

9. Pakistan's war on free speech

Challenges and probable solutions

Altaf Ullah Khan

The record of freedom of expression and journalism, viewed through the history of Pakistani governments is rather shabby. However, what has happened lately, and is still going on, is highly alarming. It appears to be a fight between, on one hand, the status quo, the negative morality espoused by the state as a force of unification rooted in tradition, and on the other, the positive alternative, which is inherently present in the status quo (Drolet, 2007). What we mean by negative morality is one that focuses on discipline and order. It is rooted in tradition and resists change. In the very best of its forms, it maintains order and ensures steady social processes, avoiding social disorder by checking and constraining the forces of innovation. The Pakistani state and other organizations responsible for group cohesion use negative morality to maintain order. However, in a democratic dispensation, such a point of view is not against innovation. Innovation, the liberal thought, and its accompanying boons are inherent in the negative morality, thus, the very antithesis that justifies the thesis. The liberal strands in a human society represent what can be called the positive morality. A good state and government, or ruling system for that matter, would ensure the balance between the negative and positive. While not espousing the positive one, the balanced state gives it enough room to thrive. In autocracies, dictatorships, anarchies, and all societies ruled by closed and obscurantist ideologies this balance is lost. The state and the power centers deny the people their right to dissent, thus stifling positive

Altaf Ullah Khan is a Professor of Mass Communication at Forman Christian College University, Lahore, Pakistan. He has been a visiting scholar at Ohio University, USA in two periods, and taught at the Department of Journalism & Mass Communication at University of Peshawar from 1990 to 2018.

morality. They lean upon tradition for the very purpose of acquiring legitimacy for the nefarious designs of a small group of power brokers.

Pakistan, at this moment, is going through this stifling phase of denying the people their right to hold an opinion. It was never easy to speak one's mind in a country whose democratic course was diverted towards ideological meanderings. Government-media relations and that of liberal intelligentsia and the people in power never remained good throughout Pakistani history. However, the present represents one of the worst nightmares for the people of this nation.

This chapter looks at the question of freedom of speech and expression from the perspective of the need for balance between negative and positive morality. The analysis of different segments of society in terms of freedom to express in relation to the government's control over the narrative can be viewed as a measure of freedom of expression and thought. The author's view is based on the premise that the government and the power centers in Pakistan do not serve the interests of most people in the society. Instead, they impose restrictions on the media and other groups and individuals. In a word, they have vested interests to serve. The curbs on freedom are not regulatory, but rather repressive. These are not being practiced to ensure a steady transition from one stage of innovative change to another level, while keeping the traditional fabric of the society intact. Indeed, the preservative continuity of the society is not the purpose of these curbs. Unfortunately, their aim is to keep a tight grip on the society, its institutions and individuals, thereby gagging free thought for the very purpose of controlling the narrative and the discourse in favor of a small ruling elite in the country. The following discussion provides examples and discussion of this situation and seeks to explore the veracity of this statement through in-depth debate.

A strange "hero"

"Proletarians, in practice, are not allowed to graduate into the Party," says George Orwell (1983: 178). The most gifted among them, who might possibly become nuclei of discontent, are simply marked down by the Thought Police and eliminated.

A retrospective view of the past decade gives us an impression of the Orwellian prophecy. From this perspective one gains an im-

pression of a dreadful trend of suppression, trampling on individual freedoms in the worst possible way, by making a precedent out of individuals who dare to speak their minds for the very purpose of keeping a large majority of the population fearful to speak, or intimidating them even from thinking freely. The reason for abhorrence of the very idea of a free media and a thinking social mind might lie in post-colonial structure of Pakistan. "... the triumphant natives soon enough found out that they needed the West and that the idea of *total* Independence was a nationalist fiction designed mainly for what Fanon calls 'nationalist bourgeois,' who in turn run the new countries with a callous, exploitative tyranny reminiscent of their masters" (Said, 1993: 20). Moving from this premise, one can understand "why the very idea of freedom of thought, let alone freedom of expression or journalism, has become anathema to the governing structures in Pakistan" (Khan, 2017).

