

Fourth Dr Amitabh Chowdhury Annual Memorial Lecture

Freedom of the Press Today by Mrs. Nalini Singh

The very first time in my entire life and I think also for the rest of my life has a Chief Justice of a High Court in India ever made a request to me, and I am absolutely delighted to be able to acknowledge – That Sir, you made a request and I have absolutely no alternative but to comply. Hon'ble Justice Chelmeshwar, Justice D. N. Chowdhury other Judges over here, lawyers and extremely distinguished audience that I see over here I saw a writing that the family had prepared on Dr. Amitabh Chowdhury and the last line said, “ **Happy birthday Amitabh** ”, is the kind of line that leaves almost no eye moist and it didn't leave mine. *He would have been 38 today and I think in his short life he understood the essence, the distilled essence of life which is to be kinder than necessary. And I was just looking at these lines and I am sure that you would agree that this is what perhaps he thought,*

*I shall pass this world but once
If there is any kindness I can show
Or any good thing that I can do
Let me not defer it
For I shall not pass this way again.*

The tide of Dr. Amitabh's memory has receded but I am sure that it has left behind bright seashells. The sun has gone down, but I can see that the gentle warmth lingers - for everyday that has passed something quite beautiful has

*remained of this young man - the beloved of his family. The Doctor of our country
– a promising Doctor of our country*

I am very grateful to the Chowdhury family for having bestowed this honour on me to come and deliver the fourth extremely prestigious Dr. Amitabh Chowdhury Memorial lecture and my thanks to not only Mr. D.N. Chowdhury but to his wife, to Dr. Anupama Hazarika Chowdhury- the wife of Dr. Amitabh Chowdhury, to Arunabh and Shruti Chowdhury and to Barnali Chowdhury all of whom has been in touch with me and I am really grateful to them. I am also actually very grateful to the audience for also giving me their attention for the next few minutes.

It is said that there is not a thought which is being thought in east or west of Paris that is not active in an Indian mind and particularly in an Assamese mind because - I have been to know the brilliance of the Assamese people who are in the State. I have been here several times, before to shoot. Whether it is that I was shooting on the Brahmaputra or in Barpeta on the border – you know I have been struck by, I just had to look up and I had an Assamese cameraman and I had to look up and he had already taken the shot and the incisiveness with which people approach the subject that you are at that time investigating was just fantastic. So, it is quite probable that whatever I say today you have heard before. Because as I say there isn't a thought active in an Indian mind that is not active in an Assamese mind. But, I am also very daunted by these distinguished speakers that you have had for this lecture series; who really are you know towering personalities of our country. And because for a Television person to talk for almost one hour of even half and hour is akin to impossible because we are used to 30 second sound bytes, when it becomes 31 seconds we are blinking and saying - you know the guy has spoken too much. But I shall try, when

Arunabh asked me for the topic I was in the middle of exactly this news in Nepal Channel I, just thought. Ok let's think of something generic — how about Press Freedom today and that looked like a generic topic—topical as well as macro enough for me to be able to swing through it. But what really happened is I did not realize when I said that I'll do this that it will become so relevant and it will be in such ferocious focus so soon. You have over here since that time that we discussed the AANLA (The All Adivasi National Liberation Army) which has indulged in, as far as I can read, in some of the insolent violent killing; you have the Dispur incident and the controversy of the national coverage and the regional coverage. You have in the meantime Taslima Nasreen who was bowed out of West Bengal and then, she had to delete three pages from her book. You have the Gujrat election and the coverage of the Gujrat elections by the media; how fair were they? How fair was that coverage? You have the announcement of victorio /defeat in the forthcoming Assam Panchayat Elections. How free is the media being when it is doing this? So it questions? But we live in complex times. There is an old Chinese proverb which says that the rot starts at the top. The rot starts in the head. Now where there is a monarchy, the rot starts with the King but we are a democracy and here the rot travels like the rot of violence and terrorism and insurgency and intolerance and corruption and injustice, exploitation. It travels from one cluster to another. So it is in this context, that I would like to locate the issue of the Freedom of the Press which in its essence is actually a moral concept. It is not an absolute legal right and I am sure that young media persons who are coming along right now would want to know this and would want to memorize it forever that it is actually a moral concept and therefore remember the rot that I talked about - when the rot spreads, are you going to be a journalist who is using the Freedom of the Press by looking at the rot through half learnt clichés? Or are you going to be recognizing the rot for what it is? Now before I try to open this issue and the issue of Freedom of the Press, I would like

