

Freedom of Expression; A Double-edged sword.

Outline

A-Introduction

"Freedom of expression is a fundamental right that allows for open exchange of ideas, but this unrestricted freedom undermines its essence and causes disruption in society".

B- How Freedom of Expression is a Double-edged Sword

- 1) Dissemination of false information
- 2) Spreading hate speech
- 3) Triggering social unrest
- 4) Bullying and harassment
- 5) Hurting the sentiment of others
- 6) Exacerbating social divisions
- 7) Violating privacy of Individuals

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C- Negative Biases About Freedom of Speech are Overrated

- 1) Sharing Ideas to spark change
- 2) Holding the powerful accountable
- 3) Protecting minority viewpoints

D- Conclusion

"Having the freedom of speech does not mean saying whatever you want, it means saying what is humane, hateless and non-prejudicial", says human right activist Abhijit Naskar. Freedom of speech is though a fundamental right of every individual, but it is not without its downsides.

Unrestricted and unquestioned freedom of expression may generates various problems in the society. Freedom of expression gives a right to say to every individual regardless of their social position, mental capabilities and moral status.

By this right, both the scholar and a terrorist have

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equal right to express their viewpoints. Therefore, it results in dissemination of fake news and hatred speech. Hatred speech, especially about religion and politics can trigger social unrest. It has also resulted in lack of privacy, with people commenting and indulging in others life. An unprecedented spike has been seen in bullying and harassment incidents with advancement in media and technology. This gives a license to people to attack and interfere in others' private affairs and hurt their sentiments. But, to some people this biasness about freedom of speech is overrated. They see it as an opportunity to share ideas and spark change. It is helpful to hold the ruling and powerful elite responsible. It gives protection and independence to minorities and marginalised individuals of society.

How Freedom of speech is double-edged sword is discussed in following paragraphs.

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Freedom of expression is closely related with dissemination of false and fake news. It bestows everyone a claim to express their views whether true or false. It results in outflow of news without any confirmation. Most of the claims rely on assumptions, but no body can be held accountable, because of their basic right of freedom of speech. In the end, an amalgam of lies, misinformation and tempered news along with truth is received. The false information can be fatal for a society or state in many ways. It can mold the attention of masses towards a goal and create propaganda or deception. Thus, freedom of expression eventually results in unrolling false information.

Similarly, freedom of expression is associated with spread of hate speech. With the independence of expression, anyone can criticize any person or group of individuals. The radical elements of society makes

the most through it. This tool is widely used by religious and other fanatics to attack specific factor of society. They go unchecked and unstopped in their endeavour because of freedom of speech. The practical application of this is seen in Europe and west, where freedom of speech is used against Islam. According to reports, in 2023, 532 incidents of hatred speech were noticed in European Union, and majority of these were against muslims. Hence, Freedom of expression may leads to hatred speech.

Expressing hate against any political or religious group will ~~or~~ subsequently results in social unrest. It challenges the feelings of targeted group, which retaliate in forceful way. The situation ends up in drama of violence and fear, disrupting the peace of society. This can best be visualized from the situation of India. Muslims have been marginalized in India since ~~an~~ long and an intense dislike is

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seen against muslims in Indian political, social, economic and academic discourse. This has created an ubiquitous unrest in Indian society, where incidents of violence, riots and violent protests are common. Thus, unnecessary freedom of expression, especially against religion cause problems in peace of society.

Likewise, bullying and harassment have also been normalized due to freedom of speech. Freedom of expression in its true essence is to speak up for ~~one's~~ ^{one's} rights and protect one's self. But, it also gives a permit to interfere in someone else's affairs and justify the misdeeds as freedom of expression. Many of the bullies go unasked ~~about~~ for their misbehaviour. Females, mostly are prone to such incidents of bully and harassment. They receive sexual and unwelcoming comments from their male counterparts at workplace. Since, freedom of speech gives full vocal independence to individuals, therefore issues

like harassment and bullying are impossible to stop.

This criticism and negativity hurts the sentiments of others. Speech that is insulting, discriminatory, or hateful can be hurtful, even if ~~directly~~ ~~hurt~~ it does not directly hurt

someone. This can target race, religion, sexual orientation or any other group affiliation. One such statement ~~was~~ made by Italian Prime Minister, George Meloni^o hurt the feelings of millions of muslims all over the world, when she said:

"Islam and Europe have compatibility problems". Sometimes speech can be insensitive without being overtly offensive. Jokes or comments that does not consider the listener's experiences can be hurtful, especially if they deal with sensitive topics.

