

## Freedom of Speech

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Freedom of Speech is recognized as a Right to Freedom in our Constitution. It is most precious gift of democracy which emerged during the European Enlightenment. After Independence the writers of our Drafting Committee included this as a Fundamental Right in our Constitution. Freedom of speech is a powerful instrument for all civilized and democratic nations of the world. Now-a-days we are living in a world dominated by mass media. Sometimes media becomes partial and coloured. A free press can help to remove the evils of the society. The power of the electronic media is immense in our society. NGOs are also playing crucial role in spreading awareness of democratic rights. But his freedom of speech is not absolute, it is limited by our social duties and obligations.

One wonders as to what would have been the course of history of many countries in the world, had freedom of speech been completely denied to their inhabitants. One celebrated instance of freedom of speech and its historical outcome is forcefully described by Shakespeare in his drama "Julius Caesar". After the murder of Julius Caesar, some leading lights of Rome assembled at a place to offer justification for assassination of Caesar. Caesar, according to them, had become a threat to the freedom of Romans. Antony, a friend of Caesar begs for one

opportunity to go to the stage and pay his tribute to the dead Caesar. Once he gets the permission to speak, he makes the fullest use of his freedom of speech and explains to the audience how Caesar had undergone hardships to serve the people. Bit by bit, he builds up a highly sympathetic opinion among the crowd of listeners and they are converted from being haters of Caesar to lovers of Caesar. Not only that, most of the Romans thereafter started hating Brutus for his dastardly act of killing Caesar. Antony, through the clever exercise of his freedom of speech is able to turn the table on the conspirators and mobilize pro-Caesar forces to defeat Brutus and his co-conspirators.

Towards the first half of the twentieth century most colonized countries of the world were swept by freedom movements aimed at restoring freedom of speech and other basic freedoms which only self governing nations can ensure. India, too witnessed growing agitation of freedom fighters against the British Regime. While leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel traversed the length and breadth of the country criticizing the despotism and repression of the British Rulers, Netajee Subhash Chandra Bose organized Indians, mostly prisoners of war, outside India into Azad Hind Fauj ( Indian National Army) to fight the British

and free our country from the foreign yoke. He thundered, "Offer me your blood and I will ensure the freedom of India". His fiery speeches inspired thousands of men and women who fought valiantly and even freed some parts of India from the British Rulers before they were overwhelmed by the superior might of the British. After the conclusion of 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, most of the colonial powers felt that they could no longer deny half the population of the world democratic freedom, and they granted freedom to many Asian and African countries.

The spirit of the age at the turn of the twentieth century is characterized by free enquiry and freedom of expression. The last two decades have witnessed the collapse of totalitarian regimes in the communist countries of Eastern Europe and progressive democratization in China. Gorbachev brought in "Perestroika" (Restructuring) and Glasnost (Openness) and Russia bade good bye to seven decades of regimentation and iron-curtains. Thorough-going reforms were introduced to usher in a multi-party democracy, freedom of speech and transparency in the functioning of the government. Gorbachev's initiative was hailed by Chinese students too who gathered in large numbers at Beijing's Tiananmen Square in April-May 1989 to protest against the

corrupt one party rule and to demand democratic rights. On 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1989, the Chinese government used army with tanks and guns and killed students in hundreds and curbed the uprising. After this protest, however, state control over business, industrial and educational sphere was loosened and greater freedom of expression was allowed in China. A new kind of free market economy has been introduced in China promoting prosperity and civil liberties in the country.

With the crumbling of the last major bastion of totalitarianism in Russia and China, most of the world has accepted liberal democratic system. Experience of civil liberties has whetted the appetite for greater freedom and transparency. Wherever people are taking initiative to liberate themselves from repressive political order, they are getting moral support of the people of free countries. It is hoped that proliferation of human rights and freedom of speech will reinforce the liberty of man throughout the world.

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