

FREEDOM OF PRESS IN INDIA: A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT?

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Abstract

Freedom of speech and expression has been recognised as one of the basic and most important human rights following the right to life and personal liberty. Humans are social beings and it is their tendency to interact and mingle with its environment. Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India guarantees freedom of speech and expression to all persons in India. Press is recognised as a legal entity and has also been enjoying freedom of speech and expression from time immemorial. Today, the amount of freedom press enjoys in any democratic setup is considered as an important determinant of the instilled democratic values and constitutionalism being prevalent in that particular country. Press is not only important for spreading news and communication across the globe, but it also plays a crucial role in determining the moral values, prevalent practices and the overall development and attitude of a given society. Press also plays a major role in assessing the government and is powerful enough to even decide the fate of the government in the future elections. The aim of this research paper is to analyse the degree of freedom available to press in India, and how the press is expected to function keeping in view various express as well as implied restrictions applicable upon them.

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Keywords: Freedom, Speech and Expression, Press, Democratic Values, Restrictions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Just like individuals, the Constitution of India, under article 19 (1) (a)¹ guarantees freedom of speech and expression to the press as well. A free press, which not only reports the happenings around the globe but is also courageous enough to assess the government and its actions is a blessing to the democracy. Some scholars have compared a free press as 'oxygen' for the democracy, without which it cannot survive.² After more than 7 decades of independence, we have learnt that freedom of press is an essential tool in reducing the corrupt practices taking place and it reminds the chosen authorities about their duty towards the people of the nation. Freedom of press and the extent of its freedom have been a debatable issue in many countries, and various countries have their own laws to regulate the same. However, the common consensus and a general principle is that the amount of freedom that the press enjoys in a country determines the overall absorption of democratic values prevalent in that country.³ However, in the same manner as an individual cannot speak and express whatever he/she feels like, thereby keeping in mind the reasonable restrictions mentioned under article 19 (2) of the Constitution of India⁴, the Press is also expected to communicate contents which are neither against public policy, nor against morality or any other restrictions applicable upon them both expressly or impliedly. Besides the Constitutional guarantee, article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵ also mandates the States to ensure freedom of speech and expression to its subjects.

Having discussed about the need of a free press in a democracy, it needs to be mentioned that each country has their own expectations from its subjects, and accordingly they try to regulate their activities. Press is also regulated in a similar manner. Each country has express or at least implied restrictions and regulations in order to control what the press is

¹ Constitution of India, 1950. art. 19 (1)(a).

"All citizens shall have the right- (a) to freedom of speech and expression;"

² Hadiya Khan & Pankaj Joshi, 'Freedom of Press: Pillar Of Democracy', (2018), INT'L J. L. 07, 09

³ B. Mugundhan, C. Renuga, 'A STUDY ON FREEDOM OF PRESS IN INDIA: WITH REFERENCE TO ARTICLE 19', (2018), IJPAM, 3957, 3973

⁴ Constitution of India, 1950, art. 19 (2)

Nothing in sub clause (a) of clause (1) shall affect the operation of any existing law, or prevent the State from making any law, in so far as such law imposes reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred by the said sub clause in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

⁵ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, art. 19

showing to its people, and this degree of 'control' determines the overall freedom available to the press in that particular country.

1.2.LITERATURE REVIEW

1) ***Hadiya Khan & Pankaj Joshi, 'Freedom of Press: Pilar Of Democracy', (2018), INT'L J. L. 07, 09***

This article primarily focuses on the need of free press in a democracy. The authors begin with explaining the meaning of free press, its need and the history of freedom of press in India. The article then proceeds with various legislations that regulate the freedom of press in India like the Official Secrets Act, 1923, Press and Registration of Book Act, 1867, among others. This article provides instincts upon the constitutional perspectives upon the freedom of press in India, and also why is it a necessary tool in a democracy. The authors emphasize on the fact that for a healthy functioning of any democracy the freedom of press is essential and therefore, it should coexist with the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by the Constitution of India. The authors sadly express that though we all are aware of the need of a free press in a democracy, even then we have a long way to go. Another important issue, which has become a big challenge in contemporary times is that the press and the media houses have been found running more towards money and are more of business houses rather than press in the first place, and a direct impact of which is that it is only the popular voices and opinions that are heard of while the feeble ones die.

