

GOA STATE INFORMATION COMMISSION

Kamat Towers, Seventh Floor, Patto, Panaji, Goa

Complaint no. 43/SIC/2014

Shri Harishchandra Vithu Govekar,
H.No.471,Dabhol wada Chapora,
Bardez Goa.

-----Complainant

V/S

1. The chief Conservator of Forest,
O/o, the Principal Conservator of Forest,
Gomantak Maratha Samaj Building,
Panaji Goa . -----Opponent No. 1
2. The Conservator of Forest,
O/o, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest,
Gomantak Marathas Samaj Building,
Panaji Goa . -----Opponent No. 2
2. The Dy. Conservator of Forest,
North Goa Division, Ponda-GoaOpponent No. 3

CORAM :

Smt. Pratima K. Vernekar, State Information Commissioner,

Complaint filed on:21/11/2014

Decided on: 19/07/2016

ORDER

1. This order deals with the issue of maintainability of the present Complaint in the backdrop of the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India dated 12/12/2011 in Civil Appeal Nos. 10787-10788 of 2011 (***Chief Information Commissioner and another v/s State of Manipur and another***).
2. The relevant facts that arise herein for the purpose of deciding the maintainability is that the complainant herein filed application, dated 10/10/2014, u/s 6 of the Right to Information Act 2005 (RTI Act)

..2/-

seeking certain information. As the information sought was not furnished, the complainant contends that the information is rejected as contemplated u/s 7 of the Act.

3. Being aggrieved by such rejection, the Complainant herein filed complaint before this Commission as contemplated u/s 18 of the RTI Act seeking several prayers more particularly seeking information as sought as/also for imposition of penalties on PIO.

After constituting of this Commission a notice were served both the parties. During the initial hearing Complainant remain present in person Respondent No. 1 Shri A. G. Sawant was present before this commission during the subsequent hearing both failed to remain present .

Since both the parties despite of several opportunity given to them, failed to remain present as such the commission had no other option then to decide the matter based on records available in the file.

A reply dated 29/4/2016 was submitted with the inward clerk by Respondent No. 3 on 3/5/2016.

On perusing on the reply of Respondent No. 3 one could gather that the information was supplied to the complainant on 2/1/2015.

The ground raised in their defense are that the complainant had not availed and exhausted the opportunity of appeal before the First Appellate Authority and that the information already supplied to the complainant on 2/1/2015 by Registered A.D. vide No. RM 498805862 IN and the delay caused in supplying the information inadvertent owing to the circumstances and not deliberated. The circumstances in brief have been in corporate in their reply. The copy of A.D. card is not placed on record by the opponent. On

account of continuous absent of complainant, the copy of the reply could not be furnished to him. Since during the initial hearing on 18/3/2016 in the presence of complainant the PIO Shri A.G. Sawant had submitted that the information was earlier submitted to the complainant the said statement was not denied /disputed by the complainant and interelia complainant submitted that he wants to consult his lawyer and do the needful. Hence this commission presume that information is already furnish to the complainant. It appears that Complainant satisfied with the information provided to him and is not interested in proceeding with the present Complaint.

However, by this order the basic issue of maintainability of present Complaint has to be decided.

4. On close scrutiny of the facts, it is seen that the complainant had filed his application u/s 6 of the RTI Act, seeking certain information. As per the complaint the said application resulted in refusal of information. Being aggrieved by such refusal the complainant has filed the present complaint filed u/s 18 of the RTI Act to this Commission.

In the present complaint, besides other reliefs, the Complainant has also sought the direction to furnish the information as sought for by application u/s 6 of the RTI Act.

5. Section 18 of the Act opens with the words "*Subject to the provisions of this Act-----*", which implies that this section operates in consonance with and not in conflict with or independent of the rest of the provisions of the Act. Thus section 18, as per the Act cannot be said to be an independent section but is subject to the provisions of this Act. In other words section 18 does not enjoy an overriding status over other provisions more particularly section 19. Hence both these sections are to read together.

6. This Commission has dealt with a similar issue in Complaint No.171/SIC/2010. Complainant therein had filed a complaint against the order of PIO rejecting his request by invoking exemption u/s 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act. The SIC then, by his order, dated 24.06.2010 had held that in the said situation the proper course of action for the complainant therein would have been to file first appeal and adjudicate the propriety of refusal before first appellate authority.

