

COMMENT

RTI Martyrs

SURFEIT OF RIGHTS. THAT IS how one may look at Indian Constitution. There are so many democratic and civil rights for Indian citizens and yet people are denied those rights when they really demand them. Everybody admits that the Right to Information (RTI) Act is an important tool of good governance and yet RTI activists like human rights activists find it increasingly difficult to carry on RTI activism because vested interests stand in their way. Reports of more and more RTI activists getting murdered during their endeavour to seek information from government authorities are pouring in from different parts of the country.

A few weeks back IBN7 was at pains to report : “Another Right to Information (RTI) activist has been murdered in Maharashtra. Dattatreya Patil an activist from Ichalkaranji in the Kolhapur district, was found dead on May 22”.

As per the report of Sri Ashutosh Shukla of DNA dated 26/05/2010, —“Patil, a close associate of social activist Anna Hazare, had recently unearthed a corruption racket, which had resulted in removal of the area’s deputy superintendent of police, a senior police inspector and action was initiated against officials of the Ichalkaranji Corporation.”

Sometimes back on 13 January 2010, 38-year old Satish Shetty, who exposed several land scams and irregularities in Kerosene distribution was murdered in Poona when he was returning home from a morning walk. And they are not alone. There are so many examples of RTI activists having lost their lives on the altar of their selfless endeavour. Lalit Kumar Mehta, member of Vikas Sahyog Kendra (Palamau District), was brutally killed on 14 May 2008, Shashidhar Mishra whom unidentified motorcycle-borne criminals shot dead on 16 February 2010 at his Phulwaria village residence in Begusarai, Venkatesh of Eeranapalya murdered on April 07, 2009 as he had launched a movement to save the BBMP land in Bangalore and Ranga Rao from Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh murdered near his house. These are the people who have now become the RTI martyrs. They are dead and gone, seeking information from the closed doors of governance and in the process even losing their lives. Each one of them was young and dynamic. And had big dreams in their eyes. Not for themselves but for the society around them. They wanted to rebuild and refurbish the society in a novel manner by attacking the corrupt elements around them who had all kinds of support from all kinds of influential quarters. But before they could make the necessary dent, they were attacked and silenced for ever. □□□ *[contributed]*