation of records. Section 8(3) provides that information relating to any occurrence, event or matters which has taken place and occurred or happened *twenty years before the date* on which any request is made under Section 6, shall be provided to any person making a request. This means that where any information required to be maintained and preserved for a period beyond twenty years under the rules of the public authority, is exempted from disclosure under any of the provisions of Section 8(1) of RTI Act, then, notwithstanding such exemption, access to such information shall have to be provided by disclosure thereof, after a period of twenty years except where they relate to information falling under clauses (a), (c) and (i) of Section 8(1). In other words, Section 8(3) provides that any protection against disclosure that may be available, under clauses (b), (d) to (h) and (j) of section 8(1) would cease to be available after twenty years in regard to records which are required to be preserved for more than twenty years. Where any record or information is required to be destroyed under the rules and regulations of a public authority prior to twenty years, Section 8(3) would not prevent destruction in accordance with the Rules.

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- A Section 8(3) of RTI Act is not therefore, a provision  
requiring all 'information' to be preserved and maintained  
for twenty years or more, nor does it override any rules  
or regulations governing the period for which the record,  
document or information is required to be preserved by  
B any public authority. [Para 30] [1085-A-G]

- 5.5. The Act seeks to bring about a balance between  
two conflicting interests, as harmony between them is  
essential for preserving democracy. One is to bring about  
transparency and accountability by providing access to  
C information under the control of public authorities. The  
other is to ensure that the revelation of information, in  
actual practice, does not conflict with other public  
interests which include efficient operation of the  
governments, optimum use of limited fiscal resources  
D and preservation of confidentiality of sensitive  
information. The preamble to the Act specifically states  
that the object of the Act is to harmonise these two  
conflicting interests. While Sections 3 and 4 seek to  
achieve the first objective, Sections 8, 9, 10 and 11 seek  
E to achieve the second objective. Therefore, when Section  
8 exempts certain information from being disclosed, it  
should not be considered to be a fetter on the right to  
information, but as an equally important provision  
protecting other public interests essential for the  
F fulfilment and preservation of democratic ideals. [Para 33]  
[1089-F-H; 1090-A-C]

- 5.6. When trying to ensure that the right to  
information does not conflict with several other public  
interests (which includes efficient operations of the  
governments, preservation of confidentiality of sensitive  
G information, optimum use of limited fiscal resources, etc.),  
it is difficult to visualise and enumerate all types of  
information which require to be exempted from  
disclosure in public interest. The legislature has however  
H made an attempt to do so. The enumeration of

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1045  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY

exemptions is more exhaustive than the enumeration of exemptions attempted in the earlier Act that is Section 8 of the Freedom to Information Act, 2002. The Courts and Information Commissions enforcing the provisions of RTI Act have to adopt a purposive construction, involving a reasonable and balanced approach which harmonises the two objects of the Act, while interpreting Section 8 and the other provisions of the Act. [Para 34] [1090-D-F]

5.7. The RTI Act provides access to all information *that is available and existing*. This is clear from a combined reading of Section 3 and the definitions of 'information' and 'right to information' under clauses (f) and (j) of Section 2 of the Act. If a public authority has any information in the form of data or analysed data, or abstracts, or statistics, an applicant may access such information, subject to the exemptions in Section 8 of the Act. But where the information sought is not a part of the record of a public authority, and where such information is not required to be maintained under any law or the rules or regulations of the public authority, the Act does not cast an obligation upon the public authority, to collect or collate such non-available information and then furnish it to an applicant. A public authority is also not required to furnish information which require drawing of inferences and/or making of assumptions. It is also not required to provide 'advice' or 'opinion' to an applicant, nor required to obtain and furnish any 'opinion' or 'advice' to an applicant. The reference to 'opinion' or 'advice' in the definition of 'information' in Section 2(f) of the Act, only refers to such material available in the records of the public authority. Many public authorities have, as a public relation exercise, provide advice, guidance and opinion to the citizens. But that is purely voluntary and should not be confused with any obligation under the RTI Act. [Para 35] [1090-G-H; 1091-A-C]

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A 5.8. Section 19(8) of RTI Act has entrusted the  
Central/State Information Commissions, with the power  
to require any public authority to take any such steps as  
may be necessary to secure the compliance with the  
provisions of the Act. Apart from the generality of the said  
B power, clause (a) of section 19(8) refers to six specific  
powers, to implement the provision of the Act. The power  
under Section 19(8) of the Act however does not extend  
to requiring a public authority to take any steps which are  
not required or contemplated to secure compliance with  
C the provisions of the Act or to issue directions beyond  
the provisions of the Act. The power under Section 19(8)  
of the Act is intended to be used by the Commissions to  
ensure compliance with the Act, in particular ensure that  
every public authority maintains its records duly  
D catalogued and indexed in the manner and in the form  
which facilitates the right to information and ensure that  
the records are computerized, as required under clause  
(a) of Section 4(1) of the Act; and to ensure that the  
information enumerated in clauses (b) and (c) of Sections  
E 4(1) of the Act are published and disseminated, and are  
periodically updated as provided in sub-Sections (3) and  
(4) of Section 4 of the Act. If the 'information' enumerated  
in clause (b) of Section 4(1) of the Act are effectively  
disseminated (by publications in print and on websites  
and other effective means), apart from providing  
F transparency and accountability, citizens will be able to  
access relevant information and avoid unnecessary  
applications for information under the Act. [Para 36] [1091-  
F-H; 1092-A-F]

G 5.9. The right to information is a cherished right.  
Information and right to information are intended to be  
formidable tools in the hands of responsible citizens to  
fight corruption and to bring in transparency and  
accountability. The provisions of RTI Act should be  
enforced strictly and all efforts should be made to bring  
H to light the necessary information under clause (b) of

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1047  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY

Section 4(1) which relates to securing transparency and accountability in the working of public authorities and in discouraging corruption. But in regard to other information, (that is information other than those enumerated in Section 4(1)(b) and (c)), equal importance and emphasis are given to other public interests (like confidentiality of sensitive information, fidelity and fiduciary relationships, efficient operation of governments, etc.). Indiscriminate and impractical demands or directions under RTI Act for disclosure of all and sundry information (unrelated to transparency and accountability in the functioning of public authorities and eradication of corruption) would be counter-productive as it would adversely affect the efficiency of the administration and result in the executive getting bogged down with the non-productive work of collecting and furnishing information. The Act should not be allowed to be misused or abused, to become a tool to obstruct the national development and integration, or to destroy the peace, tranquility and harmony among its citizens. Nor should it be converted into a tool of oppression or intimidation of honest officials striving to do their duty. The threat of penalties under the RTI Act and the pressure of the authorities under the RTI Act should not lead to employees of a public authorities prioritising 'information furnishing', at the cost of their normal and regular duties. [Para 37] [1092-G-H; 1093-A-F]

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*State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain* (1975) 4 SCC 428:1975 (3) SCR 333; *Dinesh Trivedi v. Union of India* (1997) 4 SCC 306:1997 (3) SCR 93; *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India* (2004) 2 SCC 476: 2004 (1) SCR 232 – referred to.

G

Case Law Reference:

1984 (4) SCC 27                      Referred to.                      Para 6

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|   |                         |              |         |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|---------|
| A | 2004 (3) Suppl. SCR 372 | Referred to. | Para 6  |
|   | 2004 (13) SCC 383       | Referred to. | Para 6  |
|   | 2007 (1) SCC 603        | Referred to. | Para 6  |
| B | 2007 (10) SCR 464       | Referred to. | Para 6  |
|   | 1975 (3) SCR 333        | Referred to. | Para 10 |
|   | 1997 (3) SCR 93         | Referred to. | Para 10 |
|   | 2004 (1) SCR 232        | Referred to. | Para 10 |

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CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION : Civil Appeal No. 6454 of 2011.

From the Judgment & Order datd 5.2.2009 of the High Court at Calcutta in Writ Petition 18189 (W) of 2008.

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WITH

C.A. Nos. 6456, 6457-6458, 6459, 6461, 6462, 6464, 6465-6468 of 2011.

E  
Parag P. Tripathi, ASG, Bhaskar P. Gupta, Mahabir Singh, P.K. Goswami, Tapash Ray, Dr. Rajiv Dhawan, Tara Chandra Sharma, Neelam Sharma, Rupesh Kumar, Ajay Sharma, Pijush K. Roy, Mithilesh Kr. Singh, Ranajit Chatterjee, Shankar Divate, Anuj Bhandari, Pramod Dayal, Nikunj Dayal, Rakesh Agarwal, F  
Pulkit Agarwal, Payal Dayal, Parthiv Goswami, S. Hariharan, Rajiv Mehta, Saurendra Betal, D.M. Nargolkar, L.C. Agrawala, F.I. Choudhary, Rameshwar Prasad Goyal, Abhijit Sengupta, B.P. Yadav, Sampa Sengupta Ray, Anmia Kujur, Ranjan Mukherjee, Azem H. Laskar, Divya Jyoti Jaipurian, Jyoti G  
Mendiratta, Navin Prakash, Sunil Kumar Verma, Rekha Pandey for the appearing parties.