2) ***B. Mugundhan, C. Renuga, 'A STUDY ON FREEDOM OF PRESS IN INDIA: WITH REFERENCE TO ARTICLE 19', (2018), IJPAM, 3957, 3973***

The author discusses the need of free press in a democracy, and how the same has been a topic of debate from a long time in history. The author advocates that the democratic credentials of a state can be determined by looking at the amount of freedom the press enjoys in that particular state. The press is regarded as the fourth pillar of democracy, and hence it is necessary that the same is taken care of. The author beautifully demonstrates that the press is not absolutely free to do whatever it feels like, but the same should be subjected to the reasonable restrictions as mentioned in the Constitution

of India. It is the need of the hour that freedom of press should coexist with the freedom of speech and expression.

1.3. HYPOTHESIS

Democracy cannot sustain without a free press.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Why is Press considered as the fourth pillar of democracy?
2. What is the current standpoint of freedom of press in India?
3. In what ways can we achieve more freedom of press in a democracy?

1.5. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

Freedom of press is an essential tool for ensuring that the values of democracy is upheld in a country. In some countries the press enjoys wide freedom, while in other countries, the same is coupled with some restrictions. Press plays an essential role in assessing and questioning the government, hence it is also considered as the fourth pillar of democracy. The scope of this paper is limited to the study of freedom of press in India, and the legislations that govern the same.

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The Objectives of this paper are:

- To study the need of Freedom of Press in a democracy.
- To study some of the restrictions on the press in India.
- To study the contemporary scenario of freedom of press in India.

1.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used for this research paper is a doctrinal method of research, involving both analytical as well as deductible approach. Various primary and secondary sources of information have been used to complete the research. Majorly relying upon articles and journals of both domestic as well as international origin, this research paper is an outcome of thorough research and confining the idea to the scope and objective of study.

2. PRESS AS A PILLAR OF DEMOCRACY

Press is responsible for not only reporting of incidents and happenings around the globe, but it is also responsible for questioning and assessing the Governments and other State authorities and their actions. This duty of press becomes even bigger as far as democracy is concerned, because in a democracy it's a prerequisite that the people are well aware of the state actions and they have an equal Constitutional Right to question the concerned authorities of the government. The history tells us that the struggle of free press in India is archaic and dates back to the British Era, when freedom of press and the Independence Movement shared a close relationship. Press played an important role in creating awareness towards voices calling for an Independent India, while the British Government tried to enact and implement various repressive legislations from time to time with an aim to dissolve the power and effect of the print medium.⁶ During the British rule in India, a number of legislations were enacted in order to control the press and to slow down the Independence Movement⁷. Acts like the Indian Press Act, 1910 and the Indian Press (Emergency) Act, 1931 imposed censorship upon the press.⁸ Press at that time played an important role in channelizing the thoughts of the people of the country.

However, after the Constitution of India came into force on 26th January 1950, Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India laid down that "All citizens shall have the fundamental right to freedom of Speech and Expression."⁹ The thing that must be noted here is that unlike the US Constitution, we do not have a specific mention of the freedom of speech and expression of the Press, and the same is impliedly covered under article 19 (1)(a) of the Constitution of India. In the famous case of *Romesh Thapar vs. State of Madras*¹⁰, Patanjali Shastri, CJ while hearing the matter observed, that: "*Freedom of speech and press lay at the foundation of all democratic organisations, for without free political discussions no public education, so essential for the proper functioning of the process of popular government, is possible.*" This observation emphasizes upon the importance of a free Press regarded in a democracy, because without free and unbiased political discussions, there

⁶ Supra 2

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Radhika Iyengar, 'A pre-Independence history of press freedom in India', (Indian Express, 3 May 2017) <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/a-pre-independence-history-of-press-freedom-in-india/> accessed 24/04/2021

