

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION UNDER CENSORSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Freedom of expression acknowledged as a fundamental human right in all across the world. Freedom of speech is a defense shield of all rights and prerequisite for individual distinction. In Islamic Republic of Pakistan, freedom of speech is recognized as constitutional right which can be practiced by every citizen; however this right barely rehearses due to uncertainties and unreliability in the governance of a country. Pakistan has been going through with the authoritative and democratic form of governmental system. By misusing and taking cover of constitution, governments violated the internationally standards of human rights continuously since the day of independence. Unfortunately Censorship curbs the free space of Media, a place where different ideologies and diversity of approaches can be expressed without any restrictions. Throughout the history, censorship has been used as a tool to restrict the public awareness, keep an eye on public morality and to quiet the voices of opponents. The core argument of the study is, freedom of speech is primary factor which can strengthen the democracy. This study aims to analyze a political structure of Pakistan, challenges and also aim to distinguish the main factors and actors which has been an essence of subject paradigm. Also highlight the importance of free media without any censorship is a root cause of a progressive democratic culture. This study intends to enlighten the existing situation of freedom of expression in Pakistan. This study follows the qualitative form of approach examine the previous studies of different scholars to understand the power dynamics and draws out conclusion accordingly.

Keywords: Freedom of Expressions, Democracy, Media, Censorship, Human Rights.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has never been a country acknowledged for the freedom and liberation grant for its citizens (Khan, 2022). Pakistan has an extensive history of limitations on freedom of expression (Noor, 2016). Free expression is indispensable for the growth of people's lives and protection of strong & healthy democratic societies (Howie, 2018). Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19(2) of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), officially binding legal agreement sanction by 165 countries, both assured the significance of freedom of expression. In 1964 UN General Assembly already declared freedom of expression a fundamental human right but unfortunately many countries of the world witnessed the free speech principle as the battlefield over numerous conflicts (Balkin, 2004)

Freedom of expression is not less than a spinal cord for media (Bhatti & Safdar, 2021). Freedom to hold opinion is deep-seated element for flourishing of democracy. Independence and diversity of media is essential for any democratic system, free media take part in strengthen the democratic norms by modernize people and facilitate them to hold an independent approach for social equality (Alam, 2015). Democracy has been discussed off and on in diverse civilizations for approximately twenty five hundred years (Dahl, 2020). People have right to exercise their rights generously and take part in government directly or by opt

the candidate they want to govern them, recognized by (UDHR). Democracy is one of the best political structure among the different form of governments, in other words a formation of society, where a government of the people, by the people, and for the people (Carr & Young, 2010)

During the process of democratic development of a country both freedom of speech and democracy promote each other, it's not all about empowering the policy makers wholly but to the recognition of diversity of opinions and encouraging of such idea too(Sun, 2014)

Currently democratic governments face a number of challenges; comprise with ensuring freedom of expression along with harmony and maintain law & order within the country, that owns diversity in terms of faiths, beliefs and views (Liaquat, Qaisrani & Khokhar, 2016) Furthermore the country like United States also conditionally restricted the free opinion as well (Chaudary, 2014)

Objectives of the Study

This study is meant to achieve the following objective:

1. To identify, current status of freedom of expression in Pakistan.
2. To identify, role of different stakeholders in imposing of censorship on Media in Pakistan.

Key Questions

1. What is meaning of democracy and how political structure is working in Pakistan?
2. How Censorship in Media destabilized the meaning of Democracy?

Relevant Secondary Data

Democracy and Political Culture of Pakistan

Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah delivered his speech at Kingsway hall London in Dec 1946 and said *“Democracy is in the blood of Muslims who look upon complete equality of man. I give you an example. Very often when I go to a mosque, my chauffeur stands side by side with me. Muslims believe in fraternity, equality and liberty”* (Arifeen, 2018)

Later than demise of Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan has been observed as a politically instable country; sadly no political leader could ever bring out the nation from bog of economic and political adversities and prove him as a true defender of Pakistan. Many underdeveloped countries like Pakistan have been puzzled as how to deal with the consecutively growing rate of complications of centralization of authority, national integration, politically instability and economic growth and many more(Memon & Shaikh, 2011)