The Judgment of the Court was delivered by

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R.V.RAVEENDRAN, J. 1. Leave granted. For convenience, we will refer to the facts of the first case.

**CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1049  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]**

2. The first respondent appeared for the Secondary School Examination, 2008 conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (for short 'CBSE' or the 'appellant'). When he got the mark sheet he was disappointed with his marks. He thought that he had done well in the examination but his answer-books were not properly valued and that improper valuation had resulted in low marks. Therefore he made an application for inspection and re-evaluation of his answer-books. CBSE rejected the said request by letter dated 12.7.2008. The reasons for rejection were:

- (i) The information sought was exempted under Section 8(1)(e) of RTI Act since CBSE shared fiduciary relationship with its evaluators and maintain confidentiality of both manner and method of evaluation.
- (ii) The Examination Bye-laws of the Board provided that no candidate shall claim or is entitled to re-evaluation of his answers or disclosure or inspection of answer book(s) or other documents.
- (iii) The larger public interest does not warrant the disclosure of such information sought.
- (iv) The Central Information Commission, by its order dated 23.4.2007 in appeal no. ICPB/A-3/CIC/2006 dated 10.2.2006 had ruled out such disclosure."

3. Feeling aggrieved the first respondent filed W.P. No.18189(W)/2008 before the Calcutta High Court and sought the following reliefs : (a) for a declaration that the action of CBSE in excluding the provision of re-evaluation of answer-sheets, in regard to the examinations held by it was illegal, unreasonable and violative of the provisions of the Constitution of India; (b) for a direction to CBSE to appoint an independent examiner for re-evaluating his answer-books and issue a fresh marks card on the basis of re-evaluation; (c) for a direction to

A CBSE to produce his answer-books in regard to the 2008 Secondary School Examination so that they could be properly reviewed and fresh marks card can be issued with re-evaluation marks; (d) for quashing the communication of CBSE dated 12.7.2008 and for a direction to produce the answer-books into court for inspection by the first respondent. The respondent contended that section 8(1)(e) of Right to Information Act, 2005 ('RTI Act' for short) relied upon by CBSE was not applicable and relied upon the provisions of the RTI Act to claim inspection.

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C 4. CBSE resisted the petition. It contended that as per its Bye-laws, re-evaluation and inspection of answer-books were impermissible and what was permissible was only verification of marks. They relied upon the CBSE Examination Bye-law No.61, relevant portions of which are extracted below:

D *"61. Verification of marks obtained by a Candidate in a subject*

E (i) A candidate who has appeared at an examination conducted by the Board may apply to the concerned Regional Officer of the Board for verification of marks in any particular subject. The verification will be restricted to checking whether all the answer's have been evaluated and that there has been no mistake in the totalling of marks for each question in that subject and that the marks have been transferred correctly on the title page of the answer book and to the award list and whether the supplementary answer book(s) attached with the answer book mentioned by the candidate are intact. No revaluation of the answer book or supplementary answer book(s) shall be done.

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G (ii) Such an application must be made by the candidate within 21 days from the date of the declaration of result for Main Examination and 15 days for Compartment Examination.

H (iii) All such applications must be accompanied by

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1051  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

payment of fee as prescribed by the Board from time to time. A

(iv) *No candidate shall claim, or be entitled to, revaluation of his/her answers or disclosure or inspection of the answer book(s) or other documents.* B

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(vi) In no case the verification of marks shall be done in the presence of the candidate or anyone else on his/her behalf, nor will the answer books be shown to him/her or his/her representative. C

(vii) Verification of marks obtained by a candidate will be done by the officials appointed by or with the approval of the Chairman. D

(viii) The marks, on verification will be revised upward or downward, as per the actual marks obtained by the candidate in his/her answer book.

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62. *Maintenance of Answer Books* E

The answer books shall be maintained for a period of three months and shall thereafter be disposed of in the manner as decided by the Chairman from time to time." F

(emphasis supplied)

CBSE submitted that 12 to 13 lakhs candidates from about 9000 affiliated schools across the country appear in class X and class XII examinations conducted by it and this generates as many as 60 to 65 lakhs of answer-books; that as per Examination Bye-law No.62, it maintains the answer books only for a period of three months after which they are disposed of. It was submitted that if candidates were to be permitted to seek re-evaluation of answer books or inspection thereof, it will G H

A create confusion and chaos, subjecting its elaborate system of examinations to delay and disarray. It was stated that apart from class X and class XII examinations, CBSE also conducts several other examinations (including the All India Pre-Medical Test, All India Engineering Entrance Examination and Jawahar  
 B Navodaya Vidyalaya's Selection Test). If CBSE was required to re-evaluate the answer-books or grant inspection of answer-books or grant certified copies thereof, it would interfere with its effective and efficient functioning, and will also require huge additional staff and infrastructure. It was submitted that the entire  
 C examination system and evaluation by CBSE is done in a scientific and systemic manner designed to ensure and safeguard the high academic standards and at each level utmost care was taken to achieve the object of excellence, keeping in view the interests of the students. CBSE referred to the following elaborate procedure for evaluation adopted by  
 D it :

E "The examination papers are set by the teachers with at least 20 years of teaching experience and proven integrity. Paper setters are normally appointed from amongst academicians recommended by then Committee of courses of the Board. Every paper setter is asked to set more than one set of question papers which are moderated by a team of moderators who are appointed from the academicians of the University or from amongst  
 F the Senior Principals. The function of the moderation team is to ensure correctness and consistency of different sets of question papers with the curriculum and to assess the difficulty level to cater to the students of different schools in different categories. After assessing the papers from  
 G every point of view, the team of moderators gives a declaration whether the whole syllabus is covered by a set of question papers, whether the distribution of difficulty level of all the sets is parallel and various other aspects to ensure uniform standard. The Board also issues detailed  
 H instructions for the guidance of the moderators in order to

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1053  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

ensure uniform criteria for assessment.

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The evaluation system on the whole is well organized and fool-proof. All the candidates are examined through question papers set by the same paper setters. Their answer books are marked with fictitious roll numbers so as to conceal their identity. The work of allotment of fictitious roll number is carried out by a team working under a Chief Secrecy Officer having full autonomy. The Chief Secrecy Officer and his team of assistants are academicians drawn from the Universities and other autonomous educational bodies not connected with the Board. The Chief Secrecy Officer himself is usually a person of the rank of a University professor. No official of the Board at the Central or Regional level is associated with him in performance of the task assigned to him. The codes of fictitious roll numbers and their sequences are generated by the Chief Secrecy Officer himself on the basis of mathematical formula which randomize the real roll numbers and are known only to him and his team. This ensures complete secrecy about the identification of the answer book so much so, that even the Chairman, of the Board and the Controller of Examination of the Board do not have any information regarding the fictitious roll numbers granted by the Chief Secrecy Officer and their real counterpart numbers.

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At the evaluation stage, the Board ensures complete fairness and uniformity by providing a marking scheme which is uniformly applicable to all the examiners in order to eliminate the chances of subjectivity. These marking schemes are jointly prepared at the Headquarters of the Board in Delhi by the Subject Experts of all the regions. The main purpose of the marking scheme is to maintain uniformity in the evaluation of the answer books.

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The evaluation of the answer books in all major subjects including mathematics, science subjects is done in

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A centralized “on the spot” evaluation centers where the examiners get answer book in interrupted serial orders. Also, the answer books are jumbled together as a result of which the examiners, say in Bangalore may be marking the answer book of a candidate who had his examination in Pondicherry, Goa, Andaman and Nicobar islands, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu or Karnataka itself but he has no way of knowing exactly which answer book he is examining. The answer books having been marked with fictitious roll numbers give no clue to any examiner about the state or territory it belongs to. It cannot give any clue about the candidate’s school or centre of examination. The examiner cannot have any inclination to do any favour to a candidate because he is unable to decodify his roll number or to know as to which school, place or state or territory he belongs to.

The examiners check all the questions in the papers thoroughly under the supervision of head examiner and award marks to the sub parts individually not collectively. They take full precautions and due attention is given while assessing an answer book to do justice to the candidate. Re-evaluation is administratively impossible to be allowed in a Board where lakhs of students take examination in multiple subjects.

