APPENDIX 3

Interview with Journalists on Right to Information Act

Introduction

Interviews were conducted with journalists who have extensively made use of RTI and who have continuously filed reports on RTI. The excerpts are given below.

A3.1 Gangadhar S Patil – Daily News and Analysis (DNA)

1. Have you used RTI for getting information? If yes, did you receive the information you had sought?

   Yes. In most of the cases I did get the information sought but there are many other cases where journalists were denied information. It all depends on the department, government (state/center), RTI questions framed and many other things. If the application fulfills the entire mandatory requirement, there are high chances of it being accepted and fetching information.

2. How do media obtain information from government departments? Would the RTI Act help the media in getting the type of information they want?

   Yes. It does help journalists to get information under RTI. There are many journalists in the country who have already excelled in it. Until now one of the most important ways of getting information was through sources in
the government but since the inception of RTI Act, reporters are using this Act as a tool to get information.

3. **What will be the nature of information likely to be sought by the media?**

   It can be anything. But mostly information or documents which are not available in public domain could not be shared by the officials. The information sought is mostly confidential in nature.

4. **Do you think that the government authorities have made suitable arrangements for providing such information to you?**

   It again varies from government to government. In Union Government departments, RTI system is in place, and it makes filing and getting information under RTI easy. However, in many state government departments, the RTI system is still evolving so sometimes it becomes difficult to get information.

5. **Are you satisfied with the quality of information disclosed to you?**

   Yes, though there are exceptions. But overall I am satisfied.

6. **What is the response of the audience to media reporting on RTI?**

   Articles having element of RTI have drawn a large number of readers. These articles are well accepted.

7. **What are your suggestions for effective implementation of the RTI Act?**

   The most important step is to train public information officers in RTI Act, so that they do not reject applications on flimsy grounds. Besides, every department should try to put everything online or have a soft copy of
information so that it becomes easier for officials to furnish information within the prescribed time.

8. **How can we generate awareness among the people about freedom of information? Please give your suggestions**

   The best way would be to hold public seminars and workshops to make people understand that it is a tool which should be used effectively.

**A3.2**  
**T. Ramakrishnan – Senior reporter, ‘The Hindu’ Newspaper**

1. **Have you used RTI for getting information? If yes, did you receive the information you had sought?**

   No, though some of my colleagues did use the RTI route. But I strongly feel that RTI is meant for the common man, not for the press which should use its traditional ways of securing information.

2. **How do media obtain information from government departments? Would the RTI Act help the media in getting the type of information they want?**

   Through its network of sources, media obtain information. RTI may be helpful to some extent, but I am not sure whether it can get you [from the point view of the media] all that is wanted.

3. **What will be the nature of information likely to be sought by the media?**

   Depending upon case to case, the nature varies. Let me give you one example, which is from my experience. In the wake of the Annamalai University controversy, I wrote an article essentially on the basis of the audit report presented to the State government. I would not have been able to get a copy of the audit report had I taken the RTI route. Even if I had, I would have
seen the audit report certainly a month later which may not have served my purpose of doing an article immediately, given the news value of the controversy.

4. **Do you think that the government authorities have made suitable arrangements for providing such information to you?**

   Not all the time. Sometimes yes. But, it is for you, as a discerning journalist, to examine whether there is any agenda behind the government officials giving you information.

5. **Are you satisfied with the quality of information disclosed to you?**

   Sometimes yes.

6. **What is the response of the audience to media reporting on RTI?**

   Initially, there was some curiosity on the part of people. But, now, I do not think that people are looking for any explosive information that can be brought out through the RTI route.

7. **What are your suggestions for effective implementation of the RTI Act?**

   The State Information Commission should make it more visible and create confidence among people that it is not an extended arm of the government.

   There has to be a vibrant movement on the part of people. Unfortunately, the middle class does not want to get itself involved too much in this matter.
8. **How can we generate awareness among the people about freedom of information? Please give your suggestions**

This has to be done by a number of players – the government, activists, academicians and the media.

**A3.3 K.M. Chandrasekaran - Input Editor in Kalaignar TV.**

1. **Have you used RTI for getting information? If yes, did you receive the information you had sought?**

Yes. I have tried. But they deliberately delayed to reply. They wanted to avoid answering my queries. At last I dropped the idea and used some other way to get the required information.

2. **How do media obtain information from government departments? Would the RTI Act help the media in getting the type of information they want?**

We have personal contacts with officials and other staff. We know how to get the information and where to approach. We can get all the information, unofficially, but authenticated information. It is much easier and we get it in a few days or in a few hours also.

RTI will not help media for urgent important stories. When we apply under RTI, we have to wait for at least one month. Usually they do not answer. So it takes a few months. After that we may need to go for further clarification petitions. We cannot wait for so many months. But it is useful for calendar type stories; for example the government has allotted so many crores, and it has not been utilized etc. Even for that we can get details with personal contacts, more easily. For an active journalist who wants to make hot stories, RTI is of no use.
3. **What will be the nature of information likely to be sought by the media?**

   Amount allotted for specific projects, actual spending, details of some decisions at higher level, statistical stories etc.

   They are some journalists who ask for case details from the police, property details of IAS, IPS officers, ministers etc.

4. **Do you think that the government authorities have made suitable arrangements for providing such information to you?**

   No, they have not made any such arrangement. They simply forward the petition. They never bother to reply in the stipulated 30 days period. When we go for clarification, they purposely delay it.

5. **Are you satisfied with the quality of information disclosed to you?**

   No.

6. **What is the response of the audience to media reporting on RTI?**

   We go by merit of the information. If it really matters to the society, we publish it. Sometimes, individuals would like to settle their scores with some official. We know the background of the petition and never entertain such persons. But, we do encourage RTI information.

7. **What are your suggestions for effective implementation of the RTI Act?**

   They must ensure that the reply reaches the petitioner within the stipulated 30 days period. They should not try to find reasons to delay it. Sometimes, they ask for more payment, for xerox papers etc. When the information officer delays purposely he should be punished by higher officials, so that it never happens in future. Responsibility should be fixed and put into practice.
8. How can we generate awareness among the people about freedom of information? Please give your suggestions

TV is the easy way to propagate information. Small kits may be telecast before news bulletins. Simple advertisement is not enough. It should come with examples of previous suggest disclosures and that anybody can do this.