The murder of the former governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, in broad daylight by his official police guard, Mumtaz Qadri, unfolded an unending show of aggression in the name of religion, and nationalism. Taseer was killed on January 4, 2011. The extremist clerics' claim that he deserved death because he was guilty of "blasphemy and apostasy"; because he termed the blasphemy laws in the country "inhuman" (Boon, 2017). This was the first ever high-profile murder in Pakistan in the name of religion. The fatwa (religious verdict) was issued by the Sunni Tehreek (movement), a Barelvi sect in Islam, whose stance on issues other than blasphemy remained pretty mild (ibid). Mumtaz Qadri, the murderer, became a religious-national hero. It was not easy for the court to issue a death sentence, and when it happened, more than 10,000 people participated in the funeral (ibid). In Norway, a demonstration supporting Mumtaz Qadri was held outside Pakistan's embassy, on 9 March 2016. One of the slogans carried by approximately one hundred participants, was, "In service of the Prophet, even death is acceptable".¹ This act could signal the beginning of the end of liberal freedom in Pakistan. True, Pakistan never ranked amongst the societies that were based on the ideals of freedom of speech and thought. Nevertheless, there was a continuous struggle between the liberal intelligentsia and the power structure in Pakistan, a power structure, which also had a soft spot for right wing politics. The recent brutal killings, kidnappings,

and brazen acts of physical violence against those espousing different opinions has closed the doors of dialogue. There is no place to debate. The right-wing intelligentsia is sitting cozily because no liberal mind could afford to invoke the wrath of the fanatics who literally quash dissent by killing the dissenting person.

This fear was instilled through repeated and brazen acts of savagery against minorities of faith as well as minorities of thought. Some weeks after the assassination of Salman Taseer, the only Christian minister in the then national cabinet was shot dead by extremists (2011, March 2). His only sin had been to challenge the blasphemy law saying that punishing any person under this law was tantamount to “judicial murder” (Walsch, 2011). President Asif Ali Zardari’s decision to put an “infidel Christian” in charge of the committee to review the blasphemy law was furiously criticized (*ibid*). This criticism was stoked by the right-wing members of the parliament, but its roots were deep enough such that extremists decided to take control of the whole narrative.

Blasphemy became the bogeyman invading and haunting each thinking mind. The government’s “inability” to control extremist mobs sent fear signals into every circle in society. Self-censorship became the norm and everyone started talking with a metaphoric pair of scissors in the head. One knew that if the governor of the biggest province in the country could not survive the extremist onslaught, a commoner could never fight religious bigotry! This form of self-censorship “is the result of the fear that individuals have of upsetting the mobs and virtue-signaling hordes of self-righteous personalities. It is the fear that anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of public opinion and political correctness” (Charles, 2018). This fear has been used to regiment the Pakistani liberal opinion into the negative morality where questioning the status quo became synonymous with meddling in the dangerous zone of a shameful death, an action which would come to haunt whole generations. Concomitantly, the very conscience of Pakistani society adjusts to the worst aspects of negative morality. Self-censorship, unlike direct media censorship, is more detrimental to the wellbeing of the people. “Media censorship is a shift in the flow of information, while self-censorship is a shift in consciousness. It is the dangerous cornerstone of group-think” (*ibid*).

The killing of an outspoken student

This shift in the conscience of the populace exhibited itself in the brutal murder of Mashaal Khan on April 13, 2017. The young man's murder was "just another disturbing consequence of the harsh anti-free speech measures taken by Pakistan's government" that have been in force for the last decade (Khan, 2017). The 23-year-old journalism student at Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was lynched on university campus by none other than his own fellow students. The reasons for this merciless killing are many, from his "outspoken" attitude (Khan, 2017) to his criticism on a local TV channel, Khyber News, of the corrupt practices within the university administration. The bottom line is simple to understand. Whatever happened on that day and went on afterwards "has exposed the ugly side of our radicalized society where people have fallen to a new low of settling their scores and personal grudges in the name of divine and holy beings" (Khan, 2017).

Many have repeatedly questioned the idea of the "helplessness of the state". The state too has colluded in the murder by creating an atmosphere of fear and terror by actively adding to the legal arsenal, which on one hand, curbs freedom of expression, while on the other, it has acquiesced to the growing strength of the extremist mobs. The irony only brought home brutal, stark truths about Pakistani society. In the name of blasphemy mullahs are invoked and rampaging mobs are called upon, much like Frankenstein's monster patched together from lies, distortions, and hate (Khan A., 2018). As Khadija Khan aptly puts in her article in *The Nation*,

The state here is inaccurately being portrayed as victim by those who believe it's the non-state actors challenging the writ of the 'poor' state, completely ignoring the fact that radicalization and pro-extremism policies of the deep state of Pakistan might have led to this degeneration, making them accomplices, or rather the handlers, of this crime (Khan K., 2017).