There are strict instructions to the additional head examiners not to allow any shoddy work in evaluation and not to issue more than 20-25 answer books for evaluation to an examiner on a single day. The examiners are practicing teachers who guard the interest of the candidates. There is no ground to believe that they do unjust marking and deny the candidates their due. It is true that in some cases totaling errors have been detected at the stage of scrutiny or verification of marks. In order to minimize such errors and to further strengthen and to improve its system, from 1993 checking of totals and other

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1055  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

aspects of the answers has been trebled in order to detect and eliminate all lurking errors. A

The results of all the candidates are reviewed by the Results Committee functioning at the Head Quarters. The Regional Officers are not the number of this Committee. This Committee reviews the results of all the regions and in case it decides to standardize the results in view of the results shown by the regions over the previous years, it adopts a uniform policy for the candidates of all the regions. No special policy is adopted for any region, unless there are some special reasons. This practice of awarding standardized marks in order to moderate the overall results is a practice common to most of the Boards of Secondary Education. The exact number of marks awarded for the purpose of standardization in different subjects varies from year to year. The system is extremely impersonalized and has no room for collusion infringement. It is in a word a scientific system." B  
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CBSE submitted that the procedure evolved and adopted by it ensures fairness and accuracy in evaluation of answer-books and made the entire process as foolproof as possible and therefore denial of re-evaluation or inspection or grant of copies cannot be considered to be denial of fair play or unreasonable restriction on the rights of the students. E

5. A Division Bench of the High Court heard and disposed of the said writ petition along with the connected writ petitions (relied by West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and others) by a common judgment dated 5.2.2009. The High Court held that the evaluated answer-books of an examinee writing a public examination conducted by statutory bodies like CBSE or any University or Board of Secondary Education, being a 'document, manuscript record, and opinion' fell within the definition of "information" as defined in section 2(f) of the RTI Act. It held that the provisions of the RTI Act should be interpreted in a manner which would lead towards dissemination F  
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- A of information rather than withholding the same; and in view of the right to information, the examining bodies were bound to provide inspection of evaluated answer books to the examinees. Consequently it directed CBSE to grant inspection of the answer books to the examinees who sought information.
- B The High Court however rejected the prayer made by the examinees for re-evaluation of the answer-books, as that was not a relief that was available under RTI Act. RTI Act only provided a right to access information, but not for any consequential reliefs. Feeling aggrieved by the direction to grant inspection, CBSE has filed this appeal by special leave.
- C

6. Before us the CBSE contended that the High Court erred in (i) directing CBSE to permit inspection of the evaluated answer books, as that would amount to requiring CBSE to disobey its Examination Bye-law 61(4), which provided that no candidate shall claim or be entitled to re-evaluation of answer books or disclosure/inspection of answer books; (ii) holding that Bye-law 61(4) was not binding upon the examinees, in view of the overriding effect of the provisions of the RTI Act, even though the validity of that bye-law had not been challenged; (iii) not following the decisions of this court in *Maharashtra State Board of Secondary Education vs. Paritosh B. Sheth* [1984 (4) SCC 27], *Parmod Kumar Srivastava vs. Chairman, Bihar PAC* [2004 (6) SCC 714], *Board of Secondary Education vs. Pavan Ranjan P* [2004 (13) SCC 383], *Board of Secondary Education vs. S* [2007 (1) SCC 603] and *Secretary, West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education vs. I Dass* [2007 (8) SCC 242]; and (iv) holding that the examinee had a right to inspect his answer book under section 3 of the RTI Act and the examining bodies like CBSE were not exempted from disclosure of information under section 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act.

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G The appellants contended that they were holding the "information" (in this case, the evaluated answer books) in a fiduciary relationship and therefore exempted under section 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act.

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1057  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

7. The examinees and the Central Information Commission A  
contended that the object of the RTI Act is to ensure maximum  
disclosure of information and minimum exemptions from  
disclosure; that an examining body does not hold the evaluated  
answer books, in any fiduciary relationship either with the  
student or the examiner; and that the information sought by any B  
examinee by way of inspection of his answer books, will not  
fall under any of the exempted categories of information  
enumerated in section 8 of the RTI Act. It was submitted that  
an examining body being a public authority holding the C  
'information', that is, the evaluated answer-books, and the  
inspection of answer-books sought by the examinee being  
exercise of 'right to information' as defined under the Act, the  
examinee as a citizen has the right to inspect the answer-books  
and take certified copies thereof. It was also submitted that  
having regard to section 22 of the RTI Act, the provisions of D  
the said Act will have effect notwithstanding anything  
inconsistent in any law and will prevail over any rule, regulation  
or bye law of the examining body barring or prohibiting  
inspection of answer books.

8. On the contentions urged, the following questions arise E  
for our consideration :

- (i) Whether an examinee's right to information under F  
the RTI Act includes a right to inspect his evaluated  
answer books in a public examination or taking  
certified copies thereof?
- (ii) Whether the decisions of this court in *Maharashtra*  
*State Board of Secondary Education* [1984 (4)  
SCC 27] and other cases referred to above, in any G  
way affect or interfere with the right of an examinee  
seeking inspection of his answer books or seeking  
certified copies thereof?
- (iii) Whether an examining body holds the evaluated  
answer books "in a fiduciary relationship" and H

A consequently has no obligation to give inspection of the evaluated answer books under section 8 (1)(e) of RTI Act?

B (iv) If the examinee is entitled to inspection of the evaluated answer books or seek certified copies thereof, whether such right is subject to any limitations, conditions or safeguards?

**Relevant Legal Provisions**

C 9. To consider these questions, it is necessary to refer to the statement of objects and reasons, the preamble and the relevant provisions of the RTI Act. RTI Act was enacted in order to ensure smoother, greater and more effective access to information and provide an effective framework for effectuating the right of information recognized under article 19 of the Constitution. The preamble to the Act declares the object sought to be achieved by the RTI Act thus:

E "An Act to provide for setting out the practical regime of right to information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities, in order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority, the constitution of a Central Information Commission and State Information Commissions and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

F Whereas the Constitution of India has established democratic Republic;

G And whereas democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency of information which are vital to its functioning and also to contain corruption and to hold Governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed;

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1059  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

And whereas revelation of information in actual practice is likely to conflict with other public interests including efficient operations of the Governments, optimum use of limited fiscal resources and the preservation of confidentiality of sensitive information;

And whereas it is necessary to harmonise these conflicting interests while preserving the paramountcy of the democratic ideal.”

Chapter II of the Act containing sections 3 to 11 deals with right to information and obligations of public authorities. Section 3 provides for right to information and reads thus: “*Subject to the provisions of this Act, all citizens shall have the right to information.*” This section makes it clear that the RTI Act gives a right to a citizen to only access information, but not seek any consequential relief based on such information. Section 4 deals with obligations of public authorities to maintain the records in the manner provided and publish and disseminate the information in the manner provided. Section 6 deals with requests for obtaining information. It provides that applicant making a request for information shall not be required to give any reason for requesting the information or any personal details except those that may be necessary for contacting him. Section 8 deals with exemption from disclosure of information and is extracted in its entirety:

“8. *Exemption from disclosure of information — (1)* Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, *there shall be no obligation to give any citizen,-*

(a) information, disclosure of which would prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, relation with foreign State or lead to incitement of an offence;

(b) information which has been expressly forbidden to be

A published by any court of law or tribunal or the disclosure of which may constitute contempt of court;

(c) information, the disclosure of which would cause a breach of privilege of Parliament or the State Legislature;

B (d) information including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property, the disclosure of which would harm the competitive position of a third party, unless the competent authority is satisfied that larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information;

C (e) information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship, unless the competent authority is satisfied that the larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information;

D (f) information received in confidence from foreign Government;

(g) information, the disclosure of which would endanger the life or physical safety of any person or identify the source of information or assistance given in confidence for law enforcement or security purposes;

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(h) information which would impede the process of investigation or apprehension or prosecution of offenders;

F (i) cabinet papers including records of deliberations of the Council of Ministers, Secretaries and other officers:

G Provided that the decisions of Council of Ministers, the reasons thereof, and the material on the basis of which the decisions were taken shall be made public after the decision has been taken, and the matter is complete, or over:

H Provided further that those matters which come under the exemptions specified in this section shall not be disclosed;

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1061  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

(j) information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual unless the Central Public Information Officer or the State Public Information Officer or the appellate authority, as the case may be, is satisfied that the larger public interest justifies the disclosure of such information:

Provided that the information which cannot be denied to the Parliament or a State Legislature shall not be denied to any person.

(2) Notwithstanding anything in the Official Secrets Act, 1923 (19 of 1923) nor any of the exemptions permissible in accordance with sub-section (1), a public authority may allow access to information, if public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm to the protected interests.

(3) Subject to the provisions of clauses (a), (c) and (i) of sub-section (1), any information relating to any occurrence, event or matter which has taken place, occurred or happened twenty years before the date on which any request is made under section 6 shall be provided to any person making a request under that section:

Provided that where any question arises as to the date from which the said period of twenty years has to be computed, the decision of the Central Government shall be final, subject to the usual appeals provided for in this Act."