to linger on the concepts of operating reality of the Freedom of the Press today. How is it operating? You know, you and I know that the Freedom of the Press exists but it is not very clearly defined. And if you ask me today, I am going to hide very soon behind some legalities. But before I do that I would say that the Freedom of the Press, as we understand is being very strongly violated by some particular sections of our society — And I am not talking about arm twisting politicians or brutal policeman - I am not talking about them. I am talking about the owners of the media. I am talking about the worrying phenomenon of concentration of the media in a very few hands. And I am talking about the rather cosy relationship between media persons, between editors, media persons and politicians. I am saying to you that these are thwarting. The very Freedom of the Press that we have got today, - which is being given to us by the Constitution. Let me give you a very small example of the misuse of the Freedom of the Press. Recently by the media you can see it almost every evening. But you know – this may be six to eight weeks ago –there were three simultaneous bomb blasts in three District Courts of Uttar Pradesh; three different areas – Lucknow, Faizabad, one more. And so far a minute all the telecast turned to this and there was what I would call an immediate description of what had happened more than a description. It was not a description but analysis – very thin on the ground. But anyway the media, the news channels turned to that. And there was almost a kind of building at up... it was quite a hype... it was quite shrill... it was quite dramatic. And suddenly it all stopped... all through the Channel it stopped. And Channels went back on a day when there had been bomb blast in three District Courts of Utar Pradesh – Channels went back to the Song and Dance and bounce of *Aaja- Naachele* – the talent competition of Dance. Now I would like to say that because it happened and because I was going to come to Guwahati – I had spent the last two days looking at Prime Time. What Prime Time, most popular News Channel is actually showing at Prime Time? Allow me to quote:

and I quote from the Slug that appear – the attractive slugs that came and go and come and go ... I do it all the time Here allow me to read this –

PRIME Time News:

Kathrina Kaif ka bayan... Sallu meri Secretary nahi... Mallaika Arora ki chayya chayya... Body bole tota thayya (some wrestler was going along to music)

Zamma Zhum Zoom Zoom India... Mumbai

Police ke Rangeen Saam that was attended by the Bachhan family and by several filmstarts.

Naag nagin ka bibah... Raju ke hasi thiloli - which is Raju Srivastava , the extremely important comedian of our times... Yeah Cricket hain rangeen – about some party by cricketers who were with Filmstars and Ghaas Khau masti raho – somebody whose diet is grass.

Now I would like to say to you that in my Dictionary this Prime Time News shows me that several of our News Channels are now using the Freedom of the Press to Press for Freedom of News, they are actually using Freedom of the Press to not give us the News that the country needs and I am saying most... but not all. Now owners here as well as those who would hear this later – You know that you will agree with my cynicisms. But think on the other hand what a vibrant media with competing independent newspapers, competing Independent TV Channels, Internet, websites with different content would do? This if we have had this diversity – if we had this huge menu it would empower even the destitute – and that is not gain completely as the corporate sector says “Net gain for the

community”. But the question is why are we not hearing different voices on the media now.

