



Speech of
Hon'ble Governor of Andhra Pradesh
Sri Biswa Bhusan Harichandan
at

**The "Lecture on Freedom of Expression" at the Annual
Lecture & Awards programme on organized by the Capital
Foundation Society, New Delhi on 1st September, 2019 at
India International Centre**

Justice A.K. Patnaik, Justice Gita Mittal, Mr. N. Ravi, Mr. K.B. Singh, Dr. Vinod Sethi, dignitaries on the dais, off the dais, ladies and gentlemen, a very good afternoon to you all.

I feel it a privilege to be the chief guest on this august occasion sitting amidst the top dignitaries from across the country. And I am really glad to address this annual function of Capital Foundation Society as the Chief guest for this programme, which was once addressed by eminent personalities like Hon'ble former President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the Chief Justices of India and other luminaries.

The Right to freedom of speech and expression the topic for the day is immensely important in its relevance in the present time. It has long been a hallmark of a healthy democracy and a free society. This basic right allows the citizens to freely participate in the social and political processes in a democracy.

Let me quote what the great English poet John Milton has said about freedom. I quote "Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties." Unquote.

It is through free speech, people could come together to achieve political influence, to strengthen their morality and to help others to become moral and enlightened citizens. Freedom of speech is regarded as the first condition of liberty.

Even International conventions like Universal Declaration of Human Rights , European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights etc. have expressly deliberated and on this basic liberty.

It is not out of place to mention here the observations made by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the case of Romesh Thappar vs The State Of Madras long ago in 1950 that the freedom of speech and expression lay at the foundation of all democratic organisations. Therefore, freedom of speech is of paramount importance in a democracy and it is a boon granted to all of us.

The very essence of a democratic nation lies in public discussions and debates which can help the authorities mend their ways of functioning so that the citizens can have the feeling that their State is indeed working for the welfare of its citizens. Therefore, a careful and knowledgeable use of the freedom to speak and disseminate correct information will help create a better society and the dream of the welfare nation will be realised.

At the same time let us recall what the eminent jurist, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer's observations on freedom of speech. He said "Right to express one's thought is meaningless if it is not accompanied by relaxed right to secure all information on matters of public concern from relevant public authorities. This right to privacy was implicit in the right to life and personal liberty to the citizens."

Privacy and free expression are two sides of the same coin where each is an essential prerequisite for the enjoyment of the other. This is because, in order to freely form and express political, religious or other beliefs, an individual requires privacy and safe private space, free from the interference of others.

Any kind of invasion on the right to privacy directly prevents an individual from exercising his or her freedom of expression.

Every citizen should have the undoubted right to express what sentiments he or she feels are correct. At the same time, this freedom must, however, be exercised with circumspection and care must be taken not to trench on the rights of other citizens or to jeopardize the public interest.

But, of late, free speech has taken the form of curtailment against the right to speak against what is wrong. Free speech is certainly a guaranteed right but nowadays the citizens take the full liberty to give out information that is false. In a country like ours where the necessity of free speech is to bring in a change for the good, the same is being viewed as the change in the wrong sense.

We have been watching that many interest groups waffle on the freedom of speech. You all know that our country has full of groups and identities that are quick to protest whenever they encounter the mildest criticism, however valid they might be. They threaten violence, if the offending criticism is not removed.

The authorities sometimes fall prey to the intentions of such groups taking shelter behind the limitation that can be imposed on the freedom of expression on the ground of a possible threat to law and order. Such conditions provoke these groups to threaten violence and carry out the threat exploiting the situation if their fragile sentiments are hurt by adverse opinion.

In such a situation, as a mature democracy we address the question in a balanced and responsive manner as to what should be done when someone crosses the limits of freedom of expression both at political, executive and judicial.

Finally, I will conclude with a quote from Benjamin Franklin, who said "Without freedom of thought, there can be no such thing as wisdom - and no such thing as public liberty without freedom of speech."

Thanking you all once again

Jain Hind