(emphasis supplied)

Section 9 provides that without prejudice to the provisions of section 8, a request for information may be rejected if such a request for providing access would involve an infringement of copyright. Section 10 deals with severability of exempted information and sub-section (1) thereof is extracted below:

- A “(1) Where a request for access to information is rejected on the ground that it is in relation to information which is exempt from disclosure, then, notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, access may be provided to that part of the record which does not contain any information which is exempt from disclosure under this Act and which can reasonably be severed from any part that contains exempt information.”
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Section 11 deals with third party information and sub-section (1) thereof is extracted below:

- C “(1) Where a Central Public Information Officer or a State Public Information Officer, as the case may be, intends to disclose any information or record, or part thereof on a request made under this Act, which relates to or has been supplied by a third party and has been treated as confidential by that third party, the Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer, as the case may be, shall, within five days from the receipt of the request, give a written notice to such third party of the request and of the fact that the Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer, as the case may be, intends to disclose the information or record, or part thereof, and invite the third party to make a submission in writing or orally, regarding whether the information should be disclosed, and such submission of the third party shall be kept in view while taking a decision about disclosure of information:
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- Provided that except in the case of trade or commercial secrets protected by law, disclosure may be allowed if the public interest in disclosure outweighs in importance any possible harm or injury to the interests of such third party.”
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- The definitions of *information*, *public authority*, *record* and *right to information* in clauses (f), (h), (i) and (j) of section 2 of the RTI Act are extracted below:
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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1063  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

**(f) "information"** means any material in any form, including records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any other law for the time being in force; **A**  
**B**

**(h) "public authority"** means any authority or body or institution of self- government established or constituted-

**(a)** by or under the Constitution; **C**

**(b)** by any other law made by Parliament;

**(c)** by any other law made by State Legislature;

**(d)** by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any- **D**

**(i)** body owned, controlled or substantially financed;

**(ii)** non-Government organisation substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government; **E**

**(i) "record"** includes-

**(a)** any document, manuscript and file; **F**

**(b)** any microfilm, microfiche and facsimile copy of a document;

**(c)** any reproduction of image or images embodied in such microfilm (whether enlarged or not); and **G**

**(d)** any other material produced by a computer or any other device;

**(j) "right to information"** means the right to information **H**

- A accessible under this Act which is held by or under the control of any public authority and includes the right to-
- (i) inspection of work, documents, records;
  - B (ii) taking notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records;
  - (iii) taking certified samples of material;
  - C (iv) obtaining information in the form of diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts where such information is stored in a computer or in any other device;

D Section 22 provides for the Act to have overriding effect and is extracted below:

E "The provisions of this Act shall have effect notwithstanding anything inconsistent therewith contained in the Official Secrets Act, 1923 (19 of 1923), and any other law for the time being in force or in any instrument having effect by virtue of any law other than this Act."

F 10. It will also be useful to refer to a few decisions of this Court which considered the importance and scope of the right to information. In *State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain - (1975) 4 SCC 428*, this Court observed:

G "In a government of responsibility like ours, where all the agents of the public must be responsible for their conduct, there can but few secrets. *The people of this country have a right to know every public act, everything, that is done in a public way, by their public functionaries. They are entitled to know the particulars of every public transaction in all its bearing. The right to know, which is derived from the concept of freedom of speech, though not absolute,*

H is a factor which should make one wary, when secrecy is

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1065  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

claimed for transactions which can, at any rate, have no repercussion on public security.”

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(emphasis supplied)

In *Dinesh Trivedi v. Union of India* – (1997) 4 SCC 306, this Court held:

B

“In modern constitutional democracies, it is axiomatic that citizens have a right to know about the affairs of the Government which, having been elected by them, seeks to formulate sound policies of governance aimed at their welfare. However, like all other rights, even this right has recognised limitations; it is, by no means, absolute. ....Implicit in this assertion is the proposition that in transaction which have serious repercussions on public security, secrecy can legitimately be claimed because it would then be in the public interest that such matters are not publicly disclosed or disseminated.

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D

To ensure the continued participation of the people in the democratic process, they must be kept informed of the vital decisions taken by the Government and the basis thereof. Democracy, therefore, expects openness and openness is a concomitant of a free society. Sunlight is the best disinfectant. But it is equally important to be alive to the dangers that lie ahead. It is important to realise that undue popular pressure brought to bear on decision-makers is Government can have frightening side-effects. If every action taken by the political or executive functionary is transformed into a public controversy and made subject to an enquiry to soothe popular sentiments, it will undoubtedly have a chilling effect on the independence of the decision-maker who may find it safer not to take any decision. It will paralyse the entire system and bring it to a grinding halt. So we have two conflicting situations almost enigmatic and

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A we think the answer is to maintain a fine balance which would serve public interest.”

B In *People’s Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India* - (2004) 2 SCC 476, this Court held that right of information is a facet of the freedom of “speech and expression” as contained in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India and such a right is subject to any reasonable restriction in the interest of the security of the state and subject to exemptions and exceptions.

C **Re : Question (i)**

D 11. The definition of ‘information’ in section 2(f) of the RTI Act refers to any material in any form which includes records, documents, opinions, papers among several other enumerated items. The term ‘record’ is defined in section 2(i) of the said Act as including any document, manuscript or file among others. When a candidate participates in an examination and writes his answers in an answer-book and submits it to the examining body for evaluation and declaration of the result, the answer-book is a document or record. When the answer-book is evaluated by an examiner appointed by the examining body, the evaluated answer-book becomes a record containing the ‘opinion’ of the examiner. Therefore the evaluated answer-book is also an ‘information’ under the RTI Act.

F 12. Section 3 of RTI Act provides that subject to the provisions of this Act all citizens shall have *the right to information*. The term ‘*right to information*’ is defined in section 2(j) as the right to information accessible under the Act which is held by or under the control of any public authority. Having regard to section 3, the citizens have the right to access to all information held by or under the control of any public authority except those excluded or exempted under the Act. The object of the Act is to empower the citizens to fight against corruption and hold the Government and their instrumentalities accountable to the citizens, by providing them access to information regarding functioning of every public authority. Certain

**CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1067  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]**

safeguards have been built into the Act so that the revelation of information will not conflict with other public interests which include efficient operation of the governments, optimum use of limited fiscal resources and preservation of confidential and sensitive information. The RTI Act provides access to information held by or under the control of public authorities and not in regard to information held by any private person. The Act provides the following exclusions by way of exemptions and exceptions (under sections 8, 9 and 24) in regard to information held by public authorities:

- (i) Exclusion of the Act in entirety under section 24 to intelligence and security organizations specified in the Second Schedule even though they may be "public authorities", (except in regard to information with reference to allegations of corruption and human rights violations).
- (ii) Exemption of the several categories of information enumerated in section 8(1) of the Act which no public authority is under an obligation to give to any citizen, notwithstanding anything contained in the Act [however, in regard to the information exempted under clauses (d) and (e), the competent authority, and in regard to the information excluded under clause (j), Central Public Information Officer/State Public Information Officer/the Appellate Authority, may direct disclosure of information, if larger public interest warrants or justifies the disclosure].
- (iii) If any request for providing access to information involves an infringement of a copyright subsisting in a person other than the State, the Central/State Public Information Officer may reject the request under section 9 of RTI Act.

Having regard to the scheme of the RTI Act, the right of the citizens to access any information held or under the control

A of any public authority, should be read in harmony with the exclusions/exemptions in the Act.

B 13. The examining bodies (Universities, Examination Boards, CBSC etc.) are neither security nor intelligence organisations and therefore the exemption under section 24 will not apply to them. The disclosure of information with reference to answer-books does not also involve infringement of any copyright and therefore section 9 will not apply. Resultantly, unless the examining bodies are able to demonstrate that the evaluated answer-books fall under any of the categories of exempted 'information' enumerated in clauses (a) to (j) of subsection (1) section 8, they will be bound to provide access to the information and any applicant can either inspect the document/record, take notes, extracts or obtain certified copies thereof.

D 14. The examining bodies contend that the evaluated answer-books are exempted from disclosure under section 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act, as they are 'information' held in its fiduciary relationship. They fairly conceded that evaluated answer-books will not fall under any other exemptions in subsection (1) of section 8. Every examinee will have the right to access his evaluated answer-books, by either inspecting them or take certified copies thereof, unless the evaluated answer-books are found to be exempted under section 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act.

F **Re : Question (ii)**

G 15. In *Maharashtra State Board*, this Court was considering whether denial of re-evaluation of answer-books or denial of disclosure by way of inspection of answer books, to an examinee, under Rule 104(1) and (3) of the Maharashtra Secondary and Higher Secondary Board Rules, 1977 was violative of principles of natural justice and violative of Articles 14 and 19 of the Constitution of India. Rule 104(1) provided that H no re-evaluation of the answer books shall be done and on an

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1069  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

application of any candidate verification will be restricted to A  
checking whether all the answers have been examined and that  
there is no mistake in the totalling of marks for each question  
in that subject and transferring marks correctly on the first cover  
page of the answer book. Rule 104(3) provided that no  
candidate shall claim or be entitled to re-evaluation of his B  
answer-books or inspection of answer-books as they were  
treated as confidential. This Court while upholding the validity  
of Rule 104(3) held as under :

“.... the “process of evaluation of answer papers or of C  
subsequent verification of marks” under Clause (3) of  
Regulation 104 does not attract the principles of natural  
justice since no decision making process which brings  
about adverse civil consequences to the examinees in  
involved. The principles of natural justice cannot be D  
extended beyond reasonable and rational limits and cannot  
be carried to such absurd lengths as to make it necessary  
that candidates who have taken a public examination  
should be allowed to participate in the process of  
evaluation of their performances or to verify the correctness E  
of the evaluation made by the examiners by themselves  
conducting an inspection of the answer-books and  
determining whether there has been a proper and fair  
valuation of the answers by the examiners.”