Really I expect to be throttled by the media after what I will say- and my opinion is “Media content, has passed in to the hands of the Marketing Department if Media organisation” and an insider in the Sales side of a prominent TV Channel told me that actually we are told that you don’t allow customer to put the phone down until he buys or he dies. May be that is hyperbole but since Market surveys are showing a huge popular wave for entertainment related stories which you also might be watching and appreciating – so today news is entertainment package. In fact you know if Kareena Kapoor changes her boyfriend – it is packaged like an earth quake. Have you ever noticed the music that goes with it... have you ever noticed how we do the graphics... have you noticed how we use it to show her in the skimpiest clothes and very lovely dance movement? It is also an earth quake if a very big megastar changes his wig. These are the earthquakes of our time. So when the marketing department almost dictating the headlines then you tell me and I am going to ask some question later. When they say – these headlines are sexy in our parlance then how free is the press? I want to make this point very early in the statements today because than all the sound and furies surrounding the Freedom of the Press appears actually quite delusion. But I would like to pause and say that I am claiming fully that in the last 60 years of the Indian Press has made such strides and it has made such progress that it has held – it has established new norms of accountability. But today we are in different times – today we are going through a different phase. So I think in an essence just to sum up before I go forward what I have said that today we are in danger of the Freedom of the Press being thwarted by the owner of the media, by the concentration of the media in few hands, by the cozy relationship with politicians of the media and by also the short

attention span of the media personnel – I will come to the later, but also because of the strangle hold of the Marketing Department on the content. Now what I would like to ask you, or what I would like to bring to your attention is that in today's context of terrorism and insurgencies and exploitation and self centered politics and you know epiportion of corruption. Today ironically Marketing Gurus will sit side by side with Terrorism experts to determine how to revamp the media; the engines of the Media. This for me is actually the reality of the Media today. Now let me come to what exactly the Freedom of the Press is? I was just setting the context or I see it and to some extent; to a larger or smaller extent I am an insider and I am telling you how it is like – not to criticize but to say to you - walk with us... to say where we should go now so what is the Freedom of Press?? What are the contours? What is the substance? And it is absolutely foolish of me to define the Freedom of the Press in the presence of such distinguished legal luminaries, such distinguished audience. But you do know that constitutionally no media has absolute freedom and no media has the absolute right to say or show or right to communicate whatever it wants. And I don't need to tell their audience here that the Freedom of the Press has not been explicitly provided in our Constitution and you see now I am on shaky grounds so I am reading. Provided in our Constitution but it is implicit in the Fundamental Rights pertaining to Freedom of Speech and Expression. And Sir you'll forgive me if I just mention the Clause – Freedom of Speech is guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution which says that I quote: *"All citizens shall have the rights – (a) to freedom of speech and expression"* and their right is available to every Indian citizen. But the explanatory note is very important because it says – this right does not affect the State's right to restrict the operation of our Rights to Freedom of expression in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India and this were used to muzzle the emergency from 1975 – 1977. This was exactly this was said to protect the sovereignty and integrity of India. It was required that the

media be censored. And also you would recall that when the Janata Dal Government came into power, the Information and Broadcasting Minister at that time said. But you know journalists had only been asked to bend yet they crawled. But of course I must say there were some journalists there were some publications that were absolutely unbending and did not succumb to these and the Indian Express must be mentioned in this context. Further recall there was Sadhana in Marathi, there was Bhoomiputra in Gujarati, there was Seminar (a monthly journal) there was Opinion (a weekly) there were some publications – but the rest of the unbent down literally on our knees. But there was a very important other clause that was introduced in 1951 – Please correct me if I am wrong – that to this day it still gives Government powers to intercept material going to the Press through the Post and Telegraph system and this is called the Press (Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matters) Act . Now you know technology has overtaken P&T, it has overtaken the powers of the Government in intercepting materials but it is important to recall this – It is important to say that this exist or it existed because it shows that you have to be alert against the mindset of the Government all the time and the intent of the Government all the time. But it still needs to be said that in the prevailing today in our context in which we operated the media there is under the law “No prior Censorship by the State except for Government media”. But Government today are going to very seriously compromise the Freedom of the Press by withholding information by giving wrong information wrong leaks by selective information or dis-information ... by turning off the patronage of Government advertisements which are vital for our existence. But it is also by Media itself which acts under pressure of big compromises. Now I see all these forms of suppression of Press Freedom or not suppression exactly but dilution of Press Freedom growing – It’s a dangerous trend. But I see it growing subtlety perhaps but if you watch carefully you see that it is coming. Now I would first like to say that how effective is any... what is the

