



**Two days National Seminar on
Contemporary Concerns of Freedom of Speech and Expression in India
Organized by PG Department of Law, Gauhati University, Guwahati – Assam
Sponsored by ICSSR, NERC, Shillong
&
Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata**

9th & 10th September, 2022

Thematic Note

About the Seminar

The freedom of speech and expression has been considered as fundamental rights under article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India and article 19(2) permits the State to impose 'reasonable restrictions', in the interests of eight specified grounds. Three of these grounds, viz. the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, and public order, suggest that the regulation of subversive or revolutionary speech is an important constitutional concern. Prior to India's Independence, there were four exceptions to the right to free speech. These were: Sedition (and hate speech), Obscenity, contempt of Court and Defamation. These continued to be exceptions to the right to free speech after the Constitution was adopted and remained virtually unchanged. Most of the Constitutional experts says that retention of archaic laws as one of the major threats to freedom of expression in contemporary India. The law of sedition in British India was rather different from its counterpart in England. It was a 'misdemeanour', or a lesser offence, which attracted a sentence of imprisonment of a few years. By contrast, sedition in British India, enacted in the form of sedition 124-A of the Indian Penal Code in 1860, was defined very broadly to include merely evoking hatred, disloyalty or bad feelings against the government. On the right to free speech, sedition therefore generated a great deal of debate in the Constituent Assembly. Members of the Assembly were keen to get rid of sedition, which had long been used against Indian Patriots. However, by virtue of its first amendment, introduced in 1951, the Constitution did very little to limit sedition. Though sedition was not specifically made an enumerated exception to free speech, the 'security of the state' was made an exception in

1950. Thereafter, the First Amendment made 'public order' an exception to free speech, which has protected sedition from constitutional challenges thereafter. Sedition continues, to this day, to stand as part of the Indian Penal Code. It is still repeatedly invoked against those who speak in an allegedly anti-national way. A handful of such incidents from Assam and North East India are: Recently, prominent Assam academic Hiren Gohain, Peasant leader and now an MLA from Sivasagar Constituency, Akhil Gogoi and journalist Manjit Mahanta have been booked on charges of '*sedition*' for their comments during a democratic protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016. Journalists Kishorechandra Wangkhem, lodged for more than two months in Manipur Central Jail in Imphal on a National Security Act. This outspoken Manipur-based journalist and editor of *The Frontier Manipur* has been booked twice for sedition, twice under the National Security Act (NSA) and once for defamation. Leichombam Erendro, a Manipur-based political activist arrested for sedition for writing on Facebook that "cow dung and cow urine don't work" as a cure to covid-19. The Global Naga Forum (GNF) stated that Nagaland Governor RN Ravi's recent orders, asking state government employees to provide list of relatives connected to Naga political groups (NPG) and to take disciplinary action against government servants 'indulging in seditious and subversive writings on social media', violate the right to personal privacy and freedom of speech. In pursuit of the changes to the right to free speech which exist as of today since the enactment of the Constitution, the PG Department of Law, Gauhati University wishes to organize a National Seminar on 'Contemporary Concerns of Freedom of Speech and Expression in India'. The Seminar will bring together people from a range of specialist and backgrounds for a cross disciplinary discussion on free speech as a broad panoply of rights under the umbrella of Article 19 of the Constitution of India. Papers are invited from the Academicians, Judicial officers, Researchers, Professionals, Practitioners, Student of Law, Research Scholars on the Contemporary Concerns of Freedom of Speech and Expression in India on the broader sub-themes given above.

Sub-Themes:

1. Right to Privacy and Freedom of Speech and Expression
2. Media Trial
3. Sedition and Freedom of Speech and Expression
4. Freedom of Commercial Speech
5. Right to Information and Freedom of Speech

6. Contempt of Court
7. Freedom of Speech and Expression in Digital Age
8. Freedom of Speech and Expression in social media
9. Parliamentary Privileges
10. Free speech and Defamation
11. Freedom of Press in Digital Age
12. Freedom of Speech and National Security
13. Right to Free Speech in a Censored Democracy
14. Limits on Freedom of Speech and Expression

These sub-themes are only suggestive and are not exhaustive. Papers that are not covered under the above-mentioned sub-themes yet holding relevance in the thrust area may also be considered.

Guidelines for Submission of Manuscripts for Selected Papers

1. Paper Title
2. Author Particulars-Name in one line and affiliation with email and phone number
3. Abstract within 200 words in italics with 3 to 5 keywords, in MS Word
4. Full paper should not exceed 5000 words
5. Reference should be in 21st edn Harvard Blue Book format
6. Font- "Time New Roman", Font size-"12pt", Line space-"1.5"

Important Dates:

1. Conference Date: **9th & 10th September, 2022**
2. Conference Venue: Will update soon.
3. Last Date for submission of Abstract: **05th July, 2022**
4. Confirmation of Abstract: **15th July, 2022**

5. Full paper submission – 15th August, 2022

NB: We would require the full paper submission by this deadline, since we shall circulate the full papers with all the participants to initiate more discussion and deliberations during the seminar panel.

E-mail id for submission: nationalseminarlaw2022@gmail.com

Registration Fee:

For Academicians/Lawyers/Professionals : Rs.1200/-

For Research Scholars: Rs.800/-

Logistics:

Selected candidates will be given accommodation, food and travel allowance (sleeper class train/bus on production of tickets covering the shortest route).

Contact:

For any details, you may write to the Seminar Coordinator:

Dr. Pallavi Devi, Assistant Professor, PG Department of Law, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam at nationalseminarlaw2022@gmail.com. Contact Number: 9101029546