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Essay: Is Freedom of Speech a human right or a Tool for Manipulation

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Essay

Is Freedom of Speech a Human Right or a Tool for Manipulation

Europe in medieval period was under the influence of Pop. What Pop said 'right' was right and what he implied 'wrong' was unacceptable. None could challenge his decree. Sixteenth century Europe was inspired by the concept of Enlightenment and reason. After Thirty Years War - an agreement - Treaty of Westphalia assured the state system along with freedom, liberty and fraternity. Democracy was chosen as the form of government which guaranteed freedom of speech. Freedom of speech means two way process of information distribution. However, today this basic human right is used as a tool by the powerful against the weak, all around the globe. Whether it is face to face conversation or online dissemination of information, powerful controls the gift of gab. Also, the superpower influences the media all around and propagates

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the distorted image of adversary. Moreover, dominant forces are obstructing the stance of the weak. Meanwhile, the accused or vilified has no or minimum media access. Affluent states are maligning the rising nation under the pretext of freedom of speech. Further, it is also visible that governments control the the media and all platform of information and news and yellow Journalism is rampant. On the other hand people still argue that freedom of speech is a core principle of democracy and a battle for truth. It ensures accountability and facilitates active participation of public in democratic process. This basic right is a shield of protection against oppression of minorities and it is vital for change and innovation. But the reality is something else, even the democratic states suppress the voice which rises in contravention to them and battle for truth deprives people of their lives ^{by} ~~by~~ exposing the truth. Political persons never allow the

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honest people to access them and make them accountable. Besides, journalists and people raising voice for minorities are arrested under legal restrictions, in fact, those who inform about novel ideas are declared untrustworthy. In a nutshell, freedom of speech is not practiced anywhere but only used against the weak for manipulation and subjugation.

To begin with, freedom of speech itself is a basic human right. It actually means that speech or conversation is a two way process i.e. bi-directional flow of information and knowledge. The powerful authority or one person, alone cannot enjoy this gift. As depicted by the example of Islamic caliph Hazrat Umer (R.A); a woman asked him about the extra cloth which he used to make his complete dress. And he replied gently without feeling or having any grudge against the lady. So, whenever people's rights are concerned two way interrogation is allowed.

Unfortunately, in today's world the dominant entities

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control the speech and hamper the reality to be exposed. Power has corrupted the system of democracy, even the democratic state - being influential - controls the freedom of speech globally, through media. All the media outlets in Middle East are under the influence of United States. (Noam Chomsky, Failed States)

Moreover, the one who has money and power is involved in propagating false information under the guise of freedom of speech. The purpose is to malign the adversary and present a rogue image of the weaker state or person. For instance hundreds of social media outlets were used by India to spread negative news about Pakistan. (European DisinfoLab, 2020) Therefore, the right to speech is being misused by the dominant force.

Furthermore, the privilege of presenting one's own picture at international platforms is not easily available to the weaker and war-ravaged states. The one with more media

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On the other hand ^{some} people still believe that the freedom of speech is a core principle of democracy in developed countries. And this basis right is making such state prosperous which is not true as the military commander of America (Douglas McArthur) was removed from his job when he criticised the government's policies of engaging the military in other's war. (Henry Kissinger, World Order). Hence, the stance that freedom of speech is a core principle of democracy is a farce.

Additionally, it is said that the freedom of speech is a battle for truth and it helps disseminate accurate facts and figures. But it is quite clear that who are willing to fight this battle are either arrested under the pretext of legal restrictions or killed at unknown places. In Egypt 118 journalists were arrested under legal restrictions and they were allegedly linked with terrorist groups. (Amnesty

International, 2018.

Some ^{people} also boast that freedom of speech makes politicians and other administrative authorities accountable. Media is the fourth pillar of democracy which is the true depiction of freedom of speech. However, the reality is that such authorities never allow critical journalists to access them. For instance certain journalists complain that the present government never invites them when they arrange a press talk. So, it is not completely true that media or freedom of speech through it promotes accountability.

Extending the argument further people assert that freedom of speech facilitates the equal treatment of minorities and whenever minorities face discrimination, it is freedom of speech that makes them utter their grievances. While arguing it is totally forgotten that Myanmar journalists who were reporting the killing of Rohingya men, got arrested.

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influence obstructs the others stance. Like, Afghanistan is being continuously reported by the Western media as a violator of human rights. But the Western media itself is not approaching the Afghan authorities to get their narrative. Proving someone wrong without taking his views and stance is like a try to win a case in the court without any adversary.

Also, state interests are rendered more important when it comes to ^{the} freedom of speech mantra. States forget the cruel treatment meted out to the minorities when their business and financial gains are linked with the cruel national governments. Examples are the cases of Palestine and Kashmir. Palestine being an open prison under the sky, and Kashmir being the place where around 200,000 lost their lives as reported by Russell tribunal on Kashmir ^{in 2020}. Hence, freedom of speech is manipulated on the grounds of business and trade interests.

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Further, not only the democracies but authoritarian regimes also gag the voice of truth. Governments around the world dictate the information channels, what to speak or show and what to not. In Russia TV channels are instructed; not to use the word 'war', instead use the word 'military operation'. (Eleanor Brook, Why is freedom of speech important for democracy: 5 reasons, 2022). So is the case in the whole world.

Besides, government's manipulation of media, yellow journalism is also widespread. The journalists which stand by the stance of authorities are good to go while the ones who speak against the powerful are threatened and forced to self-censor. 'Media Freedom' report (2022) by European Commission says that journalists in Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia and Sweden ~~self~~ were self-censoring due to attacks and harassment. Which proves that that majority of the journalists are doing yellow journalism to prevent censorship.

(Amnesty International, 2018)

People also assert that freedom of speech also led to the change and innovation in societies and contributed a hand in development. But, what about the denial of Chinese government when the doctor told that a novel virus is there - threat to humans.

The government of China instantly declared it a "false rumour". This denial led the losses around the globe. Here, it is clear that not all the changes are accepted through speech.

To sum it up, freedom of speech is just a 'right' on paper but its implementation is nowhere. From powerful being influencing and controlling speech through media, weak being maligned and victims being portrayed as terrorists there is none to separate the reality from fallacy. Moreover, governments are still manipulating the public opinion and the yellow journalism is rampant everywhere. While those who think that freedom of speech exists as

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core principal of democracy, and disseminating the accurate information-cum-facts are living in fools' paradise. Minorities are still oppressed and no one is allowed to present their grievances through any channel.

Freedom of speech as driving change in societies is another force. Noam Chomsky asserts:

He who controls the media controls the minds of the public. Therefore freedom of speech is used as a tool for manipulation.