point of having a elected House of Parliament or a Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha, Vidhan Sabhas; if you don't have an absolutely dynamic fearless go getting Press – which doesn't enjoy freedom? And if you cant ask questions of Ministers and Government's in the Press? Then soon you'll have a Government which is not only defective Government, but a corrupt Government, a bullying Government an imperious Government and ultimately perhaps even a tyrannical Government But if you have this Freedom of asking them conversely then it is a healthy Government with diversity of views – where the pompous Government with diversity of views – where the pompous and the secretive can be exposed and that's where we really have always hoped that you would go. But it is – what I would like to say is that the Freedom of the Press therefore is not a privilege but it is absolutely, completely necessary for the foundations of a democratic society. So if we have got these freedoms it is because we want a democracy and we want it to be the most powerful and we want it to be the most powerful democracy. If possible and of you please note – that every time a dictator takes over a country, the first thing they do is to muzzle the Press – Pakistan on 3rd November; the King of Nepal on 1st February 2005. You know along with other Television Channels at that time ours went off air was the first one to be banned and the last one in the world to come back on there – And I am just saying look at Pakistan and so the first thing that was done was many channels are off air in Pakistan. But because you cant have a Press that is snooping around and then reporting. That does not work for a Dictator. It works for a democracy or it must work for a Democracy. So I would say that the most desirable feature in fact the conflict between Press Freedom and the authorities is at least two hundred twenty years old. And Sir you mentioned – Churchill and I think I am also mentioning about some English Prime Minister whose name I don't know but he did say that “Were it left to me to decide whether we shall have a Government without Newspapers or Newspapers without a Government I should not hesitate

a moment to prefer the latter” So obviously there is a huge place in a democracy, in people’s minds and hearts’ for a Free Press. But you know the most important I think that most important feature of the Press is this that it exposes the Truth. And you are quite aware that it was not – I am not yet sure of how many decades ago? But until a few decades ago there was a ... it was not the Countries like the UK... In fact a country like UK, truth didn’t matter, the Government decided what was seditious or obscene or immoral or treasonable. Of course the situation has changed completely today – but the notion of truth in public interest is accepted or a complete defence in cases of libel and defamation and if I am wrong then the Chief Justice will surely correct my wrong statement. But so much do we honour the truth in our societies that this is and this is what the Press is supposed to do. I just want to mention very briefly that there a very important case which took place I think in the 30’s of the last century... still important enough for us to go back to it was in the US – in Minnesota and what happened here – is that there was a Newspaper called “The Saturday Press” that went to press and it is abused what were then called the Black... it was ethnic abuses. It also then went and exposed corruption amongst the politicians and the Minnesota District Court thought it absolutely fit to ban it – to ban the paper and it was stopped publication. Now, the paper had to stop but it went on to the Supreme Court. And I must mention because it is so fundamental to the modern Press clause – jurisprudence in America and also because it affects us I would just quote the Supreme Court for a second – “The Supreme Court ruled that ‘no government except in case of war time, emergency can curtail a Newspaper’s Constitutional right to publish” and had TV been present ... omnipresent then it would have definitely included News Channel. This does not mean that you cannot go to Court against Newspapers or you can not go against a Newspaper or a Television Channel for defamation and you do, when you must. But that was ruled ... this is a fundamental statement. I mean how they remind you of the very