⁹ Supra 1

¹⁰ *Romesh Thapar v State of Madras*, AIR 1950 SC 124

cannot exist a welfare democracy. The Supreme Court made it clear in the case, *Sakal Papers (Private) Limited vs. Union of India*¹¹ that the freedom of speech and expression carries with itself the right to publish and circulate one's views and opinions. In another case concerning *Indian Express Newspaper vs. Union of India*¹² it was observed by the Apex court that press plays an important role in any democratic set-up, and it is the duty of the judiciary to uphold and ensure the freedom of press and invalidate any such laws or state actions which impose or tend to impose unnecessary restrictions upon its freedom. Later, the question arose before the Apex court that what all rights are included under the freedom of press.¹³ The apex court, after discussing the question at length, held that when one talks about the freedom of press in India, it is inclusive of the following three rights, namely (i) The freedom of access to all sources of information, (ii) The freedom of publication, and (iii) The freedom of circulation. Therefore, one can understand the judicial approach towards the freedom of press in India. The judiciary upheld the importance of free press in the country, being the largest democracy in the world.

Yet another interesting question regarding the constitutional validity of the Newsprint Control Order, 1962 was raised before the Supreme Court of India in the landmark case of *Bennett Coleman and Co. vs. Union of India*.¹⁴ The impugned order fixed the maximum number of pages of newspaper that could be published and circulated by the Press. However, the same was struck down by the Supreme Court of India, as it was found to be in violation with article 19 (1) (a) and neither was a valid restriction under the reasonable restrictions mentioned under article 19 (2) of the Constitution of India. It is obvious that for a newspaper, its 'reach' is the most important factor which determines its business and growth, and any government order which tries to control the reach by imposing a limit on the maximum number of circulations, is definitely going to restrict the right to freedom of speech and expression of Press. However, this raises another pertinent question about the authenticity and accountability of the Press and media houses. In this era of juggling and mixing actual news with fake news or publishing fake news altogether, there is a dire need of dedicated laws which can impose accountability upon the Press and media houses for their reporting and publications. For instance, we may consider the example of Singapore which is trying to come up with a legislation that can have a maximum sentence of up to

¹¹ *Sakal Papers (Private) vs. Union of India* AIR 1962 SC 305

¹² *Indian Express Newspaper v Union of India* 1985 1 SCC 641

¹³ *M.S.M. Sharma vs. Sri Krishna Sinha* AIR 1959 SC 395

¹⁴ *Bennett Coleman and Co. V Union of India* 1973 SCR (2) 757

10 years and a fine of up to \$738000 (SG\$ 1 million) for the offence of spreading false news.¹⁵

In the Express Newspaper Case,¹⁶ the Supreme Court observed that there shall be no doubt regarding the fact that liberty of press is an essential part of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by the Constitution of India, and that the press has the right to propagation, publication and circulation of their newspaper without any restraint. There have been reported instances where the legislature has also tried to suppress the freedom available to the press. In the case of Brij Bhushan vs. State of Delhi,¹⁷ the court iterated that the press had its rights to publish their own views and opinions, and Section 7 of the East Punjab Safety Act, 1949 was struck down.

Press is considered as one of the essential tools of a democracy because of the fact that it acts as a watchdog, keeping an eye on the actions of the three organs of the democracy- The Legislature, The Executive, The Judiciary. Apart from this, press has enough powers to make sure that the common man is not denied justice. For instance, we may consider the Arushi Talwar Murder Case, in which the print as well as digital media played a crucial role by raising and highlighting the matter in public several times, thereby imposing pressure upon the investigating agencies to take up the investigation actively.¹⁸ After all, this is the duty of the Press when we talk about it being the fourth pillar of democracy. In another similar incident, in the case of Priyadarshini Mattoo, Santosh Kumar, who was the son of an IPS officer murdered Priyadarshini, his colleague. Initially, the case investigation slowed down, however, after hue and cry from media across the country, the court took up the matter seriously, and finally the accused were convicted for murder.