7. Contrary to this ratio, this commission, in a complaint filed by one Mr. Rui Ferreira against Reserve Bank of India, directed the PIO to furnish the information sought though the complainant therein had not filed the first appeal against the order of PIO.

Said order of this commission landed before the Hon'ble High Court being *CRA No.113 of 2004, Reserve Bank Of India V/s Rui Ferreira* and the Hon'ble High court while dealing with such issue at para (8) thereof has observed:

"8. Further, the question that arises is whether the Commission would have entertained a complaint from respondent no.1 directly under Section 18 when respondent no.1 had failed to file an appeal against the order of the PIO of the Co-operative Bank rejecting the request and against the order of the Reserve Bank of India, refusing the request on the ground that the information is protected by Section 8(1)(a) of the Act. Section 18 confers power on the State Information Commission to receive and inquire into a complaint from any person in the nature of supervisory in the circumstances referred to in that Section. Thus the State Information Commission may entertain a complaint from any person who has been unable to submit a request to the PIO because no such officer has been appointed or if the PIO has refused to accept his application for information or an appeal under the Act; or whether the person has been refused access to any information requested under the Act or whose request has not been responded within the time specified

under the Act etc. The case of respondent no.1 does not fit into either of the circumstances referred to under Section 18(1)(a) to (f). The PIO of the Co-operative Bank and the RBI have rejected the request for information after considering the request in accordance with law. The Act provides for appeals against such orders vide Section 19. Section 18 commences with the words:

1) Subject to”

**[Reserve Bank of India v/s Rui Ferreira and others
(2012(2)Bom.C.R.784)]**

- 8.** In another case, while dealing with similar facts, the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Chief Information Commissioner and another v/s State of Manipur and another (civil Appeal No. 10787-10788 of 2011)** has observed at para (35) thereof as under:

Therefore, the procedure contemplated under Section 18 and Section 19 of the said Act is substantially different. The nature of the power under Section 18 is supervisory in character whereas the procedure under Section 19 is an appellate procedure and a person who is aggrieved by refusal in receiving the information which he has sought for can only seek redress in the manner provided in the statute, namely, by following the procedure under Section 19. This Court is, therefore, of the opinion that Section 7 read with Section 19 provides a complete statutory mechanism to a person who is aggrieved by refusal to receive information. Such person has to get the information by following the aforesaid statutory provisions. The contention of the appellant that information can be accessed through Section 18 is contrary to the express provision of Section 19 of the Act. It is well known when a procedure is laid down statutorily and there is no challenge to the said statutory procedure the Court should not, in the name of interpretation, lay down a procedure which is contrary to the express statutory provision. It is a time honoured

principle as early as from the decision in Taylor v. Taylor [(1876)1 Ch. D. 426] that where statute provides for something to be done in a particular manner it can be done in that manner alone and all other modes of performance are necessarily forbidden."

The rationale behind this observation of apex court is contained in para (37) of the said Judgment in following words.

"37. We are of the view that section 18 and 19 of the Act serve two different purposes and lay down two different procedures and they provide two different remedies, one cannot be substitute for the other."

Again at para (42) of the said judgment their lordship have observed.

"42. Apart from that the procedure under Section 19 of the Act, when compared to Section 18, has several safeguards for protecting the interest of the person who has been refused the information he has sought. Section 19(5), in this connection, may be referred to. Section 19(5) puts the onus to justify the denial of request on the information officer. Therefore, it is for the officer to justify the denial. There is no such safeguard in Section 18. Apart from that the procedure under Section 19 is a time bound one

but no limit is prescribed under Section 18. So out of the two procedures, between Section 18 and Section 19, the one under Section 19 is more beneficial to a person who has been denied access to information."