famous case of the Pentagon Papers which must have been fresh in the memory of some of you here – that the Pentagon Papers which must have been fresh in the memory of some of you here – that the Pentagon Papers showed how terribly wrong the Government – the US Government had gone in its policy on Vietnam. And the New York Times started publishing it but the Government went to Court but all the papers started publishing it. In fact if one was stopped, the other started publishing it and here also it was said that the American Supreme Court again ruled... that the Government had no business to censure Newspapers or prevent the disclosure of what might prove embarrassing information. So, I would say that the dominant direction in which all the democracies of the world – the modern democracies of the world dominate direction that this is taken by the issue of the Press Freedom – this one of the openness and one of giving out in the press – information that is embarrassing to the Government; but good for the country. Now, you know I would like to say why have I mentioned Minnesota? But especially when you cant take the good. But I think today, we have to stand up before we do that. Also this is not original research which I did and I would give credit immediately to the person who has done it but allow me to just give you a ... allow me to use a verb first that we must press for the Publication of an official Enquiry Report called the “Brooks Bhagat Report” on what went wrong for India during the “Chinese Aggression” of 1962? At the operational level? Now?

But obviously there is an element of hope that we are going to get information out - which is also something one must learn as a Science. But you know I cannot pretend that leaders don't pay a price for this; and back to- I am not going to talk about any of our leaders you will see, for very delicate reasons. Let me go back two hundred and twenty years, if I am not mistaken- that's when Thomas Jefferson was the President of America. *“See how careful I am being? When I have a controversial thing to say I talk about UK and USA and not India!”* Anyway

Thomas Jefferson was in the middle of his career as the President and the Press revealed he had a liaison with one of his slaves named Sally Hemmings with whom the Press alleged that he had had a brood of children. Yet even when he, Thomas Jefferson believed that the Press was filled with venom against him, he maintained his faith in the necessity of a free Press in a Democratic society. But, he told a friend in great disgust and I quote- *"They fill their Newspapers with falsehood, calumnies (I haven't heard that word a long time), and audacities... "They fill their newspapers with falsehoods, calumnies and audacities," but "I shall protect them in their right of lying and calumniating."* So it is quite clear that leaders have recognized that the Press has to be free- BUT WILL THEY ALLOW US OPERATE? WILL WE GET OUT OF THE STRANGLEHOLD OF OUR OWN CHANGING MINDSET- THE MINDSET WHICH IS ENTERTAINMENT AS NEWS? So to recap again and I am recapping because I have these few points, which I would like to bring to your attention-

1. that the Freedom of the Press is not absolute;
2. that it carries obligation... and I am not sure that we discharge them all the time as a Press;
3. that the Press is threatened by the owners of the media – by the concentration of the media ownership in the hands of the few; by precipitous damming down, by being too close to the Politicians;
4. And finally because the media has a very short attention span.

As I keep saying the media has done has fantastic things. But now and in the last little bit of my observation, I am not going to call it a speech. But I would just like to say that- *lets turn to the last few days of these socio political security context of today and that's where the Press Freedom today comes from- What can we say about the Freedom of the Press today?* We operate in time- Where our Army is battling terrorism! Where there are well known insurgency and

separatist movement- and Assam is no stranger to these movements! Where 60% of our Districts are under the influence or in direct control of Naxalites! In these circumstances- what is the scope of the Freedom of the Press? Take militants and separatist, who are engaged in splitting the country as an objective. ***Should we show the gut tearing killings by Terrorists? If we do are we supplying them the exact oxygen of Publicity that they want? If we don't then are we shielding the terrorist and therefore supporting their anti India activities? Are we furthering the objectives of the Terrorist?*** When we play an audio cassette of a Terrorist leader, ponder for a moment- ***what exactly are we doing?*** These questions become critical; these questions become critical in exercising the Freedom of the Press. So we have to keep examining these questions- ***What shall we show? What shall we exclude? How much restraint shall we exercise?*** But the problem is ... or rather the issue is that the nightly TRP (*Television Rating Point*) wars prevent us from being thoughtful. If I could do it... he would do it and what happens to my reputation? What happens to the reputation of my Channel? So we have the TRP wars that are preventing us from exercising due thoughtfulness. But the truth also is that- still this is an unsettled and dangerous question for the media just now. And an extremely extremely nebulous code of conduct seems to be operating here. That's all I will say... I can't say I know what the next person will do- I don't know and I don't think we are in a position today to be able to... specially from the world of Television, that we will be able to say, we will do this and we won't do this. But at the same time I don't know if it is going towards more openness, much more openness, perhaps much more openness than is necessary. But I would say that in this very important dimension of our time that we the Press, the media, do need a '*Media Established Code of Ethnic and Terrorism Reporting*'. We will do it ourselves, we don't need Government. But much more serious than this... even more serious than I think Terrorism... something which is parading the entire