So long as the body entrusted with the task of framing the F  
rules or regulations acts within the scope of the authority  
conferred on it, in the sense that the rules or regulations  
made by it have a rational nexus with the object and  
purpose of the statute, the court should not concern itself  
with the wisdom or efficaciousness of such rules or G  
regulations.... The Legislature and its delegate are the  
sole repositories of the power to decide what policy should  
be pursued in relation to matters covered by the Act ... and  
there is no scope for interference by the Court unless the  
particular provision impugned before it can be said to H

A suffer from any legal infirmity, in the sense of its being wholly beyond the scope of the regulation making power or its being inconsistent with any of the provisions of the parent enactment or in violation of any of the limitations imposed by the Constitution.

B It was perfectly within the competence of the Board, rather it was its plain duty, to apply its mind and decide as a matter of policy relating to the conduct of the examination as to whether disclosure and inspection of the answer books should be allowed to the candidates, whether and to what extent verification of the result should be permitted after the results have already been announced and whether any right to claim revaluation of the answer books should be recognised or provided for. All these are undoubtedly matters which have an intimate nexus with the objects and purposes of the enactment and are, therefore, with in the ambit of the general power to make regulations....”

E This Court held that Regulation 104(3) cannot be held to be unreasonable merely because in certain stray instances, errors or irregularities had gone unnoticed even after verification of the concerned answer books according to the existing procedure and it was only after further scrutiny made either on orders of the court or in the wake of contentions raised in the petitions filed before a court, that such errors or irregularities were ultimately discovered. This court reiterated the view that “the test of reasonableness is not applied in vacuum but in the context of life’s realities” and concluded that realistically and practically, providing all the candidates inspection of their answer books or re-evaluation of the answer books in the presence of the candidates would not be feasible. Dealing with the contention that every student is entitled to fair play in examination and receive marks matching his performance, this court held :

H “What constitutes fair play depends upon the facts and

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1071  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

circumstances relating to each particular given situation. A  
If it is found that every possible precaution has been taken  
and all necessary safeguards provided to ensure that the  
answer books inclusive of supplements are kept in safe  
custody so as to eliminate the danger of their being  
tampered with and that the evaluation is done by the B  
examiners applying uniform standards with checks and  
crosschecks at different stages and that measures for  
detection of malpractice, etc. have also been effectively  
adopted, in such cases it will not be correct on the part of  
the Courts to strike down, the provision prohibiting C  
reevaluation on the ground that it violates the rules of fair  
play. It appears that the procedure evolved by the Board  
for ensuring fairness and accuracy in evaluation of the  
answer books has made the system as fool proof as can  
be possible and is entirely satisfactory. The Board is a very D  
responsible body. The candidates have taken the  
examination with full awareness of the provisions contained  
in the Regulations and in the declaration made in the form  
of application for admission to the examination they have  
solemnly stated that they fully agree to abide by the E  
regulations issued by the Board. In the circumstances,  
when we find that all safeguards against errors and  
malpractices have been provided for, there cannot be  
said to be any denial of fair play to the examinees by  
reason of the prohibition against asking for reevaluation.... F

This Court concluded that if inspection and verification in  
the presence of the candidates, or reevaluation, have to be  
allowed as of right, it may lead to gross and indefinite  
uncertainty, particularly in regard to the relative ranking etc. of  
the candidate, besides leading to utter confusion on account G  
of the enormity of the labour and time involved in the process.  
This court concluded :

"... the Court should be extremely reluctant to substitute its  
own views as to what is wise, prudent and proper in H

A relation to academic matters in preference to those  
 formulated by professional men possessing technical  
 expertise and rich experience of actual day-to-day working  
 of educational institutions and the departments controlling  
 them. It will be wholly wrong for the court to make a pedantic  
 B and purely idealistic approach to the problems of this  
 nature, isolated from the actual realities and grass root  
 problems involved in the working of the system and  
 unmindful of the consequences which would emanate if a  
 purely idealistic view as opposed to a pragmatic one were  
 C to be propounded.”

16. The above principles laid down in *Maharashtra State  
 Board* have been followed and reiterated in several decisions  
 of this Court, some of which are referred to in para (6) above.  
 But the principles laid down in decisions such as *Maharashtra  
 D State Board* depend upon the provisions of the rules and  
 regulations of the examining body. If the rules and regulations  
 of the examining body provide for re-evaluation, inspection or  
 disclosure of the answer-books, then none of the principles in  
*Maharashtra State Board* or other decisions following it, will  
 E apply or be relevant. There has been a gradual change in trend  
 with several examining bodies permitting inspection and  
 disclosure of the answer-books.

17. It is thus now well settled that a provision barring  
 F inspection or disclosure of the answer-books or re-evaluation  
 of the answer-books and restricting the remedy of the  
 candidates only to re-totalling is valid and binding on the  
 examinee. In the case of CBSE, the provisions barring re-  
 evaluation and inspection contained in Bye-law No.61, are akin  
 G to Rule 104 considered in *Maharashtra State Board*. As a  
 consequence if an examination is governed only by the rules  
 and regulations of the examining body which bar inspection,  
 disclosure or re-evaluation, the examinee will be entitled only  
 for re-totalling by checking whether all the answers have been  
 H evaluated and further checking whether there is no mistake in

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1073  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

totaling of marks for each question and marks have been transferred correctly to the title (abstract) page. The position may however be different, if there is a superior statutory right entitling the examinee, as a citizen to seek access to the answer books, as information.

18. In these cases, the High Court has rightly denied the prayer for re-evaluation of answer-books sought by the candidates in view of the bar contained in the rules and regulations of the examining bodies. It is also not a relief available under the RTI Act. Therefore the question whether re-evaluation should be permitted or not, does not arise for our consideration. What arises for consideration is the question whether the examinee is entitled to inspect his evaluated answer-books or take certified copies thereof. This right is claimed by the students, not with reference to the rules or bye-laws of examining bodies, but under the RTI Act which enables them and entitles them to have access to the answer-books as 'information' and inspect them and take certified copies thereof. Section 22 of RTI Act provides that the provisions of the said Act will have effect, notwithstanding anything inconsistent therewith contained in any other law for the time being in force. Therefore the provisions of the RTI Act will prevail over the provisions of the bye-laws/rules of the examining bodies in regard to examinations. As a result, unless the examining body is able to demonstrate that the answer-books fall under the exempted category of information described in clause (e) of section 8(1) of RTI Act, the examining body will be bound to provide access to an examinee to inspect and take copies of his evaluated answer-books, even if such inspection or taking copies is barred under the rules/bye-laws of the examining body governing the examinations. Therefore, the decision of this Court in *Maharashtra State Board* (supra) and the subsequent decisions following the same, will not affect or interfere with the right of the examinee seeking inspection of answer-books or taking certified copies thereof.

A **Re : Question (iii)**

B 19. Section 8(1) enumerates the categories of information which are exempted from disclosure under the provisions of the RTI Act. The examining bodies rely upon clause (e) of section 8(1) which provides that there shall be no obligation on any public authority to give any citizen, information available to it in its fiduciary relationship. This exemption is subject to the condition that if the competent authority (as defined in section 2(e) of RTI Act) is satisfied that the larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information, the information will have to be disclosed. Therefore the question is whether the examining body holds the evaluated answer-books in its fiduciary relationship.

D 20. The term 'fiduciary' and 'fiduciary relationship' refer to different capacities and relationship, involving a common duty or obligation.

(20.1) *Black's Law Dictionary* (7th Edition, Page 640) defines 'fiduciary relationship' thus:

E "A relationship in which one person is under a duty to act for the benefit of the other on matters within the scope of the relationship. Fiduciary relationships – such as trustee-beneficiary, guardian-ward, agent-principal, and attorney-client – require the highest duty of care. Fiduciary relationships usually arise in one of four situations : (1) when one person places trust in the faithful integrity of another, who as a result gains superiority or influence over the first, (2) when one person assumes control and responsibility over another, (3) when one person has a duty to act for or give advice to another on matters falling within the scope of the relationship, or (4) when there is a specific relationship that has traditionally been recognized as involving fiduciary duties, as with a lawyer and a client or a stockbroker and a customer."

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1075  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

(20.2) The *American Restatements* (Trusts and Agency) A  
define 'fiduciary' as one whose intention is to act for the benefit  
of another as to matters relevant to the relation between them.  
The *Corpus Juris Secundum* (Vol. 36A page 381) attempts  
to define *fiduciary* thus :

"A general definition of the word which is sufficiently B  
comprehensive to embrace all cases cannot well be given.  
The term is derived from the civil, or Roman, law. It connotes  
the idea of trust or confidence, contemplates good faith,  
rather than legal obligation, as the basis of the transaction, C  
refers to the integrity, the fidelity, of the party trusted, rather  
than his credit or ability, and has been held to apply to all  
persons who occupy a position of peculiar confidence  
toward others, and to include those informal relations which  
exist whenever one party trusts and relies on another, as  
well as technical fiduciary relations. D

The word 'fiduciary,' as a noun, means one who holds a  
thing in trust for another, a trustee, a person holding the  
character of a trustee, or a character analogous to that of  
a trustee, with respect to the trust and confidence involved E  
in it and the scrupulous good faith and candor which it  
requires; a person having the duty, created by his  
undertaking, to act primarily for another's benefit in matters  
connected with such undertaking. Also more specifically,  
in a statute, a guardian, trustee, executor, administrator, F  
receiver, conservator, or any person acting in any fiduciary  
capacity for any person, trust, or estate. Some examples  
of what, in particular connections, the term has been held  
to include and not to include are set out in the note."