3. LEGISLATIONS GOVERNING FREEDOM OF PRESS IN INDIA

Each and every sovereign, democratic country has a right to manage their internal affairs without any intervention from any other country. Generally, the countries make regulations keeping in mind their Constitution and its objectives. When we talk about legislations

¹⁵ Prabhjote Gill, 'Anti fake news laws around the world' (Business Insider)

<https://www.businessinsider.in/slideshows/indiainsider/anti-fake-news-laws-in-singapore-russia-germany-malaysia-france/slidelist/68704974.cms> Accessed 27th April 2021

¹⁶ Supra 13

¹⁷ Brij Bhushan v State of Delhi AIR 1950 SC 129

¹⁸ Mayukh Gupta, 'Freedom of Press in India' (Legal Services India) <http://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/217/Freedom-of-Press-In-India.html> accessed 24th April 2021

governing the amount of freedom press enjoys in India, we need to start with the reasonable restrictions to freedom of speech and expression as mentioned in the Constitution of India.¹⁹ As mentioned above, press in India derives its right to freedom of speech and expression from article 19 of the Constitution of India.²⁰ So, the reasonable restrictions mentioned under article 19 (2) of the Constitution of India is equally applicable upon the Press and media houses just like they apply to the individuals. The wide meaning of the term ‘public order’ was discussed in the case of *Madhu Limaye vs. Sub divisional Magistrate Monghyr*²¹, and the Supreme Court held that the term ‘public order’ can be understood to construe “no insurrections or riots or disturbance to public place”. Similarly, in the case of *Ramji Lal Modi vs. State of UP*²², the constitutional validity of Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code was questioned on the basis of argument that the said section abridged the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by the Constitution of India under Article 19 (1)(a). However, the Supreme Court dismissed the argument and held that if in the course of exercising the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, any individual causes public disorder, then that individual is liable to be prosecuted under the said section of Indian Penal Code (hereafter IPC).

There have been instances when various legislations were passed in order to control and censor the work of press and media. While some of the acts had enough rationale behind their enactment, the others on the other hand most of which date back to the pre-independence era were enacted in order to curb the freedom of press and slow down the independence movement.

1. The Official Secrets Act, 1923.

This legislation was a very logical act of the Parliament, as the main aim of this act was to prevent the press from reporting and publishing data and information which is related to national security, in order to maintain the national security.²³ Similarly, the Indian Press (Emergency) Powers Act 1931 imposed necessary obligations upon the press to furnish an amount as security. Later the Act was amended by the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1932 and the

¹⁹ Supra 4

²⁰ Supra 1

²¹ *Madhu Limaye v Sub Divisional Magistrate Monghyr* 1971 SCR (2) 711

²² *Ramji Lal Modi vs. State of UP* 1957 AIR 620

²³ Supra 2

provincial government was empowered to make the press deposit the security amount which was subject to forfeiture in case the press indulged in publication of any matter which was liable to creating hatred towards the government or incitement of feelings of hatred and enmity between different classes of citizens.²⁴

2. Press (Objectionable Matter) Act, 1951.

This legislation was enacted with a view to preventing the publication and printing of contents which were capable of inciting crime or consisted of objectionable contents. Though the act was enforced with a lot of expectations, however, it was somehow repealed in the year 1957.

3. The Sedition Law, Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)

Section 124A of the IPC²⁵ forbids any signs, or gestures, or visual representation, or any written or spoken expressions of hate towards the government or tends to harm the sovereignty and integrity of the nation. This law was not originally a part of the original draft of the IPC, 1862, and was later added during the era of independence movement in order to slow it down. However, this law is well within the purview of reasonable restrictions as mentioned under article 19 (2) of the Constitution of India.

Hence, we can see that there are a number of legislations which impose a control or censorship over the publication of press and media in some form or the other. However, the difference lies in the fact that the language of some of such legislations are too broad and ambiguous to an extent, which is a matter of concern, because it may be used to impose unreasonable restrictions upon them. For instance, in the case of *Shreya Singhal vs. Union of India*²⁶ the apex court while hearing the matter challenging the validity of section 66A of the Information Technology Act observed that any law limiting freedom of speech and expression cannot pass a muster, if it is in the general interest of the public. The court also said that if any legislation imposes

²⁴ The Official Secrets Act 1923, s 4

²⁵ The Indian Penal Code 1862, s 124A

²⁶ *Shreya Singhal v Union of India* AIR 2015 SC 1523

restrictions beyond the eight matters specified under article 19 (2), Indian courts will nullify them. Subsequently, the court ruled in abolishing the said provision of the Information Technology Act.