society...and it is in the context of our divided society that I speak. The divided society that we the Press, the Media operated we have inherited a divided society, but the Politicians have driven us further, they have driven wedges into us further. This is because they base almost their entire politics on Identity Politics- On who are you and who am I? What caste? What religion? Long hair; Short hair; Gender; Child; Age- On identity politics, what we call Vote Bank politics. What is happening is that the vote identifies me as an ethnic group; and they whip up my identity as an ethnic group. It is after this that they tell me, you know- WHO ARE YOU? YOU ARE A VICTIM. So first there is an identity as an ethnic group and then the perception of victimisation. What happens thereafter is that decades and decades of Government neglect somewhere in our society transforms this politically engineered chaos and we the Media keep the bubble; keep this whole pot on the boil. We also do our bit. So I would say that the relationship between the Press and the Politicians is not a balanced one. As I said earlier, it is worryingly chummy...it is worryingly friendship or it is actively hostile. What I find, I may be wrong, I don't live in a small state anymore so I am not very familiar – lost that touch. But I would say that I don't think that there are more extreme of a relationship that I see in the States. And in the states extreme of chumminess, extreme of hostility and you may not agree with me, but you remember how a Chief Minister of a State compared the Press to Scorpions and Snakes because they had gone after him. And I think they have done something really really reptilian that the Government in Tamil Nadu made so called scurrilous reporting a non bailable offence. But there is still a little BUT left here- this is where our States are concerned. But I am back to my Press Barons and I am just saying media barons are sitting here also. Well I am just saying that what has happened is that you have bought in or rather we have bought in , I am also a very very small time owner of a News Channel. We have bought in top drawer salaries. We have brought in our Journalist and ourselves into some sort of you

know- socio and glamorous existence. There is a new assimilation of glamour and of socio acceptability in our profession. Here I am not saying, *'Don't draw top drawer salaries, but I am just saying- observe it as a phenomenon- that the integration of Journalists into a socio economic and political establishment is complete.* I want you to think, please don't accept a statement from me. I want you to think- 'Whether this is compromising the fearlessness that Journalist must exercise. That they must not forget that must be a part of their DNA, they must be fearless and uncompromising about the great research that they have to do. Just think about it. Again please don't ask me for answers; else I will get into further deeper trouble with my own community. But what I would personally like to say is that I would personally consider it a great honour to be criticised by the Politicians for exposing their vote bank politics and would consider it a great honour to expose the role of the various Governments in inciting ethnic violence. And such exposure would be a good application of the Freedom of the Press and of course they'll invite criticisms. But I think, you know that as a Journalist somewhere you have to remember the definition of NEWS. ***That News is- what somebody somewhere wants to suppress. All else is Advertising.*** So the challenge is – I think the challenge is using the Freedom of the Press as it is using the Freedom of the Press as it is available to us. It is to expose completely today's treacherous religion, caste ethnicity, corruption based compromised politics. And the self and indulgent hate filled violent politics of insurgents- mouthful and I have written it down but I meant every part of it. Without sounding Xenophobic, I would like to say that I think that I don't really see, well I am not a great admirer of- or shall I put it another way, positive way- that I am a great admirer of local ownership of the local media. And whereas National media is not ignorant about what goes on at the local level. But I don't think that foreign investment and foreign media and you know handing over the rates of, editorial rates whatever to the foreign media is not going to be productive because they

