

**FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION IN SRI LANKA:  
A MULTI-FACETED APPROACH TO SAFEGUARDING THE  
RIGHT IN THE MODERN ERA**

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ABSTRACT

On the one hand, the people of Sri Lanka are entitled to the voicing of opinions, the dissemination of information, the declaration of dissent, and more under the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. On the other hand, the exercise of this right is prudently subject to the imposition of lawful, legitimate, and proportionate restrictions under the prevailing legal framework. However, this balance in the law is not reflected in actuality, and the violation, unlawful suppression and threats to the exercise of this right are evident through an examination of case law and reported incidents relating to freedom of expression of the public and the media in Sri Lanka. The article engages in doctrinal legal research with a view to delving into this state of affairs. The research indicates that this is due to the distortion and misapplication of the law, and the shifts in society created by the widespread use of internet and social media. The state catalysed by the latter has explored multiple avenues of reform, which arguably create more issues than they resolve. A multi-faceted approach to safeguarding the right to freedom of speech and expression in Sri Lanka is proposed, in lieu of reform – by the people adhering to the corresponding duties attached to the right by respecting the rights of others, by the government taking measures to safeguard and bolster the right through its actions, and by the judiciary discharging its constitutional duties and functions. The article considers this multi-faceted approach to be the way forward to guarantee the freedom of speech and expression and media freedom in Sri Lanka.

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