4. STANDPOINT OF FREEDOM OF PRESS IN INDIA

As per the recent rankings of the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders²⁷, India currently ranks 142 among 180 countries, whereas it ranked 140 in the year 2019,²⁸ and 133 in the year 2016.²⁹ This indicates that in past few years, freedom of Press in India has gradually come down. As per the Reporters Sans Frontiers (Reporters Without Borders), India's score puts her into the "Difficult Situation (red)" category, and the reasons given by them for such a low ranking is that there have been increased violence against journalists.³⁰ Recently, Rana Ayyub, an Indian journalist was subjected to mass hatred, trolling and online abuses for authoring the book called 'The Gujarat Files: Anatomy of Cover Up'³¹. The Indian journalist Ayyub was consistently given online threats and abuses including circulation of pornographic videos with a morphed, edited image of the journalist. Ayyub stated that she faced online threats, alongside her contact details and address were shared leading the journalist to face a traumatic stage, it was so traumatising for Ayyub that she couldn't even sleep for three days.³² It is not possible to please each and every one because of the fact that not everyone is equal, neither are their thought process the same. Point of view changes from people to people, however, a civilised society with values of law and morality demands that one may express their dissent or may even criticize fellow individuals keeping in mind the reasonable restrictions as mentioned under article 19 (2) of the Constitution of India.³³ Abusing and giving death threats are punishable

²⁷ Reporters Without Borders also known as Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) is an international and non-profit, non-governmental organisation with stated aim of safeguarding right to freedom of press and of information.

²⁸ *Editor* 'India drops down on World Press Freedom Index' (The Economic Times 18 April 2019) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-drops-down-on-world-press-freedom-index/articleshow/68940683.cms> Accessed 24 April 2021

²⁹ *Scroll Staff*, 'India ranks 133rd in World Press Freedom Index 2016' (Scroll.in 20 April 2016) <https://scroll.in/latest/806931/india-ranks-133rd-in-world-press-freedom-index-2016> Accessed 26 April 2021.

³⁰ *TSI Staffer*, 'India Struggles at 140th Rank in World Press Freedom Index' (The Indian Saga, 28 April 2019) <https://theindiasaga.com/nation/india-struggles-at-140th-rank-in-world-press-freedom-index/> Accessed 21 April 2021

³¹ The book 'Gujarat Files: Anatomy of Cover Up' is the account of an eight-month long undercover investigation on the Gujarat Riots done by Rana Ayyub.

³² *Ria Das*, 'Rana Ayyub one of the most urgent global press freedom case' (She The People, 3 April 2019) <https://www.shethepeople.tv/news/rana-ayyub-urgent-global-press-freedom/> Accessed Apr 21, 2021

³³ *Supra* 4

offences under the Indian Penal Code, 1862. Just like Ayyub many other journalists had to face such hatred and threats to life merely for the journalism that they did, however in some cases they were not as lucky as Ayyub to stay alive. Gauri Lankesh, an eminent journalist was brutally murdered outside her own residence at Bengaluru in the year 2017. Lankesh, was the editor of 'Gauri Lankesh Patrike', a weekly newspaper that was published and circulated in Bengaluru.³⁴

Having discussed upon the importance of press and media in a democracy, it needs to be mentioned that just like there is a proper prescribed mechanism for enforceability of the fundamental rights of an individual, there is a need of legislation that aims at providing protection to the personal life and property of the Journalists, Press and the Media Houses. The role played by media in shaping people's opinion and spreading information, is vital and needed in a democracy. Media and Press are the mirrors of a society and they reflect the reality that is going around, and while in the process of it sometimes they can be harsh or misunderstood by some people. Hence, it is required that there is a proper legislation to protect them. Maharashtra has become the first state in India to make a legislation on protection of journalists. On 7th April 2017 Maharashtra Assembly passed the Maharashtra Media Persons and Media Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss of Property) act, 2017.³⁵ Thanks to the long struggle of the journalists throughout the country, that at least there have been a step forward towards the protection and preservation of the life and liberty of the journalists and the Media Houses. The act aims at making any act of violence against a media person or causing damage or loss of property of media persons or their institutions a punishable offence. The Act has a provision for punishing the offenders under the Act up to three years of jail and/or a fine of Rs. 50,000/- for any violent activity or abetment or provoking, instigating any violent activity against any media person or media houses. The Act defines 'media institution' as "any registered newspaper establishment, news channel establishment, news-based electronic media establishment or news stations." According to the reports, the reason behind India being ranked so low on the Index is majorly because of increased 'self-censorship' in the mainstream media.³⁶