True democracy could not be established in Pakistan due to many aspects for example conflicts between governments and the contradictory and undemocratic behaviors of politicians is one of the foremost problems in the development of true democracy in a country. In the dominance of civil bureaucracy and military elites and absences of the visionary leadership democracy has confront many challenges (Akh-tar, 2011)

In a country like Pakistan, there are number of challenges involved in progression of true democracy including a fundamental right of freedom of speech (Liaquat, Qaisrani & Khokar, 2016) Democracy has never been given the opportunity to sustain in Pakistan. Unfortunately due to the ignorance of the general public democracy is missing its true spirit. Pakistani democratic system is a combination of Islamism and Secularism which make it distinctive from other countries. Interestingly population of Pakistan belongs to diverse school of thoughts; both the secular and Islamist groups exist in a country. But unluckily both the groups are unaware about what democracy is? These innocent people are fully unaware about a system which propose a platform for different ideologies to take part in political matters of their country and have a chance to bring those people in government to whom they want (Waqas & Khattak, 2017)

Majority of Pakistani's are belong to Islam and they want an Islamic form of administration, here the extremist take advantage of simplicity of these people because public have no knowledge or less knowledge about the law and constitution of their own country even they are not fully aware about the Islamic perspective as well. Islam is giving us a complete code of life comprised on different features including democracy, legal commandments and so on, ignorant inhabitants of Pakistan easily associate with the conspiracy against their country for the sake of Islam and exploited by extremists. These extremists create a great chaos among the public and grant them a wrong perception of democracy, People followed

them blindly and supported others thoughts and agenda's instead of trying to find out the realities, explore the truth and then make decisions as per their own understanding and awareness (Shah, 2011)

Consensual and constant political system is required for the democratic form of government but flawed and blemished political culture is another challenge in the process of real democracy. The ideology power and command in a society played an important role to recognize the structure of political system (Ahmad, Saleem & Iftikhar, 2012)

Influence of caste system is very evident in political classification of Pakistan. Generation by generation this division of people in to social hierarchal communities remain constant. Cast system generally declined in different matters of life but still has been a great influence in politics; this form of structure manipulates the candidate in case of choice of the party. Cast system having a central role for the nomination of candidate by political parties to control the results of elections. Feudalism still exists in rural areas of Pakistan and regulates the politics by lords. Different political parties practice different strategies to increase their vote bank through these feudal and factories owners by offer them some profitable packages or sometime by blackmailing and harassing them. In such type of traditions, informed and well educated choices have become a dream for those individuals whom choice dose not exists in front of their biradari (Ahmad, 2006)

Civil and military leadership have ruled in Pakistan since from the day of formation of a country in 1947. Establishment also perceived to hold a strong role in political dynamics (Naveed, 2013). The Pakistan army is a well disciplined, professional and unified force, but due to intense trust issues on civilian leadership they intervene whenever they feel the politicians are not governing effectively. Repetitive interference and frequent involvement by Pakistan army have weaken other institutions of country (Shah, 2011)

Freedom of Speech & Media in Pakistan: Primary soul of democratic system is freedom of expression, theoretically in democracy, governments suppose not to restrict the diversity of opinions and divergent of thoughts and to silence the different voices of critics. There is a great challenge for all democracies to tackle such a serious subject of freedom of expression, majority of democratic governments restricted hate speech against any school of thought, religious conviction, state, institute or any specific cluster (Bibi, Jameel & Jalal, 2018)

Constitutions of 1956 and 1962 clearly acknowledged the free speech in Pakistan. 1973 constitution contain a specific provision (Article 19) on freedom of expression, which clarify freedom of expression along with its limitations. It states *“Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech, and there shall be freedom of the press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security of Pakistan or any part thereof, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, [commission of] or incitement to an offence”* (Alam, 2015)

Pakistan ranked 145th out of 180 countries in 2021. Antony Blinken the US Secretary of State said *“US government is aware of the curbs on media outlets and civil society in Pakistan and such restrictions on freedom of speech undermine the country's image and ability to progress”*. Afghanistan a country ruled by Taliban, currently ranked higher than Pakistan, in press freedom score Pakistan has bowed down 12 points in one year (DAWN, 2022)

