

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR
OF TAMIL NADU AT THE INAUGURATION OF RTI WEEK CELEBRATIONS, 2018
ORGANISED BY THE TAMIL NADU INFORMATION COMMISSION AT DURBAR HALL, RAJ
BHAVAN, CHENNAI ON 05.10.2018 AT 10.00 A.M**

Thiru.Banwarilal Purohit,Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu participated as Chief Guest at the inauguration of Right to Information Week Celebrations- 2018 organised by The Tamil Nadu Information Commission at Durbar Hall, Raj Bhavan ,Chennai today (5.10.2018).

Hon'ble Governor Said "It gives me immense pleasure to be here at the inauguration of the RTI Week Celebrations. The celebrations are meant to publicly pronounce to the world, the power of the people to obtain information from the Government a right which was denied to them under the system of administration put in place by the British Centuries ago.

To trace the history of the RTI Act, a mass based organization called the Mazdoor Kisan Shakthi Sangathan took an initiative to lead the people in one of the states of India to assert their Right to Information by asking for copies of bills and vouchers and names of persons who had been shown in the muster rolls for the construction of schools, dispensaries and community centres as having been paid wages. The schemes were reported to have been completed but in reality there was gross misappropriation of funds with the construction of school buildings, dispensaries and community centres remaining incomplete.

The Mazdoor Kisan Shakthi Sangathan was followed by similar requests in other States also. Another NGO in Andhra Pradesh conducted a mass awareness campaign across the State and through a 'post card campaign' made representations to the Prime Minister of India demanding the enactment of a law guaranteeing the right to information. A National Campaign for People's Right to Information was formed in August, 1996 and it played a significant role in exerting its weight behind the introduction of a legislation for the Right to Information.

The Government of India introduced the Freedom of Information Bill in the Lok Sabha on 25th July, 2000, which was enacted as the Freedom of Information Act, 2002.

Even before the Freedom of Information Act was passed by the Parliament, several States in India had enacted their own legislations on Freedom of Right to Information. Tamil Nadu was the first State to introduce Right to Information Act in April, 1996.

The National Advisory Council set up by the Government of India in 2004 suggested important changes to be incorporated in the Freedom of Information Act. Hence, the Freedom of Information Act was repealed and a new legislation, the Right to Information Act, 2005 was enacted which came into effect on 12th October, 2005.

The enactment of the Act, in India is a historic event in the annals of democracy in India. Information is power and now every citizen has a right to access information “held by or under the control of” the public authorities. It is the duty of all public authorities to provide information sought by citizens. The RTI Act, seeks to establish that “transparency is the norm and secrecy is an exception” in the working of every public authority. It is no doubt that this is one of the most empowering and progressive legislations in the independent India.

1. The Right to Information Act empowers every citizen to
2. Ask any questions from the Government or seek any information
3. Take copies of any government documents
4. Inspect any government documents.
5. Inspect any Government works
6. Take samples of materials of any Government work

The Act extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir. All bodies, which are constituted under the Constitution or under any law or under any Government notification or all bodies, including NGOs, which are owned, controlled or substantially financed by the Government are covered by this.

All private bodies, which are owned, controlled or substantially financed by the Government are directly covered. Others are indirectly covered. That is, if a government department can access information from any private body under any other Act, the same can be accessed by the citizen under the RTI Act through that government department.

A Public Information Officer can refuse information on 11 subjects that are listed in section 8 of the RTI Act. These include information received in confidence from foreign governments, information prejudicial to security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the country, breach of privilege of legislatures, etc.

There is a list of agencies given in second schedule of the Act to which RTI Act does not apply. However, they also have to give information if it relates to matters pertaining to allegations of corruption or human rights violations.

The true spirit of democracy lies in transparency and accountability in governance by implementing the Act in letter and spirit. The implementation of the RTI regime for the past 13 years has seen a sea change in dissemination of information to the general public which was earlier held in secrecy and not disclosed by the public authorities.

During the course of implementation of the RTI Act for more than a decade, as rightly pointed out by our Hon'ble Prime Minister Thiru. Narendra Modiji, it has become a tool for 'Good Governance'.

It is also seen that the information seekers use the RTI Act not just to access information, but also to address their grievances. Of late the RTI Act is getting transformed as an enabling tool for redressal of grievances.

For the greater absorption of benefits towards of the RTI Act, the Central and the State Governments are obliged to create awareness about the provisions of the Act. The Government of India provides funds every year to conduct programmes for the purpose of creating such awareness among the public authorities and the common man. I congratulate the Tamil Nadu Information Commission for having organised the RTI Week Celebrations in such a grand manner. It shows their interest to serve the public and a desire to disseminate information about the RTI Act to the maximum number of people.

I congratulate the commission for its efforts and wish them well.

I have been harping on the themes of honesty transparency and efficiency in all my speeches. I am therefore more than happy to be a serving the cause of the right to information for it ensures transparency in governance. I am sure that with the passage of time measures and methods of making use of the provisions of the Act will get refined even more resulting in greater benefits to the common public. May all of us contribute our energies to that effect”.

On this occasion Dr.M.Sheela Priya, IAS (Retd), State Chief Information Commissioner, Thiru.R.Rajagopal, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary to Governor, Dr.Swarna, IAS, Secretary, Personnel and Administrative Reform Department, Thiru.KV.Ramamoorthy, Registrar,Tamil Nadu Information Commission and State Information Commissioners participated.