³⁴ Anureet, 'Gauri Lankesh: A Look at her Firebrand Journalism on her death Anniversary' (She The People, 2020) <https://www.shethepeople.tv/home-top-video/do-not-forget-gauri-lankesh-patrike-three-years-after-the-murder-of-a-firebrand-journalist/> Accessed Apr 21, 2021

³⁵ Maharashtra Media Persons and Media Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss of Property) Act, 2017

³⁶ Editor, *The Logical Indian* 'Maharashtra Is The Only State With A Law To Protect Journalists' (The logical Indian 15 June 2107) <https://thelogicalindian.com/story-feed/awareness/law-to-protect-journalists> Accessed Apr 21, 2021

Reporters Sans Frontiers (Hereafter, RSF) has been critical of the fact that due to lack of any protective legislations throughout India, it has been very difficult for them to report the incidents from sensitive regions like the Jammu and Kashmir.³⁷ In such a situation, it is the need of the hour that the Centre tables a bill in the Parliament with the legislative intention of providing protection to personal life and property of the Journalists, Media Houses and Press Establishments. If we draw a healthy comparison between India with Norway, we will find that there are some peculiar features that makes the latter top the list on the Press Freedom Index. Article 100 of the Constitution of Norway guarantees freedom of expression, media freedom and right to access the government information.³⁸ The media in Norway are generally free from censorship and undue intervention of politics on the journalists and media houses. Likewise, even India needs to stop crimes against its journalists and ensure that the press is free to report the happenings without any threat of life or property. The day we start accepting criticisms and understand the fact that criticism leads to a healthy democracy, we will automatically make country even more open to the Journalists and towards Free Journalism.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Press is supposed to act as a mirror of the society, reflecting the happenings and impacts of various state actions. A free press is an essential tool that is needed to carry on with a healthy democracy, for where the people's will cannot be expressed freely, it cannot be respected either, and a democracy without the free will of the people is no democracy. It is justified for the government to keep an eye over the matter published and propagated by the press in a given country, however, such a watch should not be confused with excessive control and censorship. Now the question arises that what is the extent up to which it would not amount to excessive control and censorship, the answer is clear and has been provided in the same instrument that guarantees fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression i.e., the Constitution of India. Any censorship or control or intervention into the matters of publication of press and media beyond the eight subject matters listed as reasonable restrictions under article 19(2) of the Constitution of India would amount to curbing the freedom of press in the country. It is the need of the hour that the press should be given reasonable freedom in order to preserve a healthy democracy, and the press at the

³⁷ Editor, RSF 'India: A year of throttling journalism in Kashmir' (Reporters Sans Frontiers, 5 August 2020) <https://rsf.org/en/news/india-year-throttling-journalism-kashmir-0> Accessed Apr 21, 2021

³⁸ Constitution of Norway, 1814. art. 100

same time should make sure that they are not misusing their fundamental rights and not indulging into acts like unethical reporting, yellow journalism or excessive journalism.

There has been a sharp increase in online abuse, threats and even instances of reported violence being faced by journalists throughout the country. In such desperate times, India needs dedicated laws to protect the personal life and property of the journalists and media houses, just like Maharashtra came up with the first ever journalist protection law in the country. Having said that, there is yet another issue that needs our attention. We need to enforce dedicated laws in order to prevent rampant spread of false information or fake news over digital platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. These platforms are totally independent and have become a factory of fake news, leading to fear-mongering, hate speech, spreading propaganda, promoting obscenity and even leading to acts like mob-lynching.

There are some recommendations that can be incorporated in order to promote reasonable freedom of press.

1. Review existing laws and check whether they are imposing unreasonable restrictions and censorship over press.
2. Police should be trained to make sure that they take appropriate actions whenever a journalist is given threat to life and property.
3. Hate speech and threats given online should be monitored and reported to the police station, in order to make the online platforms healthier and more inclusive.
4. Enact laws to tackle spread of false news and hate speech online.
5. Enact laws for the protection of the life and property of the journalists and media houses.



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