

Summary

Apart from various theories propounded in the last seventy or eighty years, there are four major theories of press also known as the normative theories

Mass media, although free in general sense, has to function under state controls. Freedom of thought, according to authoritarian approach, was guarded jealously, by the few individuals in the ruling classes, who are worried about the emergence of a new middle class and the impact of media on the middle class thought process.

In the authoritarian media theory, press censorship was justified and defended on the grounds that the state, as the caretaker of the people, should always take precedence over the freedom of expression of the people.

Friedrich Engels, a German thinker posited that only authoritarianism can ensure and protect the right to freedom.

The free press theory advocates removal of all restraints on media. The theory has its origins in the seventeenth century England where the invention and spread printing press took place.

Advocates of the free press theory were, an early sixteenth century philosopher, Lao Tzu; a seventeenth century British philosopher, John Locke; the epic poet (Aeropagitica), John Milton; and an essayist (who has written On Liberty), John Stuart Mill.

In their book Four Theories of Press, Wilbur Schramm, Siebert and Theodore Paterson, criticized the 'free press theory' stating 'pure libertarianism is antiquated, outdated and obsolete.' They advocated that the 'social responsibility theory' is more relevant and practical than the 'free press theory'.

Social responsibility theory thus advocates a conscientious practice of media ethics should precede the right of free expression.

Marx and Engels posited the communist media theory according to which 'the ideas of the ruling classes are the ruling ideas'. They believed the bourgeois ideology pervaded throughout the mass media.

The communist media theory advocated that the responsibility of mass media was educating the masses of workers and peasants rather than simply giving out information. The public must be encouraged to give feedback which helps the media to cater to the public interests.

The communist media theory justifies the state control on the basis of the communist theory that the socialist revolution would be led by the proletariat comprising of peasants and workers