9. Contrary to the above ratio this Commission in the Complaint No 518/SCIC/2010 decided on 07/10/2010 filed before it u/s 18 of the RTI Act, had directed the PIO to disclose the information. Said order also was challenged before the Hon'ble High Court of Bombay at Goa in ***Writ Petition No. 739 of 2010. (Goa Cricket Association v/s state of***

Goa and Others). In said petition several contentions were raised one out of the same was that if the complainant was aggrieved by rejection of his application by PIO remedy available to the Complainant was to file an appeal before first appellate authority. The Hon'ble High Court after considering the Judgments in the case of Reserve Bank of India v/s Rui Ferreira and others (supra) as also in CIC v/s State of Manipur (Supra) reversed the said order of CIC with observation :

" 7. The fact situation in the present case is almost identical and though we may not castigate the decisions in the same harsh words, the same principle would apply. Section 18 of the Act confers jurisdiction on the State Information Commission to entertain the complaint in cases which do not include the case of refusal by the public authority to disclose the information. The remedy available to the complainant, in such a case, therefore, is by way of First Appeal before the First Appellate Authority".

- 10.** On careful analysis of the above decisions of the Hon'ble High Court and the Hon'ble Supreme court, nothing remains to be discussed further. The issue regarding maintainability of the complaints u/s 18, seeking information, without filing appeals u/s 19(1) of The RTI Act, as involved herein is laid at rest and the position of law is laid down as above. The facts involved in the case in hand and those before the Hon'ble High Court and the Hon'ble Supreme court are identical.
- 11.** Nowhere is it suggested that an information seeker cannot approach the Commission under Section 18 but only after he exhausts the alternate and efficacious remedy of First Appeal, before approaching the higher forum. Judicial institutions operate in hierarchical jurisprudence. An information seeker is free to approach the Commission by way of a Complaint under Section 18, if his grievance is not redressed, even after the decision of the First Appellate Authority. As held above, Section 18 is 'subject' to provisions of Section 19 and Section 19 provides for an efficacious remedy to the

fundamental requirement of information under the Act. Such a remedy of filing first appeal would also be in conformity with the provisions of section 19(5) of the Act and grant a fair opportunity to the PIO, to prove that the denial of request for information was justified. Seeking penalty and information by way of complaint, without first appeal, would be violative of such rights.

- 12.** On scrutiny of the file it is seen that no affidavit-in-evidence was filed by the Appellant neither he has subjected himself for cross examination. The replies which are filed by him during inquiry proceedings are also not supported by his affidavit. Proving certain facts raised as alleged by Complainant always rests on him to prove so and under no circumstances burden shifts on the opposite party. In other words the onus is on the Complainant to prove that information furnished to him was incomplete and incorrect. By continues absence of the Complainant and failure to produce his evidence the Complainant has failed to discharge his burden. It also appears that Complainant is not interested in the present proceedings and as such he did not make himself available before this Commission to substantiate his case.
- 13.** In absence of any such proof the allegations made as there in, cannot be considered as gospel truth as nothing was brought on record by the Complainant in support on his submissions that "***the wrong and incorrect information was intentionally and deliberately provided to him.***"
- 14.** The interest of justice also demands that the Opponent ought to be afforded opportunity to cross examine the Complainant in order to rebutt the evidence. In present case, Complainant did not avail himself for cross examination.
- 15.** In the above circumstances the Commission holds that the Complainant has miserably failed to discharge the onus. Hence adverse inference emerges against the case of the Complainant that the information furnished to the Complainant was correct and in absence of any evidence we are constrained to close the present proceedings and consequently we dispose this Complaint

- 16.** However I find that the interest of the complainant is required to be protected therefore proceed to dispose the present complaint with the following:

ORDER:

Complaint stands closed. Complainant is granted liberty to file first appeal under section 19(1) of The RTI Act in respect of the information provided to him by PIO vide his letter dated 02/01/2015 in respect of application dated 10/10/2014. If such an appeal is filed, the first appellate authority shall decide the same on merits in accordance with law, without insisting on the period of Limitation. The rights of the complainant herein to file complaint in case the complainant is aggrieved by the order of the first appellate authority in such appeals, are kept open.

Respondent No. 1 PIO is hereby directed to comply with the section 7 of RTI Act in true spirit and such lapse on their part will be viewed seriously henceforth.

Parties to be notified. Copy of this order shall be furnished to the parties free of cost. Proceedings stands closed.

Pronounced in the open court.

-Sd/-
Smt. Pratima K. Vernekar,
State Information Commissioner,
Panaji Goa.