will not understand the subtleties of News. So, I would like to emphasize by saying that I don't quite back foreign intervention in local media. Infact I am absolutely willing to say that I really have absolutely no touch with Media in Assam, and I don't know infact someone should be coming up and saying, 'Ah here is the money...lets add up something. I am not terribly sure ... I mean it is a question that has to be asked. But I would say that, 'in order to exercise Freedom of the Press Journalist have to be extremely extremely well informed. And here I cannot emphasize enough the primacy of reporting. ***Go out to the field and get the story. Don't go to the Internet or the Television set or to the Regional Press or to the Local Press. Even for here, for Guwahati- there is nothing like primacy of Reporting.*** But I would say the Bifocal tradition that we have in our country- we must also be outward looking. I am just going to add a word in another four minutes. I would like to say that in a speech that has been quoted quite often these days – made by the Chinese Prime Minister in Singapore. He said that he had actually done a survey of the GDP growth- let's say just the rate of growth of China. '*Each time the China became inward looking...*' he said, '*that the rate of growth fell*'. '*Each time it became outward looking the rate of growth had risen; had soared*'. And you can see what's happening in China today as it is outward looking. And I would say that to a large extent it also applies to the Journalists- because once you are outward looking, you can contextualise reporting of your own region, much more accurately. This is because you know; because you know what the World is up saying about your own region. So I would plead for that. But just to give a very small example of this do you know when - well I have it on authority that just months before 9/11; before the World Trade Tower fell, that American Channels, American Newspapers started withdrawing maybe for economic reasons, financial reasons their correspondence with various parts of the World. So over the months they lost that touch for what the World was saying about America and how anti

Americanism was surging at. I have it on authority that in the week before 9/11 a two member Committee- one a Democrat and one a Republican who had gone to Europe and the Middle East came back and called a Press Conference, at which they said that a large number of Americans will die on American soil. The New York Times Correspondent was there in the week before 9/11. He left the meeting said, *'what a waste of time'*? You can see what happens when we are only looking inward. What happens that you do not get the bells, you do not allow other stimuli in your brain and you say you are doing a great job- I am local. You have to be local. I just want to inform the younger Press people who may be here- that it is as much about being inward looking as what inertia and therefore I would say that- You know we have to. Infact I too- it doesn't matter how many years you have spent in the media. That if you won't exercise Freedom of the Press then you Press for Freedom from learnt clichés, learnt helplessness, press for freedom from the rut in which we fall. And we say, *'We only do it like this because these are whole dynamic times that humankind has ever seen and we are reporting on them. So how can we be in a rut?'* To this I would say, *'How free do you think the Media would be?'* And I am actually just going to touch two or three more points. If it doesn't stick with a story, you and I know. You have seen the Channel. You have seen the Newspapers- that you have a story breaking out in the morning and everybody goes for that story and in about an hour or two that story is over. People are running the world is running towards something else. I am just saying that you stick with a story and because you have to. There is no point putting out the story once, it doesn't register. Stick with a story- SAY IT AND SAY IT AND SAY IT. And you know, you might say- but it is very thin on the ground. What should I say there is no more News. But surprisingly and this is what I have noticed, that once you stick with a story, you become a magnet for information. And you and I know how many stories there are that we should have struck with and we didn't. What I would like to bring to