Participation of media is imperative for successful democracy and quality of governance in a country because it helps to frame mindset of general public, assists to educate them, facilitate people to provide them a platform for political and social discussions and also give them a confidence to become a tolerant society. Contribution of a free media will definitely encourage people towards progressive democratic form of structure, furthermore, countries where media is independent and free from all sort of censorship, tremendously involvement of general public in political affairs has been observed (Muller, 2014) Evidently restrictions on freedom of expression enforce when it clash with other rights (Van, 2015)

Censorship facing by Media in Pakistan: Media participates as an active and progressive opposition as far as the criticism required on government policies. Free and alert media is essential for availability of modernism, tolerant and progressive approach. There is no reservation that the courage and durability of media is a symbol of democratic state. Perception of innovation, improvement and liberation in a society is depending upon sovereignty of media (Parveen, Bhatti, 2018). For a flexible and sustainable society, it is

of highly momentous that the flow of communication and information keep functioning without any obstruction (INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS, 2021)

Country history is evident, public awareness always restrained through censorship; keep an eye on morality and to silence opposition (Delaney, 2010). The struggling democracies and dictators utilized the tool of censorship to uphold the public ignorance (Bennett & Naim, 2015). Practically people have unaware about the significance of free press in different areas of the world, sadly concept of free and government supported media found in theories only (Janda, Berry & Goldman, 2009)

75 years of independence, Pakistan has experienced Parliamentary, Presidential systems, martial law, and democracy form of governments. Press has suffered the most destructive time during the rule of General Ayub Khan, pioneer ruler who introduced “Press and Publication Ordinance” on September 2, 1963. Under this ordinance General Ayub Khan started taking over the independence of newspapers “Pakistan Times”, “Imroz” and “Lail o Nahar” (Pardesi,2012). Second Martial law imposed by General Yahya Khan in 1969, during his regime a friendly behaviour towards media had witnessed throughout the campaign of 1970 election. When the state-owned electronic media gave full coverage to opposition and invited leaders of different political parties to speak without any interruption. However after the election results, which were completely unexpected, censorship was re-imposed before the start of the military crackdown in the East Pakistan (Niazi, 2002). This was not only the Ayub or Yahya, the democratic government, elected by the general public of Pakistan also maintained tradition of curbing the freedom of press. In 1971 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took over the power in his hand, preliminary relationship between Bhutto and Press was friendly but the dismissal of Ziauddin Ahmad Suleri ended this friendly relation very soon. Number of newspapers including “Nawa e waqt” received the show cause notices from Bhutto government. During his regime the national advertisement to “Dawn “has banned and there were a sequence of brutal authoritarian actions taken by the Bhutto government against the press until the power has stolen by General Muhammad Zia ul Haq in 1977 (Niazi, 2009)

In the beginning same like other rulers General Zia ul Haq also expand his friendly intentions towards press. But same as the disposition of previous governments this friendly bond between press and government also did not last long and General Zia jailed 11 journalists and flogged 04 journalists at May 12, 1978 for raising voice against him. Zia ruled eleven years and he introduced the weapon of “censorship” in his regime to protect the Islamic values. Zia dismissed nine senior journalists from “Imroz”, Mashriq and Pakistan Times. He even introduced many Islamic laws for media as well. (Parveen & Bhatti, 2018)

In 1988 the government of Muhammad Khan Junejo was dissolved under the article of 58(2) b. The relations between Press and Junejo government remained cordial and smooth (Ali & Khalid, 2012, pp. 43-48). Musawaata, a well-known newspaper, was also under the attack of this era and publication of this newspaper was stopped (Iqbal, 2011)

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Muhammad Khan Junejo the tenth Prime Minister of Pakistan, his government dissolved by general Zia in 1988 as per the article of 58(2) b, because of Junejo's differ of opinion with Zia on his dictatorial action. Cordial relationship with Press remained in Junejo regime (Aziz, 2016). But the publication of a renowned newspaper "Musawat" faced trouble in this era (Iqbal, 2011)