Deep state is a term referring to clandestine power networks, which influence the working of the state (Barnes, 2018). The deep state is the shadowy existence of intelligence networks, both civil and military, and the powerful persons and organizations working behind the scenes, using the governments in office as instruments for the fulfilment of their ulterior motives.

State as an active oppressor

Warning shots were already fired by the state a few years before the brutal assassination in Mardan, when it called upon people to use the social media “responsibly”. As much as ten relevant laws were cited and these were all advertised in newspapers and televised on TV channels, to stress the gravity of any acts of transgression by any social media user (Khan, 2017). It was during the same period (January 2017) that five bloggers were abducted, their websites closed, or taken over by the state-controlled apparatus. The bloggers were abducted after the passage of the “Cyber Crimes Law” by the Pakistani parliament in August 2016 (Khan R., 2016). The Prevention of Cyber Crimes Bill (PECB), according to I. A. Rehman, was designed to punish the common internet user. It has, indeed,

[...] revealed fault lines that should cause a great deal of anxiety to the people. Pakistan’s lack of expertise in preparing and assessing legislative proposals, which would maintain a balance between the state’s thirst for absolute power and the citizens’ inviolable rights, is bound to undermine progress towards an equitable rule of law. (Rehman I. , 2016)

It is such a context and an environment created by the laws and other measures that support and strengthen the negative morality. This paved the way for the regimentation of free expression, which could be seen as an encouragement for the abduction of the bloggers with impunity. Reza Rumi, in his *New York Times* article connects the dots and tries to develop a picture of the otherwise evidence-less crime.

After the enactment of the cybercrime law, Pakistan’s intelligence agencies reportedly asked for legal cover to take pre-emptive ‘action’ against people they believed were breaching national security. This demand was accepted. It is unclear whether the five bloggers and social media activists have disappeared under this arrangement (Rumi, 2017).

Irrespective of the veracity or otherwise of the above statement, the fear among the journalism and media experts indicates that there is increasing pressure on the media, while those who are trying to limit the freedom of press and expression are getting a free run. The journalists are well aware of the fact that if and when they are harassed or physically harmed the state will not come to their rescue. When we look

at the causal connection between all the events it seems like a steady process of muzzling the media, both print and electronic, along with social media and the Internet. The role of the government seems to be progressing from passive and unhelpful bystander to that of an active oppressor. The range of muzzling covers not only media to groups but also individual freedom of expression and thought.

The recent validation to individual vigilantism on social media might be one of the many final nails in the coffin of freedom of thought and positive morality in the country. Cases were registered by individuals against other individuals claiming that their “patriotic feelings were hurt” by the Facebook status of the person accused of bringing a bad name to the country’s military and other august institutions. The first ever case was registered in Bahawalpur where the complainant was “checking news feed along with his friend” when he saw another person’s post, where he found messages and photos that he thought were “obnoxious” (Report, 2018). The First Information Report (FIR) was launched under section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code and section 29-D of the Telegraph Act. Later, another First Information Report (FIR) was launched by a “concerned citizen” in Lahore against Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman, pleading that he was guilty of treason, saying that “Mutahida Majlis E Amal (MMA)² chief was guilty of disrespecting the ideology of Pakistan as he announced not to celebrate Independence Day” (Desk, 2018). The religious leader and his party had to explain the position of the party and the personality of the politician through a statement of its Secretary General “that the statement of JUI-F chief was misconstrued as he had never said anything against celebrations of the 72nd Independence Day and made it clear that his party would be marking the day with national zeal and fervor” (Desk, 2018). Article 6 of the Constitution was cited in the FIR, while the complainant also criticized the police for “absconding legal action” warning them if action was not taken, the plaintiff would move to the court (Desk, 2018).

The invocation of Article 6 of the Constitution did not end here. The Chief Justice (CJP) of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in one of his speeches on September 15th, 2018 “warned that any person who attempts to hinder the construction of new dams in the country will be tried under Article 6 of the constitution” (Iqbal, 2018). He said this in the context of his initiative to raise funds to build Diamir-Bhasha Dam

to cope with the water and electricity shortage. The CJP's observation came in the backdrop of criticism by Pakistan Peoples' Party's stalwart Syed Khursheed Shah who was quoted as saying that "the issue of dam construction had been politicized so much that those who wanted to develop reservoirs should form their own political party" (Iqbal, 2018).