(20.3) *Words and Phrases, Permanent Edition* (Vol. 16A, G  
Page 41) defines '*fiducial relation*' thus :

"There is a technical distinction between a 'fiducial relation'  
which is more correctly applicable to legal relationships  
between parties, such as guardian and ward, administrator H

A and heirs, and other similar relationships, and 'confidential relation' which includes the legal relationships, and also every other relationship wherein confidence is rightly reposed and is exercised.

B Generally, the term 'fiduciary' applies to any person who occupies a position of peculiar confidence towards another. It refers to integrity and fidelity. It contemplates fair dealing and good faith, rather than legal obligation, as the basis of the transaction. The term includes those informal relations which exist whenever one party trusts and relies upon another, as well as technical fiduciary relations."

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(20.4) In *Bristol and West Building Society vs. Mothew* [1998 Ch. 1] the term *fiduciary* was defined thus :

D "A *fiduciary* is someone who has undertaken to act for and on behalf of another in a particular matter in circumstances which give rise to a relationship of trust and confidence. The distinguishing obligation of a fiduciary is the obligation of loyalty..... A fiduciary must act in good faith; he must not make a profit out of his trust; he must not place himself in

E a position where his duty and his interest may conflict; he may not act for his own benefit or the benefit of a third person without the informed consent of his principal."

F (20.5) In *Wolf vs. Superior Court* [2003 (107) California Appeals, 4th 25] the California Court of Appeals defined *fiduciary relationship* as under :

G "any relationship existing between the parties to the transaction where one of the parties is duty bound to act with utmost good faith for the benefit of the other party. Such a relationship ordinarily arises where confidence is reposed by one person in the integrity of another, and in such a relation the party in whom the confidence is reposed, if he voluntarily accepts or assumes to accept the confidence, can take no advantage from his acts relating

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1077  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

to the interests of the other party without the latter's knowledge and consent." A

21. The term 'fiduciary' refers to a person having a duty to act for the benefit of another, showing good faith and condour, where such other person reposes trust and special confidence in the person owing or discharging the duty. The term '*fiduciary relationship*' is used to describe a situation or transaction where one person (beneficiary) places complete confidence in another person (fiduciary) in regard to his affairs, business or transaction/s. The term also refers to a person who holds a thing in trust for another (beneficiary). The fiduciary is expected to act in confidence and for the benefit and advantage of the beneficiary, and use good faith and fairness in dealing with the beneficiary or the things belonging to the beneficiary. If the beneficiary has entrusted anything to the fiduciary, to hold the thing in trust or to execute certain acts in regard to or with reference to the entrusted thing, the fiduciary has to act in confidence and expected not to disclose the thing or information to any third party. There are also certain relationships where both the parties have to act in a fiduciary capacity treating the other as the beneficiary. Examples of these are : a partner vis-à-vis another partner and an employer vis-à-vis employée. An employee who comes into possession of business or trade secrets or confidential information relating to the employer in the course of his employment, is expected to act as a fiduciary and cannot disclose it to others. Similarly, if on the request of the employer or official superior or the head of a department, an employee furnishes his personal details and information, to be retained in confidence, the employer, the official superior or departmental head is expected to hold such personal information in confidence as a fiduciary, to be made use of or disclosed only if the employee's conduct or acts are found to be prejudicial to the employer. B  
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22. In a philosophical and very wide sense, examining bodies can be said to act in a fiduciary capacity, with reference H

A to students who participate in an examination, as a government does while governing its citizens or as the present generation does with reference to the future generation while preserving the environment. But the words 'information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship' are used in section 8(1)(e) of RTI Act in its normal and well recognized sense, that is to refer to persons who act in a fiduciary capacity, with reference to a specific beneficiary or beneficiaries who are to be expected to be protected or benefited by the actions of the fiduciary – a trustee with reference to the beneficiary of the trust, B a guardian with reference to a minor/physically/infirm/mentally challenged, a parent with reference to a child, a lawyer or a chartered accountant with reference to a client, a doctor or nurse with reference to a patient, an agent with reference to a principal, a partner with reference to another partner, a director of a company with reference to a share-holder, an executor with reference to a legatee, a receiver with reference to the parties to a lis, an employer with reference to the confidential information relating to the employee, and an employee with reference to business dealings/transaction of the employer. We do not find that kind of fiduciary relationship between the examining body and the examinee, with reference to the evaluated answer-books, that come into the custody of the examining body. C D E

23. The duty of examining bodies is to subject the candidates who have completed a course of study or a period of training in accordance with its curricula, to a process of verification/examination/testing of their knowledge, ability or skill, or to ascertain whether they can be said to have successfully completed or passed the course of study or training. Other specialized Examining Bodies may simply subject candidates to a process of verification by an examination, to find out whether such person is suitable for a particular post, job or assignment. An examining body, if it is a public authority entrusted with public functions, is required to act fairly, reasonably, uniformly and consistently for public good F G H

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1079  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

and in public interest. This Court has explained the role of an examining body in regard to the process of holding examination in the context of examining whether it amounts to 'service' to a consumer, in *Bihar School Examination Board vs. Suresh Prasad Sinha* – (2009) 8 SCC 483, in the following manner:

"The process of holding examinations, evaluating answer scripts, declaring results and issuing certificates are different stages of a single statutory non-commercial function. It is not possible to divide this function as partly statutory and partly administrative. When the Examination Board conducts an examination in discharge of its statutory function, it does not offer its "services" to any candidate. Nor does a student who participates in the examination conducted by the Board, hires or avails of any service from the Board for a consideration. On the other hand, a candidate who participates in the examination conducted by the Board, is a person who has undergone a course of study and who requests the Board to test him as to whether he has imbibed sufficient knowledge to be fit to be declared as having successfully completed the said course of education; and if so, determine his position or rank or competence vis-a-vis other examinees. The process is not therefore availment of a service by a student, but participation in a general examination conducted by the Board to ascertain whether he is eligible and fit to be considered as having successfully completed the secondary education course. The examination fee paid by the student is not the consideration for availment of any service, but the charge paid for the privilege of participation in the examination..... The fact that in the course of conduct of the examination, or evaluation of answer-scripts, or furnishing of mark-books or certificates, there may be some negligence, omission or deficiency, does not convert the Board into a service-provider for a consideration, nor convert the examinee into a consumer

....."

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A It cannot therefore be said that the examining body is in a fiduciary relationship either with reference to the examinee who participates in the examination and whose answer-books are evaluated by the examining body.

B 24. We may next consider whether an examining body would be entitled to claim exemption under section 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act, even assuming that it is in a fiduciary relationship with the examinee. That section provides that notwithstanding anything contained in the Act, there shall be no obligation to give any citizen *information available to a person in his*

C *fiduciary relationship*. This would only mean that even if the relationship is fiduciary, the exemption would operate in regard to giving access to the information held in fiduciary relationship, to third parties. There is no question of the fiduciary withholding information relating to the beneficiary, from the beneficiary

D himself. One of the duties of the fiduciary is to make thorough disclosure of all relevant facts of all transactions between them to the beneficiary, in a fiduciary relationship. By that logic, the examining body, if it is in a fiduciary relationship with an examinee, will be liable to make a full disclosure of the

E evaluated answer-books to the examinee and at the same time, owe a duty to the examinee not to disclose the answer-books to anyone else. If A entrusts a document or an article to B to be processed, on completion of processing, B is not expected to give the document or article to anyone else but is bound to

F give the same to A who entrusted the document or article to B for processing. Therefore, if a relationship of fiduciary and beneficiary is assumed between the examining body and the examinee with reference to the answer-book, section 8(1)(e) would operate as an exemption to prevent access to any third

G party and will not operate as a bar for the very person who wrote the answer-book, seeking inspection or disclosure of it.

H 25. An evaluated answer book of an examinee is a combination of two different 'informations'. The first is the answers written by the examinee and second is the marks/

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1081  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

assessment by the examiner. When an examinee seeks inspection of his evaluated answer-books or seeks a certified copy of the evaluated answer-book, the information sought by him is not really the answers he has written in the answer-books (which he already knows), nor the total marks assigned for the answers (which has been declared). What he really seeks is the information relating to the break-up of marks, that is, the specific marks assigned to each of his answers. When an examinee seeks 'information' by inspection/certified copies of his answer-books, he knows the contents thereof being the author thereof. When an examinee is permitted to examine an answer-book or obtain a certified copy, the examining body is not really giving him some information which is held by it in trust or confidence, but is only giving him an opportunity to read what he had written at the time of examination or to have a copy of his answers. Therefore, in furnishing the copy of an answer-book, there is no question of breach of confidentiality, privacy, secrecy or trust. The real issue therefore is not in regard to the answer-book but in regard to the marks awarded on evaluation of the answer-book. Even here the total marks given to the examinee in regard to his answer-book are already declared and known to the examinee. What the examinee actually wants to know is the break-up of marks given to him, that is how many marks were given by the examiner to each of his answers so that he can assess how his performance has been evaluated and whether the evaluation is proper as per his hopes and expectations. Therefore, the test for finding out whether the information is exempted or not, is not in regard to the answer book but in regard to the evaluation by the examiner.