In 1988, Benazir Bhutto first woman prime minister, set up a fresh phase of liberalism in mass media. For balance reporting both print and electronic media were given consent by government. During her regime Sindh language newspaper showed new potential in reporting and highlighting the issues of the society but at the same time in Sindh press was frequently terrorized by MQM. The free press grew stronger during her regime, but soon after only four months of this pleasant relationship, temperament of government sustained no longer and Pakistan revisit the previous custom of one-sided coverage by media (Rahman, 2019)

Muhammad Nawaz Sharif took over the power of government in his hand in 1990 and restored the permit system for newsprint. In 1992 independent press pressurized by government of Pakistan, they used different line of attacks to tame journalists in their side. Journalist were tortured and beaten by security forces during "Long March "against the government led by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto with the coalition of other groups (Rahman, 2019)

Benazir Bhutto took the charge of prime minister second time and deposed once again in 1996. In February 1997, Nawaz Sharif took over the charge of government second time and stayed as the leader of a country for two and half years. Sharif government didn't change their behaviour, once again they adopted the cruelty towards media; many journalists were punished who dared to criticize Sharif government same like their first term (Parveen, Bhatti, 2018). Veteran journalist, founder and editor of the English Newspaper Friday Times arrested under suspicious circumstances with the allege of Treachery in Sharif regime (Constable, 1999).

2002 was the time of modernization of media in Pakistan and credit all goes to General Pervaiz Musharraf, he was the person who allowed private media channels to run their transmissions. But when media raise their voice against the dictatorial actions of Musharraf, he did the same like others and snubs the voice of media. Many journalists harassed and punished, raids on media offices were reported, journalists lost their lives in his tenure (Jabbar, 2008). Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority PEMRA made in 2002 in Musharraf regime to regulate the operations of private media. During the lawyer movement PEMRA Amended law 2007, authorities allowed to seize the properties of private channels those were involved in breaching the rules. Lawyer movement 2007 to 2008 fully supported by media and in this regard anchors were facing ban. Electronic media played a vital role in Lawyer movement and faced its consequences as well (Shah, Basit & Azhar, 2017)

Asif Ali Zardari sworn in as new President after the resignation of Musharraf in 2008, Zardari was reluctant to reinstate the judiciary, in such circumstances, nationwide the Lawyer Movement begun with new enthusiasm. Geo TV launched the campaign with the previous clippings of interviews of restoration of judiciary from leadership of Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Due to enormous impact of a campaign, Geo TV suffered the suspension of its transmission by Zardari government (Media support, 2009). The Information Minister Sherry Rehman resigned from her charge in protest of imposing restrictions on media (Misra, 2012). Even cable operators were forced to stop broadcasting of different private channels in all over a country in 2010 (Schoemaker & Emrys, 2013)

After Zardari regime PML-N came third time in government and promised to enact a journalist's protection law but during the tenure of Nawaz government until 2018 this promise stay behind on hold. Instead to enact the law, in 2016 "Prevention of Electronic Crime Bill 2015" approved by National Assembly (2015), for "sweeping censorship of the internet". Pakistan ranked among the 10 most terrible countries of the world for digital freedom and fourth among the 10 most awful countries for journalists in the same year of 2016 (Khan, 2022). Freedom of speech confronted massive challenges from May 2017 to April 2018 in

Pakistan. During the last year of PML-N tenure 157 cases of violation registered against media groups and journalists (Freedom Network, 2018)

Involvement of non-state actors are vibrant in Pakistani Politics, they make quiet every discussion in the main stream media by given the reason of National Security, abduction, mentally and physically torture of journalists have become routine in Pakistan (Liaquat & Qaisrani, 2016). In 2014, leading journalists Hamid Mir had an attack and Cyril Almeida in 2016. Almeida was “barred from leaving the country” subsequent of his report on a civil-military row, known as the “Dawn Leaks.” (Khan, 2022) Ahmad Noorani a senior correspondent with “The News International” was drags out from his car and brutally thrashed on a busy road (Geo News, 2017)

