



Media freedom (formerly called press freedom) considers as a significant attribute in a democratic society which respects human rights including the right to express independent views on various matters and protect people who express independent perspectives, from litigating and punishing at the court. Before political independence in 1948, although there were newspapers in Sri Lanka, no real media freedom was enjoyed by people as the colonial rule did not recognise the freedom of expression in colonies despite show off as democratic defenders at world forum. News media was free in the country at that time, was a public acceptance but the operation of free media showed that it was like a tamed wild animal and appeared that owners of the free media were acting like agents of the colonial government rather than an instrument to express independent or free views.

After the independence, the ownership of media was with rich people, who attempted to protect own political philosophy and practice. Some of these media owners had right wing political parties or were strong members of political parties and financiers. They used writers to express right wing views paying small some of money. Lakehouse, Times of Ceylon and Davasa Nivasa practiced dirty politics as media freedom. Later in 1960s, media ownership of wealthy people attempted to control the freedom of expression and indirectly influenced on political opinion, elections, and change the governments in the name of media freedom and some governments attempted to control media using various strategies such as threatening to takeover media institutions, rejecting government advertisements, or appointing a competent authority to pre-control media reports. Some analysts stated that the change of government in 1965 was a coup of so-called free media owners.

The concept of media freedom has been broadening the result of innovations in electronic media, radio and TV developments and the social media further expanded the concept and now many people have a feeling that media freedom has become an encumbrance, which has become a threat to privacy. Journalism was a

respected job in the past. The media freedom seems that respectful profession becoming to a disrespect activity in many circumstances as many journalists use the profession like prostitution. This idea is not supposed to all journalists, I accepted that there are respected, impartial and well-trained journalists in Sri Lanka.

The concept of media freedom has been a dominating issue in Sri Lanka after the establishment of Press Council and the purpose the regulator must have wild ass behaviour of certain journalists and media institutions. After 2015 elections democratic activists or NGO agents while demanding the freedom of expression and information attempted to direct journalists to go out of the limit with a view to succussing a hidden agenda. When people read newspapers, listening Radio and TV news gave feeling that the hidden agenda was to attack or unreasonably criticising the Rajapaksa regime.

Before 2015 I noticed that novelty in news media was misunderstood by journalists and they acted without self-controls. One example I can point out in 1990s, many newspapers commenced publishing various innovative supplements in newspapers like business, arts, science and gossips of film stars with a view to attracting readers and the business community and certain journalists attempted to irresponsibly criticise the economy and the stock market, which were openly growing in the market economic system in Sri Lanka. I do agree with journalists they have right to express free views, it does not mean that journalists cannot express views irresponsibly harming to the country. Free journalists did not understand that they were harming to the country and the purpose of them was to write something to make money as the journalists had a pressure from media owners to find information to fill the pages of newspaper supplements. During the war period some defence journalists did same thing for making money. After the war those journalists vanished, if they did right thing why would they became invisible. In Australia also reported this type unethical behaviour of journalists for example, infamous cash for comments could be pointed out.

Under the media freedom in Western countries, journalists would not irresponsibly criticise vital operations of the economy based on fabricated lie or make negative comments on the stock market or the economy as they consider that the economy and the stock market is the heart of the countries. The harming to the economy and the stock market, which are highly sensitive to information, would be a destructive action to the life of people. This responsibility hasn't reflected with many journalists in Sri Lanka, who used media freedom in the country like a freedom of wild ass. The most significant issue of the wild ass behaviour of journalists was that they attempted to mislead people publishing bogus information in media.

People of Sri Lanka are highly sensitive to published information in media as such published information quickly convert to gossips among ordinary people. Many foreign agencies working in Sri Lanka clearly know about this situation and use this background to spread views of them with a view to misleading people. One example was during the wartime, BBC reported some information about death of people in Jaffna, with the report presented a background picture of highland area, where were mountains, but people who really knows about Jaffna knew that information publish in BBC was suspicious as there is no mountains in Jaffna. What was the purpose of such a misleading report? During the elections in 2015, the use of media freedom accelerated to make fabrications against the Rajapaksa regime and many people determined to vote against the Rajapaksa regime believing that what were published in media was truth and what were manipulated gossips in the society were truth. Recently I read an article written by a member of NGO groups who attempted to defend the operational decisions of the Constitutional Council, which was the prime responsibility of the members of the council, who participated the meetings and discussed about issues, and not outsiders who did not participate the council meetings. However, during the past four years, accusers against the Rajapaksa regime have failed to prove their cases and gossips at the court of law and people have now feeling that media freedom

in the country is a gimmick or opening the way media people to insult others or to fabricate lie. Later court decisions have proven that certain cases presented to the courts were fabrication and the public prosecutor had difficulties to prove them and accused persons were released by the court. In an occasion, the public prosecutor failed to state the name of complainer at the court to disclose, who made complaint against a public officer of the Rajapaksa regime and without a complain, the Criminal Investigation Division conducted an inquiry in which the findings were inconsistent with the complaint. The information was published in media under the freedom of media with a view to accusing the Rajapaksa regime. What is the meaning of media freedom? The general meaning is the right to publish newspapers, magazines and other printed matter without government restriction and subject only to the law of libel, obscenity and sedition etc. Could fabricating bogus information against leading people to make money be considered as media freedom? Most probably, it is covered under the law of libel. Sri Lanka needs to allow for media freedom, but it is not for fabricating news for public with an intention to make money disregarding the rights of others. In fact, media freedom is allowing media to publish information with a strong responsibility, which means that media must report true information without purposefully fabrication in support of political parties, individuals or anyone and media people should take responsibility for each word they express. Many journalists in Sri Lanka talk about investigative journalism and they are happy to introduce themselves as investigative journalists. The practical experience is they don't investigate whether the information they published is true or fabricated. The best recent example is that many information published about the arrest of Makadure Madush were not true and most of published information were mere fabrications. I found that not a single journalist read the news report of Khalij Times and published bogus information. This type of behaviour cannot consider as media freedom.

The best example for investigative journalism is Four Corners Program in ABC TV and all formation express in