

Censorship comes to Harvard. Of Subramanian Swamy, free speech and the need for vigilance - Dr. Jeffrey Lant, Harvard alumnus.

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Censorship comes to Harvard. Of Subramanian Swamy, free speech, and the need for constant vigilance.
by Dr. Jeffrey Lant

"I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Voltaire

Voltaire was that most inconvenient of people... a man who had something to say, something that often riled his neighbors and outraged the conventions. Worse, at whatever cost he would have his say... while encouraging you to have yours. For, you see, Voltaire understood that when one person censors another, for any reason good or bad, you have begun the process whereby one person controls another... and that this control is invidious both for the person controlling and the person being controlled. Thus, free speech, while so often so disturbing, is absolutely necessary for all... and any attempt to limit, curtail, or restrict such speech must be promptly, vigorously, and thoroughly combated....

Especially when it occurs at the great educational institutions of the world... and most of all when it occurs at the greatest educational institution of all — Harvard... my Harvard, which has this day forgotten its calling and the motto which you see everywhere here — Veritas (truth) — and which relies on free speech for its realization.

Here are the facts.

On 13 July 2011, the great city of Mumbai, India was the victim of three coordinated bomb explosions. These blasts occurred at the Opera House, Zaveri Bazaar, and Dadar West. 26 people like you and me died at once... 130 more were injured. Now before I give you another fact, I want you to think — really think — how you would have felt had these coordinated outrages of malice and hatred taken place in your town, against your friends, neighbors and co-religionists?

What would you have said and done? Well, that's how the violated and grieving people of Mumbai felt about the outrageous events of what they call 13/7. And you will not understand this matter until you understand this... for it provides the necessary context for what happened later.

At this moment of terrible anger, unfathomable rage, profound grief, suffering and an acute desire — and entirely understandable, too — for revenge, swift, punitive, hurtful, one of India's best known, most articulate, and often incendiary politicians, sat down, to write from his heart (and political calculus) about the events that had just occurred, why they had occurred and what must be done so they would not occur again.

The result was an article entitled "How to wipe out Islamic terrorism". It was published July 16, 2011 in the "Daily News and Analysis"... where it touched a grieving nation, and not always for good either. Controversial doesn't begin to describe it.

What Dr. Subramanian advocated.

Subramanian, a man with the gift of clarity, (so necessary in an active politician with future posts and government emoluments on his mind), is a clear writer whose meaning it is difficult to misunderstand. His ideas — and the words which convey them — are bold, thought-provoking, respecters of no persons or current expedients. Thus, he proposed

- * removal of an iconic mosque on the site of a Hindu temple;
- * the additional removal of another 300 mosques;
- * a proposal that non-Hindus can vote "only if they proudly acknowledge that their ancestors are Hindus," and
- * enacting a "national law prohibiting conversion from Hindu religion to any other religion."

Now consider this, Dr. Subramanian has been, and more than once, too, a Cabinet minister, often elected to Parliament, leader of the Janata Party. His controversial remarks in his now infamous opinion piece must be read as an attempt to rally support for his party and so increase his influence and chances for election; thus, business as usual. And if you read the column as it was meant to be read — as a political manifesto — while you might not agree with it, you most assuredly would never advocate the censure and suppression of even a single word... Unless you were one of several faculty members at Harvard University, thought police scrutinizing their colleague... Dr. Swamy Subramanian, Ph.D. graduate of Harvard and long-time professor of Economics therein. These thought police

decided after becoming aware of this column that Economics professor Subramanian must be censored and punished at Harvard for the remarks of Indian statesman Subramanian. And lead by one Diana Eck, the comparative religion professor, Subramanian was deprived of his economics post... to the outrage of every person at Harvard who believes Voltaire was right, not Ms. Eck. She said Subramanian's remarks were an "open incitement to violence" and decided to Do Something about the menace that was Subramanian.

And here misjudgment morphs into chicanery and unfairness... to the shame of participants and of Harvard itself.

It so happened that a meeting was being held to approve this year's summer classes. As you may imagine, this is more in the nature of a pro forma affair; something most professors skip without a pang. But this time the dean of the summer school sent a private note to professors who opposed Subramanian and his remarks and were desirous of stripping him of his teaching duties (and salary), thereby completely removing him and his inconvenient opinions from Harvard, showing him who's boss... all without giving him the chance to respond and have his say. Subramanian said it was like the Spanish Inquisition, but there the charged were allowed to respond... as he most assuredly was not.

And so Veritas — and fairness, too — was outraged because the professor of comparative religion didn't approve of the religious views and resulting policy proposals of a Hindu professor of economics. Really, this might have been the University of Toledo in the 15th century when such disagreements lead to an auto da fe.

But this is Harvard, year 2012, and the charred flesh of Subramanian is not acceptable to anyone but Ms. Eck and her adherents. Thus, more clear thinking souls must intervene, souls who realize the bias and bigotry of Eck must not be allowed to besmirch and obscure the abiding genius of Voltaire's celebrated observation.

Dr. Subramanian and his economics classes must be reinstated and he must be explicitly told by Harvard President Drew Faust, too, that his views are his views and that is that. Ms. Eck should be cautioned, quietly and subtly of course in the Harvard way; a copy of the Bill of Rights slipped under her door. And the summer school dean reminded that a person charged with anything must be allowed his say, too. This is the way of the nation and of Harvard. Ms Eck should also be reminded of this I feel sure all this will occur in due course and promptly... for a Harvard at war with Voltaire will never do.

As for you, Dr. Subramanian, let me say this: I have defended you here, as staunchly as Voltaire himself could have wished. Now I comment on your column and your views: they are abhorrent, antiquated, infra dig for a Harvard man, and shameful, too; they will inflame, not solve... and you know it. I wouldn't be adhering to the high standards of Veritas if I didn't say so. But I have...

*** What do you think? We invite your comments below.

About the Author

Harvard-educated Dr. Jeffrey Lant is CEO of Worldprofit, Inc., providing a wide range of online services for small and-home based businesses. Services include home business training, affiliate marketing training, earn-at-home programs, traffic tools, advertising, webcasting, hosting, design, WordPress Blogs and more. Find out why Worldprofit is considered the # 1 online Home Business Training program by getting a free Associate Membership today.

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