

Is Censorship on Media and Networking Sites Possible?

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Abstract - India is known as one of the most successful democracies in the world indeed, and no doubt the credit goes to its public opinion safeguarded and represented by the media. The earliest record on the freedom of press/media can be traced to the Rig Veda where it finds its expression as “*Aano Bhadra kartavo vishwatah*” meaning- Let noble thoughts come from all directions. In the history of public reasoning in India, a considerable credit goes to the Buddhists, who had a great commitment to discussions as a means of social progress. This commitment produced among other results, some of the earliest open general meetings in the world. The so-called Buddhist councils which aimed at settling disputes between different points of view.

Index Terms - Democracy, Media, Discussion, Disputes, Buddhist Councils etc.

INTRODUCTION

India is known as one of the most successful democracies in the world indeed, and no doubt the credit goes to its public opinion safeguarded and represented by the media. As we all know the four elements namely, executive, legislative, judiciary and the public opinion are its essence and among these ‘the public opinion’ is the most important because it’s the watch dog of democracy without which it cannot survive.

Whether it’s the print media, electronic media or the latest being the networking or social media, all these are the various agencies of Public Opinion through which it finds its expression, the considered opinion of an effective majority of citizens based on the ideal of general well-being and progress of the community as a whole.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To discuss on perception and role of media that safeguards our democracy which is deeply rooted in our ancient Vedic tradition.
- To elaborate on the contribution of Indian school of thought on public opinion and democracy.

METHODOLOGY

This article is primarily based on secondary sources/data. The secondary data comprises of the actual textbooks and various published sources like journals, magazines, Websites, Newspaper clippings, etc.

ORIGIN

Public opinion in India is as old as the hills. It has been practiced here in every sphere of life, to discuss on the issues from family to those of the states. The earliest record on the freedom of press/media can be traced to the Rig Veda where it finds its expression as “*Aano Bhadra kartavo vishwatah*” meaning- Let noble thoughts come from all directions. (Rig Veda, Verse 1.89) and its no wonder the very term NEWS is based on the abbreviated terms of all four directions – North, East, West and South.

ANCIENT TRADITION

In the history of public reasoning in India, a considerable credit goes to the Buddhists, who had a great commitment to discussions as a means of social progress. This commitment produced among other results, some of the earliest open general meetings in the world. The so-called Buddhist councils which aimed at settling disputes between different points of view drew delegates from different places and from different school of thought. The first of the four principal councils were held in Rajagriha, shortly after Gautam Buddha’s death. The second one about a century later in Vaisali, the last in Kashmir in the 2nd century B.C. But the 3rd, the largest and the best known of these councils occurred under the patronage of Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC in the then capital of India, Pataliputra (present Patna).

It was Ashoka, who ruled over the bulk of Indian subcontinent (stretching into what is now Afghanistan) was strongly committed to show the

world that 'public discussion' could take place freely without violence and animosity. Ashoka's championing of the public discussion has had echoes in the later history of India, but none are found to be that strong as that of Akbar, the Mughal emperor.

In the post-independence era, it was heard with great audacity on 14th August, 197, on the Eve of Indian Independence when Nehru's voice roared loud and clear beginning his lecture at the historic Red Fort. Nehru on the day one, as the prime minister of the country had taken three pledges, one of which was practice of democracy clearly hinting at the public opinion, the voice of the people of the country.

Centuries have passed then; systematic general elections have continued to happen with regularity and reasonable fairness. Political parties came into power after winning and left and went out of power after losing; the media have remained largely free, press has continued to report, scrutinize and protest. Civil rights have been taken seriously, and the courts have been fairly active in pursuing violations; the military has stayed well inside the barracks. This is largely the story of the success. The practice of democracy in India has been so thoroughly successful that once again the credit goes to the collaborated effort of public opinion and the media.

If public opinion is the base of democracy, then arguments are the founding pillars of public opinion. In fact, in any democracy the importance of argument cannot be ignored. In his autobiography- *Long Walk to Freedom*, - Nelson Mandela confesses that as a young boy he had learned about the importance of democracy from the practice of the local African meetings that were held in the regent's house in Mqhekezweni. His 'long walk to freedom' began at his home from his realization to bring out the role of Africa's historical traditions. Similarly, one can see the importance of the contributions made by India's argumentative tradition to its intellectual and social history and why they remain relevant even today.