The laws and restrictions

The incidents are not important in themselves; however, the overall context of this discourse pattern is worth understanding. The government, of which the judiciary is the stabilizing component, is infringing upon the rights of individuals in the name of abstract notions like opinion or thought. Looking at all the cited laws, one sees a threatening emergent trend, that of silencing individual and group opinions through the use of punitive actions arising from laws and regulations. Article 6 of the Constitution, for example, deals with high treason:

Any person who abrogates or subverts or suspends or holds in abeyance, or attempts or conspires to abrogate or subvert or suspend or hold in abeyance, the Constitution by use of force or show of force or by any other unconstitutional means shall be guilty of high treason. (Pakistan N. A., The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 2012)

Section 124 of the Pakistan Penal Code is concerned with "Assaulting President, Governor, etc., with intention to compel or restrain the exercise of any lawful power" (Law, 2010). The punishment for any crime under this section may extend to seven years and is also liable to fines (Law, 2010). Paragraph 124 A is the sedition clause,

Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Federal or Provincial Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine. (Law, 2010)

The Act of 1885 deals with "sending fabricated or obscene messages" (Pakistan G. o., n.d). This was later modified in 2014 by the Parliament

and known as Telegraph (Amendment) Act, 2014. According to this amendment “causing annoyance, intimidation, and harassment” is liable to a “prison sentence for up to three years or fine in excess of rupees 20,000 or both” (Pakistan N. A., Amendment of the Telegraph Act, 1885, n.d.).

Can a government employee speak?

The government employees in Pakistan are duty-bound not to divulge sensitive, workplace information to the media. Academia, though, is not a typical government institution. A public sector university is an autonomous body. Unlike the official bureaucratic public service structure, Academia represents society in the public sphere. Gagging university professionals or academics, in the name of existing rules of public service is a mockery of justice. In addition, even if the government decides to exert some influence over Academia, normal recourse to the legal system is the best way to do it. This, unfortunately, is not the case in some parts of the country.

Although, in earlier periods the legal restraints on freedom of expression are not simply limited to the media or the larger society, no special measures were taken to target specific institutions. However, this has been changed recently. Now specific institutions are being targeted. Fear of free speech is creeping into all organizational hierarchies. In a society where “pleasing the bosses” and remaining in the good books of the higher-ups through showing off, employees want to be seen as “in control” such that highhanded approaches to gag dissenting voices have become routine. As the above examples indicate, a systematic harassment of the media and the society, as well as of individuals in general is well underway. However, there was yet one sphere of activity left unchecked. This is the institutional voice, where groups consisting of “individuals” (some of them intellectuals) in influential white-collar organizations could challenge the government’s mistakes. In a move to thwart any such happening, the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P)³ decided to wake sleeping dogs from the past to invoke newer daemons. On July 24, 2018 “the K-P Establishment Department had issued a notice to all government institutions about ‘interaction with media by government servants’. The notice said that government servants ‘were interacting with the media and were airing their opinion,

which was highly objectionable and places the government in embarrassing positions” (Correspondent, 2018). This was a general notice citing the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules 1987 and the K-P Government Servants (efficiency and discipline) Rules 2011 (ibid). The University of Peshawar issued its own letter on August 8, 2018, circulating it throughout the university offices, warning its employees of strict action in case of violation of the rules. The university letter further elaborated upon the issue, mentioning that

[...] the rules prohibit interaction of government employees with the media, either of the print or the electronic variety through participation in a radio or television programme or contribute in any article or write any letter to any newspaper or periodical expressing views on government policy and political issues (ibid).

The question whether these laws are ever harshly applied or not is not relevant. It is the fear that these measures instill in the minds of people throughout the society that matters most. One cannot escape the fear of being found guilty of an unknown crime, while performing any of the given social roles in everyday life. This places people under constant pressure where they feel the need to always be looking back over their shoulder; it creates an environment where truth is the ultimate casualty. It deforms the very normative features of a human denomination, limiting truth and responsible citizenry to such an extent that they become alien concepts.

It is not simply the absence of freedom that hurts, but rather the presence of human populations very oblivious of any sense of freedom. Compromise and hypocrisy become virtues, while steadfastness and responsible expression of free opinion are now unpardonable vices. “Governments that spy on their people want to gain information and thus control not only over their enemies but over everyone, keeping them perpetually suspicious” (Brikley, 2015). The intentions of such states are never noble. In the words of George Orwell, “the real power, the power we have to fight for night and day, is not power over things, but power over men” (Orwell, 1983: 226). States, irrespective of their nomenclatures and systems of governance are in the habit of imposing negative morality such that it suppresses freedom of human liberties. States, through all possible means, try to convince their citizens that

whatever they are doing is right. In an Orwellian world, the individual is forced to believe that the state is right. The individual is suppressed to a point where he or she sees the absurdity of their very ideas of free speech and thought. The tyranny of the majority, and that of authority, is instilled into the human mind, no matter how skeptical it might be. "... how could the immortal, collective brain be mistaken? By what external standard could you check its judgements?" (Orwell, 1983: 235). The whole function of enforcement of negative morality to inappropriate measures is to ensure the feeling of absurdity among the thinking minds of a society.