Intervention and obstruction of military establishment has radically increased in Pakistan during 2018 elections. Censorship feels heavier than ever before in Imran Khan’s government. A leading Pakistani journalist Talat Hussain, host of a current affairs program at GEO TV, where he discussed different political issues, forced to stay away from the content where he criticized government of the time and establishment (Support the Guardian, 2019) Talat Hussain said, “*My programmes were being repeatedly censored*”. “*I was told that any suggestion that the 2018 elections were rigged or that the army was part of the running of the government by Imran Khan was unacceptable.*” (Support the Guardian, 2019)

Another journalist Ali Haider Habib, a former senior editor at Herald, an investigative news magazine which closed down in PTI government said “*I feel journalism is under threat more than it has ever been in Pakistan*” (Support the Guardian, 2019) Frequent interference and pressure on media owners was common during 3 and half years of the government of Imran Khan Niazi (Aug 2018 - April 2022), assault of Asad Ali Toor, attack on Absar Alam, detention of Matiullah Jan were the few examples of such an undemocratic actions (CPJ, 2021). A number of journalists lost their jobs under censorship, Hamid Mir said, “*I’ve only been told by Geo management that I won’t be hosting the show,*” “*They said there is a lot of pressure [after the statements at the protest last week]. They did not say who it is coming from.*” (Hashim, 2021)

Talat Hussain, Matiullah Jan, Murtaza Solani, Nadeem Nusrat and Shahzeb Jilani all lost their jobs. Babar Sattar, Ammar Masood and several other leading columnists of Pakistan cannot write anything that goes against the approved narrative (Index on censorship, 2019) Iqbal Khattak, representative of Reporters without Borders in Pakistan said “*Journalists who are critical of the government policies are under pressure, and those who are saying that ‘everything is fine’, they have no issues as far as their security and safety are concerned*” (Hashim, 2021)

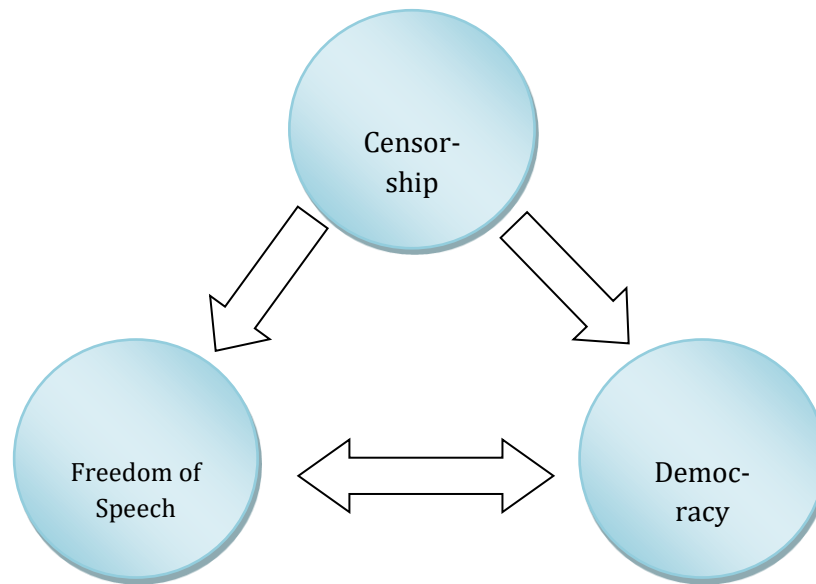
The situation of free expression in Pakistan is scathing; Pakistan has failed in execution of freedom of expression. At least eight media persons have lost their lives and 36 have been victimized under different attacks while performing of their duties, on the other hand at least 10 media persons arrested by authorities in 2020 (RSF, 2021) National and international media has been highlighting the issue of constant threats received by journalist and their families. In 2020, a legal & regulatory restriction on freedom of speech and digital content has been exercised by Pakistan’s media and internet regulatory authority. Imposing bans and suspended transmission of different private channels and restricted the services of social media are the example of dictatorial attitude of authorities towards media in Pakistan (INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS, 2021).