Like Akbar who followed *Rahi-aql*, Tagore too emphasized the role of deliberation and reasoning as the foundation of a good society:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

*Where knowledge is free,
Where the world has not being broken up into
fragments*

*By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Into to that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my
country awake.*

(Rabindranath Tagore, the Geetanjali)

MEDIA IN THE CURRENT SCENARIO

'Media Trials' and 'Fake News' have become the norms of the present-day multi-media communication- specially in Mass Communication. Public opinion transmitted through media (print or electronic) harnessed in past and does so even today that ensure free and fair freedom of speech as '*the watch dog of Democracy*'. But the recent trends of Media Trials where it (media) tries to overpower all the other mechanism of Government makes one wonder and question on its role and function. Corruption, question of credibility and criminalization with reference to electronic media dates back to the recent past where the cases like Pranoy Roy's *The World this Week*, Sudhir Chaudhary and Ahluwalia of Zee TV versus Jindal Coal Company, Neera Radia Versus Jahangir Pocha and the recent divides in media between the Nationalist versus the Lutiyan gangs that came to fore front in Arnab Goswami's case was not only shocking but was equally shattering as well.

The media trials being carried out in by almost all TV Channels on their prime-time slots are of recent origin. We witnessed its aggressive approach in Aarushi Murder case that was continued almost for a year and so was with Shushant Singh Rajput's Suicide Case that too was covered for more than a year. It kept the citizens hooked to the TV with every day's new revelations. These trials were 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' at least they reminded us of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

WHY CENSORSHIP IS NOT POSSIBLE ON THE NETWORKING SITES?

Because it is also driven by the fact that it wages a war between the good old world and modern world of internet. In past, the Aurangabad Bench of the Bombay High Court asked the Maharashtra government to issue a notice to Google in response to a public interest litigation filed against the company's popular social networking website Orkut.com. A page titled 'We hate India' featured abuses against the

country. There are many such sites active and working around, a battle that First World countries do not bother with anymore, India has persisted. But in the Orkut case, it is ambiguous whether abuses against the nation constitute a violation of the laws. "It is neither sedition nor is it an offence. If some coward says something foul, how does it spread sedition. This is just abuse which is best ignored," says Mahesh Jethmalani. About blocking such sites, in the past, the Indian government has blocked sites that carried offensive content but all went in vain. Any controversial sites that is offensive and threatening to the internal peace and security of any country cannot be blocked by any government or a controlling authority because they change their IP address so many times a day that they slip through the filters of national gateways. Even if certain sites are viewed as offence even then it will be difficult for the Internet Service Providers as it is beyond their technological capabilities plus the hardware that can block specified pages within a website costs several lakhs and every time a site is included in the banned list it affects the efficiency of the internet. And above all, if, at all, such a difficult blockage is put in place, sites like anonymouse.org can give a very easy access.

THEREFORE, CAN ONE STOP AND PUT AN END TO MEDIA TRIALS?

Not even the greatest democrat would say an unqualified 'Yes' in answer. Liberty of thought may be complete in itself, but the liberty of expressing that thought is bound to be subject to some restrictions. There would obviously be chaos in the world, if everybody were allowed to say, share or publish what one thinks and feels right. One cannot dry one's dirty laundry in the public, it is best if kept in private. Sacred subjects like God, religious opinion, community sentiment or personal reputation and safety and security of the country are beyond the sphere of criticism. We all have noticed in the recent past of the violations of norms related to coverage of anti-terror operations. ND TV 's coverage of the same is still green so much so that the I and B Ministry had to force an order banning ND TV India, Hindi Channel to go off air owing to its violation of coverage of the Pathankot terror attack.

Freedom of speech and discussion cannot obviously be allowed to degenerate into freedom of abuse. Every

country punishes blasphemy and personal libel; therefore, these networking sites, their media trials too should be punished for rumours (as we saw Assam Exodus following the ethnic violence in the Kokrajhar district of Assam) mischievous or malefic criticism of the government, and the abusive and obscene writing sites. So that liberty can be protected from being degenerated into license.

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