The battle for ideas in Pakistan is in fact the battle for the control of the discourse, of the narrative. Media, journalism, and critical intelligentsia are all potentially instruments and vehicles of free expression. Hence, the fear and dislike of these institutions by those in power. It is within this context that government-media relations have never remained in good standing, throughout Pakistani history. At the time of independence, Pakistani media espoused to an adversary model, a maintenance of a free press. They believed in the critical role of the journalists as custodians of truth and guides and educators of people. They believed that through critical evaluation of governments they were performing a democratic duty to the people. Successive governments, civil or military, never liked this approach. They always wanted to rule an ignorant mass of people rather than serve an empowered, aware population.

It is also true that the unbridled and chaotic abuse of social media, in a strife-torn society like Pakistan, has added to the problems of governance. It has also affected the public mind. However, there are limits to the measures a government could take. The balance between governing stability and freedom of opinion and expression should be sought. This, unfortunately, has not happened in Pakistan. This is not an unaddressed issue. The Commonwealth Journalists Association's (CJA) recently drafted 12 principles most relevant to Pakistan, because this code will 'help both state and society overcome the challenges confronting them with as little pain as possible' (Rehman I. A., 2018). The Principles, as the CJA names them,

[...] are intended to serve as a set of guidelines to assist member states and their agencies, as well as Commonwealth legislatures and judi-

ciaries, civil society and media, to make appropriate contributions to promoting and developing democratic, accountable and open societies, in accordance with Commonwealth values, international norms and standards, and the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. (Lumb, 2018)

The first two principles are most appropriate to our present debate. The government has to follow these before framing any law or initiative to deal with the problems of mainstream or social media. The first of these, titled "freedom of expression", clearly elucidates that governments are responsible to "respect the right to freedom of expression and promote the free flow of information and ideas" (Lumb, 2018). The second one, "restrictions on freedom of expression" deals with our present dilemma of balance between the positive and negative morality. It defines the very boundaries of regulation and control, and that of regulatory and punitive action. "Any restrictions on freedom of expression should be in accordance with standards established in international human rights law, such as those set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (Ibid). Further, if any restrictions are posed to avoid incitement to offences or any unpleasant social developments, "should be prescribed by law, and necessary and proportionate in pursuit of a legitimate aim" (ibid). The states are also advised to amend all such laws, which are contrary to the spirit of these guidelines. Freedom of speech should be guaranteed within the frame of governmental responsibility towards the people. To ensure the sanctity of these freedoms the government should not "unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression, such as laws on sedition which criminalize speech" (Ibid).

Concluding remarks

The current government's attitude towards the free expression of opinion in all forms does not fall into the above-mentioned guidelines. This is nothing new. The Pakistani governing elite has never had a positive relationship with the media. The present curbs on freedom of expression of thought are not novel. The only issue is that the people expected things to get better. When this does not happen, it naturally gives rise to frustrations. It is important that the spirit of democracy be strengthened. Empowerment of the people by finding ways to include

them as part of the knowledge production system is one of the most important functions of everyday governance. If this process is not properly nurtured, a government is not fulfilling its democratic responsibilities. It is criminal to hinder the process or control the socio-political and cultural discourse by forcing the population into intellectual servitude. Excuses are neither pardonable nor acceptable. Governments have always robbed people and institutions of the inviolable right to free expression in the name of national security or stability, in the name of unity and conformity. The fallacy of this train of argument has been proven repeatedly by history. A responsible government is one that not only respects the right to free expression, but also guarantees it.

