



# Lecture- 03



## **2. Libertarian Theory:**

This theory is just in contrast to the authoritarian approach to media. The founding fathers of this theory (Milton, Locke, Mills) propounded that Press informs, entertains, sells, and helps in discovering the truth. It is a free marketplace of ideas where anyone can publish his/ her views and expressions but cannot defame or be obscene. There shall be minimum checks and balances by the government. The libertarians had a very modern approach which was quintessential to serve the purposes of the modern society based on rise of democracy, religious freedom, expansion of economic freedom, philosophical climate of the enlightenment, undermined authoritarianism ã emphasis on personal freedom and democracy. The reason behind the said philosophy was that people are rational and can distinguish between truth and falsehood, and between good and evil and therefore, be allowed to express their views and expressions.

Here media enjoys an absolute freedom of expression. Its prominent features are as follows:

- a) Competitive exposure of alternative viewpoints.
- b) Attacks on the government's policies are accepted and even encouraged: the media as a watchdog.
- c) Journalists and media professionals ought to have full autonomy within the media organization.
- d) There is no explicit connection between the government and the media.
- e) The press is free from censorship
- f) It is accountable to the law for any consequences of its activities that infringe other individuals' rights or the legitimate claims of the society.
- g) In rebelling against authoritarian theory early libertarians argued that there should be no laws governing media operations. Free press means that all forms of media must be totally unregulated.

The Early Libertarians argued that if individuals could be freed from arbitrary limits on communication imposed by church and state, they would "naturally" follow the dictates of their conscience, seek truth, engage in public debate, and ultimately create a better life for themselves and others. They believed strongly in the power of unrestricted public debate and discussion to create more natural way of structuring society. In AEROPAGETICA, a powerful libertarian

published in 1644 by , John Milton asserted that: "In a fair debate good and truthful arguments will always win out over lies and deceit. If this is true it followed, then a new and better social order could be forged using public debate."

These libertarian principles were also adopted in the "Bill of Rights". (First 10 amendments to U.S. constitution). It asserted that all individuals have natural rights no government, community, or group can unduly infringe upon or take away. The ability to exercise dissent, to band together with others to resist laws that people find to be wrong, to print or broadcast ideas, opinions and beliefs- all of these rights are proclaimed as central to democratic self-government.

Unfortunately, most early libertarians had a unrealistic view of how long it would take to find the "truth" and establish an ideal social order. In the 18th century it became clear that "truth" couldn't be quickly or easily established, some libertarians became discouraged. They drifted between libertarian and authoritarian views. But despite the priority given to communication freedom, one sees number of restrictions on communication, accepted by media practitioners and media consumers. Examples can be : Libel - laws to check the publication of information that will damage reputations; Laws against offensive language, pornography, information that would interfere with a defendant's right to a fair trial etc. Whenever new media technologies are invented, it is necessary to decide how they should be regulated.

The debate over communication freedom never ends, sometimes the balance shifts toward expanding freedom and other times, freedom is curtailed. The question is why it is necessary to place limits on communication freedom, What happens when groups attempt to stir up hatred and resentment against racial or ethnic minorities, Should media practitioners be allowed to invade our homes, publish erroneous information or deceive public with false advertising, Do media professionals have the right to produce and distribute anything that will earn profits, or should some limits be placed on them. The protection of dignity, reputation, property, privacy, moral development of individuals, groups, minorities, evens the security of the state no infringement accepted from media. Such an extensive freedom is also a problem as all people have the right to speak and receive information freely, but no one takes responsibility of the wrong doings. The ethics in multicultural or pluralistic societies vary from place to place; hence

there is always complaint against the media of each other's society. This movement is based on the right of an individual, and advocates absence of restraint. The basis of this theory dates back to 17th century England when the printing press made it possible to print several copies of a book or pamphlet at cheap rates. The State was thought of as a major source of interference on the rights of an individual and his property. Libertarians regarded taxation as institutional theft. Popular will (vox populi) was granted precedence over the power of State.

Advocates of this theory were Lao Tzu, an early 16th century philosopher, John Locke of Great Britain in the 17th century, John Milton and John Stuart Mill. Milton referred to a self-righting process if free expression is permitted "let truth and falsehood grapple." In 1789, the French, in their Declaration of the Rights of Man, wrote "Every citizen may speak, write and publish freely." Out of such doctrines came the idea of a "free marketplace of ideas." George Orwell defined libertarianism as "allowing people to say things you do not want to hear". Libertarians argued that the press should be seen as the Fourth Estate reflecting public opinion. What the theory offers, in sum, is power without social responsibility?

**Classical liberal perspective envisages the following:**

- a) Free market as foundation of free media;
- b) Freedom to publish without prior restriction  $\tilde{\alpha}$  independence from government;
- c) Public has access to wide diversity of opinion (only limitation on freedom to publish is public willingness to pay);
- d) Market-based diversity promotes public rationality  $\tilde{\alpha}$  free marketplace of ideas and information as a self-righting mechanism, minimises bias and exposes weak arguments and evidence.

Another strand in liberal tradition presents Media as representative agency or as a watchdog protecting the public (individuals rights), overseeing the state. Wherein the Watchdog reveals and abuses in the exercise of state authority. This role overrides all other functions of the media and dictates the form in which the media should be organised, i.e. the free market. As newspapers gradually lost their party affiliations, journalists worked to establish their

independence as searchers after objective truth. Independence from government control and influence ã if media is subject to public regulation it will lose its bite as a watchdog.

Press is source of information and platform for expression of a range of divergent opinions; enables people to monitor government and form ideas about policy. But, society seen as an aggregation of individuals ã media. As representative role conceived primarily in terms of articulating public opinion, which is the sum of individual opinion. How should media relate to representative structures as distinct from individuals ã role of media in mediating class and other conflict in society.

However, Freedom of press can be abused. Absolute freedom is anarchy. Abolition of censorship; but, also the introduction of press laws designed to protect individual rights (protection of reputation, privacy, moral development of individuals or groups, security of the state) ã could override the right of the press.

Lastly, this theory also entails certain ASSUMPTIONS that help in understanding the basic premise of this theory:

- a) Press should be free from any external censorship;
- b) Publication and distribution should be accessible to any individual or group with a permit or license;
- c) Attacks on governments or parties should not be punishable;
- d) No coercion to publish anything;
- e) Freedom of access to information.
- f) libertarian view rests on the idea that the individual should be free to publish whatever he or she likes attacks on the government's policies are fully accepted and even encouraged
- g) no restrictions on import or export of media messages across the national frontiers
- h) journalists and media professionals have full autonomy within the media organization.