26. This takes us to the crucial issue of evaluation by the examiner. The examining body engages or employs hundreds of examiners to do the evaluation of thousands of answer books. The question is whether the information relating to the 'evaluation' (that is assigning of marks) is held by the examining body in a fiduciary relationship. The examining bodies contend that even if fiduciary relationship does not exist with reference

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A to the examinee, it exists with reference to the examiner who evaluates the answer-books. On a careful examination we find that this contention has no merit. The examining body entrusts the answer-books to an examiner for evaluation and pays the examiner for his expert service. The work of evaluation and marking the answer-book is an assignment given by the examining body to the examiner which he discharges for a consideration. Sometimes, an examiner may assess answer-books, in the course of his employment, as a part of his duties without any specific or special remuneration. In other words the examining body is the 'principal' and the examiner is the agent entrusted with the work, that is, evaluation of answer-books. Therefore, the examining body is not in the position of a fiduciary with reference to the examiner. On the other hand, when an answer-book is entrusted to the examiner for the purpose of evaluation, for the period the answer-book is in his custody and to the extent of the discharge of his functions relating to evaluation, the examiner is in the position of a fiduciary with reference to the examining body and he is barred from disclosing the contents of the answer-book or the result of evaluation of the answer-book to anyone other than the examining body. Once the examiner has evaluated the answer books, he ceases to have any interest in the evaluation done by him. He does not have any copy-right or proprietary right, or confidentiality right in regard to the evaluation. Therefore it cannot be said that the examining body holds the evaluated answer books in a fiduciary relationship, qua the examiner.

27. We, therefore, hold that an examining body does not hold the evaluated answer-books in a fiduciary relationship. Not being information available to an examining body in its fiduciary relationship, the exemption under section 8(1)(e) is not available to the examining bodies with reference to evaluated answer-books. As no other exemption under section 8 is available in respect of evaluated answer books, the examining bodies will have to permit inspection sought by the examinees.

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**Re : Question (iv)**

28. When an examining body engages the services of an examiner to evaluate the answer-books, the examining body expects the examiner not to disclose the information regarding evaluation to anyone other than the examining body. Similarly the examiner also expects that his name and particulars would not be disclosed to the candidates whose answer-books are evaluated by him. In the event of such information being made known, a disgruntled examinee who is not satisfied with the evaluation of the answer books, may act to the prejudice of the examiner by attempting to endanger his physical safety. Further, any apprehension on the part of the examiner that there may be danger to his physical safety, if his identity becomes known to the examinees, may come in the way of effective discharge of his duties. The above applies not only to the examiner, but also to the scrutiniser, co-ordinator, and head-examiner who deal with the answer book. The answer book usually contains not only the signature and code number of the examiner, but also the signatures and code number of the scrutiniser/co-ordinator/head examiner. The information as to the names or particulars of the examiners/co-ordinators/scrutinisers/head examiners are therefore exempted from disclosure under section 8(1)(g) of RTI Act, on the ground that if such information is disclosed, it may endanger their physical safety. Therefore, if the examinees are to be given access to evaluated answer-books either by permitting inspection or by granting certified copies, such access will have to be given only to that part of the answer-book which does not contain any information or signature of the examiners/co-ordinators/scrutinisers/head examiners, exempted from disclosure under section 8(1)(g) of RTI Act. Those portions of the answer-books which contain information regarding the examiners/co-ordinators/scrutinisers/head examiners or which may disclose their identity with reference to signature or initials, shall have to be removed, covered, or otherwise severed from the non-exempted part of the answer-books, under section 10 of RTI Act.

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A 29. The right to access information does not extend beyond  
the period during which the examining body is expected to  
retain the answer-books. In the case of CBSE, the answer-  
books are required to be maintained for a period of three  
months and thereafter they are liable to be disposed of/  
B destroyed. Some other examining bodies are required to keep  
the answer-books for a period of six months. The fact that right  
to information is available in regard to answer-books does not  
mean that answer-books will have to be maintained for any  
longer period than required under the rules and regulations of  
C the public authority. The obligation under the RTI Act is to make  
available or give access to *existing information* or information  
which is expected to be preserved or maintained. If the rules  
and regulations governing the functioning of the respective  
public authority require preservation of the information for only  
D a limited period, the applicant for information will be entitled to  
such information only if he seeks the information when it is  
available with the public authority. For example, with reference  
to answer-books, if an examinee makes an application to  
CBSE for inspection or grant of certified copies beyond three  
months (or six months or such other period prescribed for  
E preservation of the records in regard to other examining  
bodies) from the date of declaration of results, the application  
could be rejected on the ground that such information is not  
available. The power of the Information Commission under  
section 19(8) of the RTI Act to require a public authority to take  
F any such steps as may be necessary *to secure compliance  
with the provision of the Act*, does not include a power to direct  
the *public authority* to preserve the information, for any period  
larger than what is provided under the rules and regulations of  
the public authority.

G 30. On behalf of the respondents/examinees, it was  
contended that having regard to sub-section (3) of section 8 of  
RTI Act, there is an implied duty on the part of every public  
authority to maintain the information for a minimum period of  
H twenty years and make it available whenever an application was

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v.1085  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

made in that behalf. This contention is based on a complete misreading and misunderstanding of section 8(3). The said sub-section nowhere provides that records or information have to be maintained for a period of twenty years. The period for which any particular records or information has to be maintained would depend upon the relevant statutory rule or regulation of the public authority relating to the preservation of records. Section 8(3) provides that information relating to any occurrence, event or matters which has taken place and occurred or happened *twenty years before the date* on which any request is made under section 6, shall be provided to any person making a request. This means that where any information required to be maintained and preserved for a period beyond twenty years under the rules of the public authority, is exempted from disclosure under any of the provisions of section 8(1) of RTI Act, then, notwithstanding such exemption, access to such information shall have to be provided by disclosure thereof, after a period of twenty years except where they relate to information falling under clauses (a), (c) and (i) of section 8(1). In other words, section 8(3) provides that any protection against disclosure that may be available, under clauses (b), (d) to (h) and (j) of section 8(1) will cease to be available after twenty years in regard to records which are required to be preserved for more than twenty years. Where any record or information is required to be destroyed under the rules and regulations of a public authority prior to twenty years, section 8(3) will not prevent destruction in accordance with the Rules. Section 8(3) of RTI Act is not therefore a provision requiring all 'information' to be preserved and maintained for twenty years or more, nor does it override any rules or regulations governing the period for which the record, document or information is required to be preserved by any public authority.

31. The effect of the provisions and scheme of the RTI Act is to divide 'information' into the three categories. They are :

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- A (i) Information which promotes *transparency and accountability* in the working of every public authority, disclosure of which may also help in containing or discouraging corruption (enumerated in clauses (b) and (c) of section 4(1) of RTI Act).
- B (ii) Other information held by public authority (that is all information other than those falling under clauses (b) and (c) of section 4(1) of RTI Act).
- C (iii) Information which is not held by or under the control of any public authority and which cannot be accessed by a public authority under any law for the time being in force.

D Information under the third category does not fall within the scope of RTI Act. Section 3 of RTI Act gives every citizen, the right to 'information' held by or under the control of a public authority, which falls either under the first or second category. In regard to the information falling under the first category, there is also a special responsibility upon public authorities to *suo*

E *moto publish and disseminate such information* so that they will be easily and readily accessible to the public without any need to access them by having recourse to section 6 of RTI Act. There is no such obligation to publish and disseminate the other information which falls under the second category.