Censorship made the media crippled; Journalists and other media community having feeling of insecurity due to working under the shelter of threats including digital, legal and physical threats. Plentiful incidents have been reported of police attacks on journalists and threaten them while they are performing their duties (Adam 2011). Pakistani journalists faced growing violence in 2021 due to the censorship sometime imposed by government and some time by the establishment (Human Right Watch, 2022)

As per the Article 59, No trust movement against Imran Khan succeeded at 10-04-2022 and in the history of Pakistan first prime minister removed from his office through no confidence vote (Saifi & Mogul, 2022). Khan ousted as leader and this situation divided Pakistani media in different groups. One group who bash the military institution for removal of Khan, later face the consequences as well. “Arsalan Khan” journalist and well known social media personality arrested at mid night from his home (Mandhro, 2022). Another case has been observed where a well known journalist Ayaz Amir was assaulted by unknown armed

men on the road (Daily Times, 2022). Detention of journalists like Imran Riaz, Jameel Farooqi and many more for criticizing the institutions of the country has been observed (Tariq, 2022). A well known investigative journalist Arshad Sharif Shooting dead in Kenya shock the journalist community, Before he left Pakistan he faced possible provocation charges and his TV programme was banned after accusing that the military was involved with the removal of Mr Khan in April 2022 (Igunza, 2022) The culture of exploitation of journalists have become a part of daily life, during the coverage of PTI's Mrach in Hangu district located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa PTI worker kicked a journalist Aisarul Haq, broke his mobile and abused him (Dawn, 2022)

Beside these factors a parallel strategy has been adopted by Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), restricted the transmission of different news channels through cable operators is one of the most practiced tactic. Geo News, ARY News and Bol News have been often blocked by PEMRA. Iqbal Khattak said in 2018 in his interview "*Pakistan does not want to wrap behind as far as seeking full control over the media by mean of PEMRA and cyber laws*" (Abbas, 2020). Both Government and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) criticized by public on the frequent blockage of most famous News Channels (Abbas, 2020)



The diagram defines that freedom of speech and democracy is interlinked and censorship control free speech which later on cause of destabilization of democratic societies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on qualitative research method; review of previous studies that have been conducted to explore and examine the Freedom of Expression under Censorship in Democratic Pakistan. Many researchers conducted research on this topic in previous decade but it was very difficult to include all these researches in this study due to some limitations. Therefore, Prisma statement principal was adopted to select the studies. At the initial stage of filtration process research studies have been identified in open access data base services such as "Google Scholar". Key words were used to find relevant studies from this data base. 60 studies were selected in this stage, Finally 57 studies have been selected for review including 28 Research Papers, 15 Newspapers, 9 Reports of different Organizations, 2 Books and 3 Magazines, 3 studies were removed on screening and eligibility stages due to irrelevancy with the concerned topic.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Unluckily in Pakistan democracy had not sufficient time to fully grow and shine like other developed countries. Unfortunately civilian leadership of the country is in hands of conservative feudal power pattern, and the underprivileged part of society is as usual not capable to transform this political power structure. In recent years civil society has been observed more courageous and committed than ever in support of democracy. Both media and democracy are dependent on each other in strengthen the democracy in a country.

The Magnificence beauty of democracy is due to the freedom of expression because of all the roads towards autonomous avenue spring from here. Pakistan is home for traditional newspapers, television channels and social media news coverage channels. Media industry in Pakistan is facing serious pressure and threats from different political and non political players, due to the intolerant behaviour of government towards critical journalism the number of attacks on journalists and media houses are more frequent. All state and non- state actors remained involve in harassing and threatening of journalists, currently the situation of freedom of expression is quite alarming in Pakistan (Balkin, 2004)

Slow and steady the way freedom of expression is restrain in Pakistan no doubt if this situation will not be handle carefully Pakistan would become another North Korea, where general public have no right to express their feelings, thoughts and opinions, they are born to follow their rulers generations after generations.

It would be a suitable atmosphere for democracy in the presence of strong and free media. When a state is itself powerful and practiced true democratic norms, media of such state should be free from censorship. In term of growth of an individual and its participation in the development of country and spread of cultural values, digital age greatly enlarge the canvas of opportunities for the recognition of a democratic society. For a moderate political structure freedom of media, Patience and freedom of speech are the key assets. Pakistan needs such laws to ensure press freedom and discontinue the tradition of censorship. By ensuring the Right to Information and guarantee of liability make society broad and inclusive. Implementation of laws is significant to build a peaceful and democratic Pakistan.

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