Thus, freedom of speech, in most of the cases hurt the feelings of others directly or indirectly.

Moreover, it exacerbates the social divisions within various groups of society. Freedom

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of speech comes at the
expense of hateful rhetoric
that targets certain groups.
This can inflame tensions
and make it harder for
people with different viewpoints
to have civil conversations.

Offensive or hateful speech
can damage relationships and
make it harder for people
to trust and respect each
other. Freedom of speech through
social media also increase
divisions, where its algorithms trap
people in echo-chambers; ~~and~~
They only see information that
confirms their existing beliefs.
This can lead to further
polarization and a hardening
of attitude. Therefore, freedom
of speech divides people instead
of joining.

In addition to that, freedom of
speech violates the privacy of
individuals. This is closely related
with the advancement in
media and technology. Vulnerable
to such problems are celebrities
and those public figures which
usually remains in limelight.
Their personal and domestic

life affair are discussed on media and social media, completely destroying their privacy. Social media posts, commentaries, blogs are posted about an individual, and such posts in most of the cases have no credibility of information. What is most important of all this is that, ~~these~~ it is done without the consent of that individual. Hence, freedom of speech clearly violates the privacy of others.

Although freedom of speech creates several problems, but it cannot be rejected altogether as a basic human right. Free speech is globally recognized human right and is protected and recognized by the article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The advocates of freedom of speech ignore the problems created by it, and declare these problems as overrated. For them, freedom of speech is necessary, and what comes with it is secondary. As Voltaire said, "The right to ^{free} speech is more important than the content

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of the speech". They propose the arguments discussed in following paragraphs.

Firstly, freedom of speech help share ideas and spark a change in society. Individuals from different backgrounds and experts in different fields of knowledge are allowed to share their views. Every person regardless of his race, colour, creed, social status and education have right to express their opinions. This is true essence of public liberty. As Benjamin Franklin said; "Without freedom of thought, there can be no such thing as wisdom; and no such thing as public liberty, without freedom of speech". This results in outflow of many productive and diverse ideas, which are healthy for society. But, this also give rise to spread of many negative ideas as well. Many propagandist and fanatical actors perpetuate their viewpoints through this shield of freedom of speech. Thus, it introduce both positive and negative ideas in society.

Secondly, freedom of speech is vital to hold powerful and ruling accountable for their deeds. Tyrant rulers of primitive times used to subdue their public of open questioning. Modern democracy, on the other hand give liberty to masses to question the rulers. It is necessary for liberty of nation.

As Benjamin Franklin said:

"Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freedom of speech"

This results in transparency and accountability, eventually leading to good governance. This freedom also allows the individuals to blame baselessly and defame the rulers. A technique used as a propaganda maneuver to manipulate public opinion. Therefore, it is double-edge sword which impact the rulers both positively and negatively.

Lastly, it is guardian of minority rights and their viewpoints. Freedom of speech along with media advancement in current era has liberated the marginalized and

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oppressed entities of ~~at~~ society. They can have their say and engage with global community. They point out the oppression and injustice inflicted upon them. Freedom of expression gives them the power to openly preach and protect their beliefs. Without freedom of speech it ~~was~~ not possible. As George Washington said; "If the freedom of speech ~~is~~ may be taken away, dumb and silent we may be led like sheep to the slaughter". This freedom of speech, also widens the gaps between social groups. It divides them as majority-minority, rich-power and ruling-ruled, causing anarchic situation in society. Hence, freedom of expression is double-edge sword, protecting rights of oppressed on one side and causing division in society on other.

In a nutshell, one may say that freedom of expression is a complex and multi-faceted idea. It gives people the basic right to have their say and share opinions. At the same, it, ~~is~~ exacerbates

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tensions within society. It is a double-edge sword, because it causes the spread of false information and hate speech. Bullying and harassment incidents have increased a lot due to this unbridled freedom. This in the long run triggers social unrest and violence. Expression of Hatred against a certain group hurts the feeling of individuals of that group, thus widening the gap between different factions of society. ~~But~~ Advocates of freedom of speech consider these accusations as overrated. They regard it necessary to hold the ruling accountable and protecting minority rights. Whatever the case is, freedom of speech though is a basic right, but there must be a ~~balance~~ mechanism of check and balance on it. As Stockwell Day said: "I believe in freedom of speech, but I believe we should also have the right to comment on freedom of speech".