F 32. The information falling under the first category, enumerated in sections 4(1)(b) & (c) of RTI Act are extracted below :

G **"4. Obligations of public authorities.-(1) Every public authority shall—**

(a) xxxxxx

(b) publish within one hundred and twenty days from the enactment of this Act,—

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CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1087  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

- (i) the particulars of its organisation, functions and duties; A
- (ii) the powers and duties of its officers and employees;
- (iii) the *procedure followed in the decision making process, including channels of supervision and accountability*; B
- (iv) *the norms set by it for the discharge of its functions*; C
- (v) the rules, regulations, instructions, manuals and records, held by it or under its control or used by its employees for discharging its functions;
- (vi) a statement of the categories of documents that are held by it or under its control; D
- (vii) the particulars of any arrangement that exists for consultation with, or representation by, the members of the public in relation to the formulation of its policy or implementation thereof; E
- (viii) a statement of the boards, councils, committees and other bodies consisting of two or more persons constituted as its part or for the purpose of its advice, and as to whether meetings of those boards, councils, committees and other bodies are open to the public, or the minutes of such meetings are accessible for public; F
- (ix) a directory of its officers and employees; G
- (x) the monthly remuneration received by each of its officers and employees, including the system of compensation as provided in its regulations;
- (xi) the budget allocated to each of its agency, H

- A indicating the particulars of all plans, proposed expenditures and reports on disbursements made;
- (xii) the manner of execution of subsidy programmes, including the amounts allocated and the details of beneficiaries of such programmes;
- B (xiii) particulars of recipients of concessions, permits or authorisations granted by it;
- (xiv) details in respect of the information, available to or held by it, reduced in an electronic form;
- C (xv) the particulars of facilities available to citizens for obtaining information, including the working hours of a library or reading room, if maintained for public use;
- D (xvi) the names, designations and other particulars of the Public Information Officers;
- (xvii) such other information as may be prescribed; and thereafter update these publications every year;
- E (c) publish all relevant facts while formulating important policies or announcing the decisions which affect public;

(emphasis supplied)

- F Sub-sections (2), (3) and (4) of section 4 relating to dissemination of information enumerated in sections 4(1)(b) & (c) are extracted below:

- G “(2) It shall be a constant endeavour of every public authority to take steps in accordance with the requirements of clause (b) of sub-section (1) *to provide as much information suo motu to the public at regular intervals through various means of communications, including internet, so that the public have minimum resort*
- H *to the use of this Act to obtain information.*

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1089  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

(3) For the purposes of sub-section (1), every information shall be disseminated widely and in such form and manner which is easily accessible to the public.

(4) All materials shall be disseminated taking into consideration the cost effectiveness, local language and the most effective method of communication in that local area and the information should be easily accessible, to the extent possible in electronic format with the Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer, as the case may be, available free or at such cost of the medium or the print cost price as may be prescribed.

Explanation.—For the purposes of sub-sections (3) and (4), “disseminated” means making known or communicated the information to the public through notice boards, newspapers, public announcements, media broadcasts, the internet or any other means, including inspection of offices of any public authority.”

(emphasis supplied)

33. Some High Courts have held that section 8 of RTI Act is in the nature of an exception to section 3 which empowers the citizens with the right to information, which is a derivative from the freedom of speech; and that therefore section 8 should be construed strictly, literally and narrowly. This may not be the correct approach. The Act seeks to bring about a balance between two conflicting interests, as harmony between them is essential for preserving democracy. One is to bring about transparency and accountability by providing access to information under the control of public authorities. The other is to ensure that the revelation of information, in actual practice, does not conflict with other public interests which include efficient operation of the governments, optimum use of limited fiscal resources and preservation of confidentiality of sensitive information. The preamble to the Act specifically states that the

- A object of the Act is to harmonise these two conflicting interests. While sections 3 and 4 seek to achieve the first objective, sections 8, 9, 10 and 11 seek to achieve the second objective. Therefore when section 8 exempts certain information from being disclosed, it should not be considered to be a fetter on
- B the right to information, but as an equally important provision protecting other public interests essential for the fulfilment and preservation of democratic ideals.

- C 34. When trying to ensure that the right to information does not conflict with several other public interests (which includes efficient operations of the governments, preservation of confidentiality of sensitive information, optimum use of limited fiscal resources, etc.), it is difficult to visualise and enumerate all types of information which require to be exempted from disclosure in public interest. The legislature has however made
- D an attempt to do so. The enumeration of exemptions is more exhaustive than the enumeration of exemptions attempted in the earlier Act that is section 8 of Freedom to Information Act, 2002. The Courts and Information Commissions enforcing the provisions of RTI Act have to adopt a purposive construction,
- E involving a reasonable and balanced approach which harmonises the two objects of the Act, while interpreting section 8 and the other provisions of the Act.

- F 35. At this juncture, it is necessary to clear some misconceptions about the RTI Act. The RTI Act provides access to all information *that is available and existing*. This is clear from a combined reading of section 3 and the definitions of 'information' and 'right to information' under clauses (f) and (j) of section 2 of the Act. If a public authority has any information
- G in the form of data or analysed data, or abstracts, or statistics, an applicant may access such information, subject to the exemptions in section 8 of the Act. But where the information sought is not a part of the record of a public authority, and where such information is not required to be maintained under any law or the rules or regulations of the public authority, the
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**CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1091  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]**

Act does not cast an obligation upon the public authority, to collect or collate such non-available information and then furnish it to an applicant. A public authority is also not required to furnish information which require drawing of inferences and/or making of assumptions. It is also not required to provide 'advice' or 'opinion' to an applicant, nor required to obtain and furnish any 'opinion' or 'advice' to an applicant. The reference to 'opinion' or 'advice' in the definition of 'information' in section 2(f) of the Act, only refers to such material available in the records of the public authority. Many public authorities have, as a public relation exercise, provide advice, guidance and opinion to the citizens. But that is purely voluntary and should not be confused with any obligation under the RTI Act.

36. Section 19(8) of RTI Act has entrusted the Central/ State Information Commissions, with the power to require any public authority to take any such steps as may be necessary to secure the compliance with the provisions of the Act. Apart from the generality of the said power, clause (a) of section 19(8) refers to six specific powers, to implement the provision of the Act. Sub-clause (i) empowers a Commission to require the public authority to provide access to information if so requested in a particular 'form' (that is either as a document, micro film, compact disc, pendrive, etc.). This is to secure compliance with section 7(9) of the Act. Sub-clause (ii) empowers a Commission to require the public authority to appoint a Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer. This is to secure compliance with section 5 of the Act. Sub-clause (iii) empowers the Commission to require a public authority to publish certain information or categories of information. This is to secure compliance with section 4(1) and (2) of RTI Act. Sub-clause (iv) empowers a Commission to require a public authority to make necessary changes to its practices relating to the maintenance, management and destruction of the records. This is to secure compliance with clause (a) of section 4(1) of the Act. Sub-clause (v) empowers a Commission to require the public authority to increase the

A training for its officials on the right to information. This is to  
 B secure compliance with sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Act. Sub-  
 clause (vi) empowers a Commission to require the public  
 authority to provide annual reports in regard to the compliance  
 with clause (b) of section 4(1). This is to ensure compliance  
 C with the provisions of clause (b) of section 4(1) of the Act. The  
 power under section 19(8) of the Act however does not extend  
 to requiring a public authority to take any steps which are not  
 required or contemplated to secure compliance with the  
 provisions of the Act or to issue directions beyond the  
 D provisions of the Act. The power under section 19(8) of the Act  
 is intended to be used by the Commissions to ensure  
 compliance with the Act, in particular ensure that every public  
 authority maintains its records duly catalogued and indexed in  
 the manner and in the form which facilitates the right to  
 E information and ensure that the records are computerized, as  
 required under clause (a) of section 4(1) of the Act; and to  
 ensure that the information enumerated in clauses (b) and (c)  
 of sections 4(1) of the Act are published and disseminated, and  
 are periodically updated as provided in sub-sections (3) and  
 (4) of section 4 of the Act. If the 'information' enumerated in  
 clause (b) of section 4(1) of the Act are effectively disseminated  
 (by publications in print and on websites and other effective  
 means), apart from providing transparency and accountability,  
 citizens will be able to access relevant information and avoid  
 unnecessary applications for information under the Act.

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 37. The right to information is a cherished right. Information  
 and right to information are intended to be formidable tools in  
 the hands of responsible citizens to fight corruption and to bring  
 in transparency and accountability. The provisions of RTI Act  
 G should be enforced strictly and all efforts should be made to  
 bring to light the necessary information under clause (b) of  
 section 4(1) of the Act which relates to securing transparency  
 and accountability in the working of public authorities and in  
 discouraging corruption. But in regard to other information,(that  
 H is information other than those enumerated in section 4(1)(b)

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION v. 1093  
ADITYA BANDOPADHYAY [R.V. RAVEENDRAN, J.]

and (c) of the Act), equal importance and emphasis are given to other public interests (like confidentiality of sensitive information, fidelity and fiduciary relationships, efficient operation of governments, etc.). Indiscriminate and impractical demands or directions under RTI Act for disclosure of all and sundry information (unrelated to transparency and accountability in the functioning of public authorities and eradication of corruption) would be counter-productive as it will adversely affect the efficiency of the administration and result in the executive getting bogged down with the non-productive work of collecting and furnishing information. The Act should not be allowed to be misused or abused, to become a tool to obstruct the national development and integration, or to destroy the peace, tranquility and harmony among its citizens. Nor should it be converted into a tool of oppression or intimidation of honest officials striving to do their duty. The nation does not want a scenario where 75% of the staff of public authorities spends 75% of their time in collecting and furnishing information to applicants instead of discharging their regular duties. The threat of penalties under the RTI Act and the pressure of the authorities under the RTI Act should not lead to employees of a public authorities prioritising 'information furnishing', at the cost of their normal and regular duties.

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**Conclusion**

38. In view of the foregoing, the order of the High Court directing the examining bodies to permit examinees to have inspection of their answer books is affirmed, subject to the clarifications regarding the scope of the RTI Act and the safeguards and conditions subject to which 'information' should be furnished. The appeals are disposed of accordingly.

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N.J.

Appeals disposed of.