The Pakistani media have all the weaknesses media systems are supposed to have. They also have the strengths in which any media could take pride. It is but true that the recent infighting between rival media groups and the rise of fear amongst the media professionals, along with an extremely money-oriented, materialistic approach to news and views has marred the credibility of mainstream media, resulting in a loss of trust among the audience. However, this should not result in a clamp-down on freedom of speech and thought. The “breakdown of media ethics”, the “sentimental nihilism” (West, 2005: 36) has been globally criticized. Populist leadership within governments and societies are crying themselves hoarse to bridle freedom to express and report. US President Donald Trump is one of the leading enemies of free media. He is the role model for all those who hate transparency and accountability in politics and society. Terms like “Fake News” and “Alternative Truth” in his world become shameless pretexts to avoid responsibility to the people, especially by means of delegitimizing the media. At the same time the inherent deterioration of the Internet, which was supposed to offer an alternative perspective in a wide range of issues, is mis- or unrepresented in the mainstream. It has disappointed the thinking public by its “going too far into crude advocacy the other way – not a good way to evoke sympathy for those opposing the oppressors of freedom” (West, 2005: 37). This is not a case for capitalist enterprise but, in fact, “democracy depends, in large part, on a free and frank press willing to speak painful truths to the public about our society, including the fact of their own complicity in superficiality and simplistic reportage” (West, 2005: 39). The reason for this, West elaborates, is “there can be no dem-

ocratic *paideia*—without democratic *parrhesia*—a bold and courageous press willing to speak the misinformation and mendacities of elites” (West, 2005: 39).⁴ Following Foucault’s understanding of a democratic process, no democratic education is possible without a democratic freedom of speech. This means all education is useless unless there is a corresponding social structure based on freedom of expression. A society needs to ensure free expression and critical thought for all its citizens, if it plans to develop a democratic education system that could enable it to produce responsible citizenry. If this process is not ensured the result will be an oligarchic dispensation where the interests of the rich and the corrupt will be served.

The Pakistani ruling elite always had a distaste for free speech and public opinion. They have always used the power they derive from their post-colonial structure of bureaucracy and legal system to stifle freedom and innovation, which could challenge their authority. In other words, they have abused their authority to instill a negative morality for the very purpose of keeping a tight grip on power. The recent developments of religious extremism have a few commonalities with the ruling elite. This is the distaste of popular opinion along with the tradition rootedness to the level of rejection of all change. These interests united them against the liberal intelligentsia, minorities, in both thought and ideology. The obvious result of this like-mindedness is a collusion against free speech and sponsoring its very opposite, namely hate speech. The nefarious collusion that facilitates the creation of anti-free speech narrative is at the roots of punitive regimentation of free speech with impunity. Intellectually garbed religious extremism became mainstream through its populist attraction quite early in Pakistani history. The political parties founded on the model of the Muslim Brotherhood are “populist parties” and are now “more mainstream” (Cockburn, 2004: 108). The present brand of populism in Pakistan is a mix of religious fervor and anti-Western sentiments. No political party dares alienate the rightwing vote or voice. If it does so, it would be at the cost of cultural identity and support. The party would lose its credibility as a national entity. This is for the very reason that, over the years, religion itself has become politically mainstream. The entrenched governmental institutions like the civil and military bureaucracy use the lack of “popular legitimacy” of the governments due to an acceptance

of the “hegemony of the Americans in the region” (Cockburn, 2004) and nurture the more stringent religious-political narrative to develop a socio-cultural discourse pattern. This pattern is not a libertarian one. It is rather a disciplinarian one that asks for total allegiance of the people and institutions to traditional morality. Traditional morality, the negative ethics that forbid positive morality, espousing innovation and dissent, is a twisted version of vested interests of the ruling elite. The façade of the traditions rooted in religious-cultural matrix is sold to a people kept in darkness through misinformation in the news and education systems.

The point to keep in mind is that the war on free speech in the country will not benefit anyone. A government cannot remain in an eternal war with its people. No matter how lofty might be the reasons for taking away the people's right to free speech and thought, these are incorrect. Only a freethinking and empowered people could ensure a prosperous society and a nation capable of survival in our present age. The sooner this truth is understood, the better.

Notes

1. *Dagsavisen*, Norway, 2016, March 11 (translation by editor E. Eide).
2. MMA is the coalition of religious parties that includes the Jamat E Islami and Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman's Jamiat Ulema E Islam, Fazl Ur Rehman (JUI-F).
3. Previously called the North-Western Province. Bordering on Afghanistan in the North.
4. Paideia: A system of broad, cultural education. Parrhesia: means “to say everything – from “pan” (everything) and “rhema” (that which is said). The one who uses parrhesia, says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse. More simply, *Parrhesia* may be seen as “free speech”. (From a Foucault lecture: <https://foucault.info/parrhesia/foucault.DT1.wordParrhesia.en/> accessed 2019, March 13)

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