

Where is the freedom?



While the patriotic spirit is high, the confidence of the common man is rather low this Republic Day, what with his 'freedom' being increasingly curtailed

Abhishek Rajee

On India's 63rd Republic Day when the nation pauses to celebrate the day when India's Constitution came into being, angry and appalled citizens find that they are being denied the very fundamental rights and civil liberties that our Constitution guarantees. The Salman Rushdie-Jaipur Literature Fest controversy, where the organizers were forced to pull the plug on Rushdie's video-link, couldn't have come at a worse time. And it follows close on the heels of yet another controversy that had the whole nation tweet away in an angry uproar against minister Kapil Sibal, who suggested that social media content should be screened.

The common man feels that his freedom is at stake. Gags on artistes and filmmakers who dare to hold a mirror to society; police action on those who protest or demonstrate; brutal murders of citizens who want to exercise their Right To Information, to the more common, yet very brazen suggestions to censor everything from what you tweet and what you say, to what you wear and whom you date — one can't help but wonder where exactly is the freedom of expression, a right which is guaranteed by our Constitution.

WE ARE CONSTANTLY GAGGED

'Freedom of Speech' is a democratic right given to fundamentalists and regressive-minded people as the intelligentsia is robbed off it. 'Freedom of Speech' is defined by the right to rob artistes of their expression by muting them in the guise of protecting regressive sentiments. The Censor Board tells me that my film might hurt certain sensibility. What about hurting and insulting the artistes' sensibility by gagging us. Why is that allowed? Why does art have to follow the dictates of the common denomination. Be it painting, a sculpture, literature or cinema? We are constantly gagged."

- Bollywood filmmaker Onir (of "I Am" fame)



350 RTI DEATHS SO FAR

"There is no protection for the common man who files an RTI application. There are so many school teachers who have been killed across the country for seeking information via RTI, reducing RTI to a complete sham since there is no protection offered. An RTI activist was killed earlier this month in Hyderabad itself and almost 350 people have been killed so far in barbaric manner to discourage others from using RTI. It is only a law on paper because the law does not work to offer protection barring the Whistleblower's Act. There is no serious move to protect those who use RTI. RTI deaths is one of the worst sagas in history of India. True freedom is the ability of a common man to bring a sea change in system."

- Filmmaker Mani Shankar



POLICING THE NET VIA SOPA?

"How can the government police the Internet? When they made such statements, I don't think they have thought it through. China spends more money on internal security than on its borders. Thinking of adopting a similar module is absolutely ridiculous. Plus, a government that cannot build proper roads cannot possibly police the Internet with efficiency. The thought itself is hilarious."

- Author Amish Tripathi



TAIL WAGS THE DOG

"I don't agree with most of what Salman Rushdie has written... hell, I can't even understand most of it! But I do know that we have set a horrible precedent by muzzling his voice. We run the risk of allowing the tail to wag the dog if we allow the fringe to dictate what the moderate majority can hear, speak or watch."

- Indian Author Ashwin Sanghi