your notice is that, ***'Freedom of the Press means you never say the End to some Stories. You never say the End to a child pedophile. You never say the End to the dastardly rapist. You never say the End to a missing Child. You investigate, investigate and you never let your editor say that, 'this story is finished'. You investigate, investigate and you never let your editor say- that this story is finished.'*** That's real Freedom and I would say and I am going to read this carefully so that I don't make a mistake because it is very delicate. ***'That in my Book of Journalism a world disrepute of token patriotism, of jingoism calmly serves the country by making those in authority accountable'. We must not suppress News because the Government doesn't like something appearing in the Press- that is false patriotism ...*** and in my last concluding remarks I will return to this. But having said this, I must also emphasize that we Journalist must respect Security measures. Every measure is not there to thwart our Freedom of the Press. We have to respect restraint as Justice D.N. Chowdhury spoke about. But we should not regard everything as an Assault on the Freedom of the Press- think before you do that. Here I would like to say that the prickly dimensions of the Freedom of the Press remain. Tell me- What would you do if- would you, should you, give information to the Government if it is against the sovereignty, integrity of the Country? I will give a small example- not from India again. But the Thirty Years War in Northern Ireland. There an English Journalist was doing some depth research some kind of in-depth reporting for maybe a very long article. And he realised when he was there in Northern Ireland that the Irish Militia had a very very good plan to blow up a garrison that night. He heard the whole story- he came back to his lodging where he was and wrote intensive notes on it. You know whatever he remembered first person he wrote – that name, that name etc. He did not inform the Government and two hundred young men were blown up. *Now would you call that, exercising the Freedom of the Press'?* I absolutely will

say without a thought that I would have told our Government. And if that means I am not exercising the Freedom of the Press so be it. But that brings me to the end and I really am taking you away from questions of Freedom of the Press, but in the context of our minds as a Media person- A vendor, a person who earns you know - who is on the brink of going from poverty to some sort of level of lower middle classiness. A vendor, a street vendor is not given his place on the road by a Municipal Authority in Kapurthala in Punjab. So media person's advised him, you better emulate yourself and really I have seen those shots. So he starts and says- OK tomorrow we will do it, so they garland him and all and he sets fire to the corner of his Kurta and I have heard them saying, '*Arey Yaar hato, hato*'. Somebody goes to him and says, '*What are you doing? You can't set fire.*' The media guy and the cameraperson retort back, '*Arey yaar hato shot kharab ho rahe hai, abhi nai karo, thora aur ruk jao*'. So the fire spreads and this guy tries to go again he says, *nai nai*. And you know the fire consumes this man- ***Is that Freedom of the Press?***

In Varanasi five innocent labourers who are again very annoyed with their Boss or whoever is giving them salary were told that you take poison and they drink poison and they die...

*One Priest has been beaten up in Vadodara... and how is it that the Cameraman, the Camera attendant and one reporter... three huge, you know three strong men is there but the Priest is getting beaten up, beaten up. Again I would like to raise the question- ***Is this Freedom of the Press?*** I mean I would like to say that, *Is this Freedom of the Press*. I mean I would like to ask you but I have posited such a Question and I want to leave you on a disquieting note on a night picture- that here is a dark street, also a quiet street deserted and you see a man leading a four year old girl somewhere and you know that the man is a stranger to the girl and he is just leading her to an abandoned house. Would you take out your pen and start noting? Would you call for your camera? This is a*

great story, there is going to be a *rape* and possibly a *murder*. Or would you call the Police? I am not going to answer that again. But I think these questions I want you to know that these questions bother us and on National Television actually it was on Doordarshan on an occasion when Doordarshan had a debate. I think that it was just two or three months ago- and I said, *Suppose such a thing is happening- Suppose that a man is burning himself- what are you going to do?* Two of India's most prominent Journalist in Hindi and English medium languages and I was just sitting there and I asked them that- *What would you do- this guy is burning himself, you are getting your camera to take the shot? Why? You are showing it why?* And these people said, *'Sorry, we are not Activist, we are observers, we are Journalist. We are Observers we are not Social Workers'*. **That answer is totally unacceptable to me and I want it to rancour you.** I thank you so much for listening to me. *I just want to at the end say that this is true imprisonment by the Press of the Press. If we say that we are not going to intervene because we are observers I don't understand that language. But I would like to say that, first and last Journalists are citizens of the Country with no special powers. I am disturbed that I think earlier our Chairperson said that 'the media has become so powerful'. I would have been happier if he had said, 'Media has become so truthful'. I plead you; knock the capital 'M' out of the media. And we are not special! We can exercise Freedom of the Press best when we regard ourselves as really ordinary citizens whose primary job is to hold Government responsible in real time, and to expose the truth as ordinary citizens.* THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR LISTENING!