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THE MIGHT OF THE PEN



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## THE MIGHT OF THE PEN

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Most of us are familiar with the adage “The pen is mightier than the sword” and have often employed it in our arguments to emphasize the power of influence of the educated over the actions of others. The works of the learned men were preserved for posterity to learn from them, share and grow stronger in society.

But this has acquired a different dimension as the ‘pen’ has ventured into the world of internet, that is accessible to millions of people across nations. This 19<sup>th</sup> century phrase was part of an era where the few educated had a sense of responsibility to share their discoveries, negotiate treaties, draw up laws, amendments and regulations or even correspond with one another. These men and women of letters – scholars,

scribes, bureaucrats, nobles had the means to impact their society and beyond. Only the very best of the works were published and circulated, debated upon or criticised for their impact on the world of elitist. History is rife with examples of these influential people, both acclaimed or notorious for their contribution.

With the spread of education and technological development, both the means and sphere of influence of the written word has expanded. The reading public were found in all corners of the world, among all sections, groups and strata of the society. Gradually, the leather-bound books transitioned to e-books, the radio to TV and the hand-written letters became IMs and DMs. At present, the global village is ensnared by the web of typed characters, audio clips and video messages. But as the accessibility to writing has spread from a few to the many, has its essence been diluted?

With the world at our finger tips, we have become aware but indifferent, connected but lonely and often easily influenced by the latest trends. A plethora of affordable

smartphones, laptops, computers tablets and next-generation devices have aided us in taking over the world of web by storm. We tweet, trend, post, promote, view and share in the blink of an eye; the give & take of social media an essential part of our daily routine. Many of us document the highs and lows of our days on the internet – our memories, opinions, achievements and emotions to share with the world and join in the sense of universal togetherness.

As our dependence on the internet has deepened, many pertinent issues have cropped up that has left us vulnerable to the darker aspects of the online world. From financial frauds and data leaks to cyber bullying and hacking, these new sets of illegal activities have risen in numbers over the years.

Though social media platforms have started to dictate a new set of do's and don'ts for the netizens, cyber trolling (the term for any type of inflammatory or offensive messages posted) has attracted a lot of criticism for the derogative, misogynistic and often outrageous sentiments showcased. Many of us have become targets of malicious comments due to our political & socio-economic leanings, religious, race, gender or even caste identities. A sub-set of this development is the rise in cyber bullying,

especially common among the youngsters who have found the anonymity offered by the internet as the perfect cover to unleash their depravity. Vulgar comments, vitriolic statements and other forms of attacks on classmates, friends and relatives to extract revenge or put them in their place have become part of the norm. Of late, trolling strangers and popular personalities have become the latest fad.

Another prevalent issue is the rampant use of social media to spread false news, rumours and propaganda disguised as facts. Not just to sway public opinion on politics, the rumours inciting violence have been the chief reason behind many mob attacks and lynching of people belonging to certain groups and sections of the society. We often extensively spread such messages or message chains, without verifying the validity of the information presented. News agencies have been often accused of falsifying news or manipulating facts to fit their narratives, often preying upon the vulnerabilities of their readers.

Despite our education and awareness, most of us are responsible for at least one of the above activities, whether consciously or unconsciously. Many among us are guilty of defending our opinions and comments in a stubborn and overzealous manner,

provoking or shaming those who have dared to contradict or criticise our statements. Bonds of tolerance & civility are often crossed over war of words, that escalate into attacks over characters, morality, religion and even sexuality.

The addiction to internet in the present generation has been the topic of many debates and discussions. But is internet responsible for this?

Today, many people using the social media apps and browsing through the websites are not educated, though they may be literates who have learned to navigate the internet. As the educated netizens, it is our responsibility to monitor and correct any attempt to harm the dignity and sentiment of any person, group, community or sect. Not just as citizens of a democratic nation that has given each one of us the right to freedom of speech but as part of the advanced human species, we should uphold certain norms of societal conduct. The right to express our thoughts and sentiments does not mean that we can speak or write with the intention of maligning anyone. Anonymity cannot become the means of attacking people on public platforms that can cause irreparable harm.

Superficial and fleeting nature of our internet presence has given way to an ease of offence and grudge. Whether as individuals or representatives of groups, we are easy to offend and have cultivated a habit of holding onto grudges. Diplomacy has become a dicey field with even nations plunging into controversies and war of words over the net.

The ability to influence is a double-edged sword that makes it difficult to toe the line of virtue while remaining in the spotlight of popularity and adoration. It has been a fashion of sorts, to pass judgements on affairs and events we are unaware of or possess a few meagre facts. It may be peer pressure, religious propaganda or falling in line with popular sentiments that makes us swiftly pass judgements with callous disregard to the impact on our followers and others. The media, both social and print have been accused of 'trial-by-media', wherein the media have accused, condemned or vilified a person of misconduct or crime based on conjecture, rumours and convenience. We have forgotten that words have the power to make or break destinies, sway the balance of justice and change man's fate.

Being aware of our collective failing as an integrated community of the web, it's time

that we take up the reins of responsibility and accountability to our members and the future members. Indifference, cowardice and malice must make way for courage and respect towards each other, regardless of the righteousness of our ideals. Cyber abuse and personal attacks in the form of name-calling, body-shaming, gas-lighting, character-bashing or any others should be reported as crime and punished severely, instead of being defended as mere disagreements by various groups.

Any news or information article or video circulated with intent of harming the reputation or slandering the identity of any person, group or institution must be strictly dealt with, regardless of the position or power of the perpetrators. Cyber space needs efficient monitoring by each nation in the light of rise in crimes and the heavy net traffic.

While the instant and accessible features of the social media have tempted us to share every minute of our lives online, the line of distinction between public and private has blurred considerably. Some of us need to learn that distinction to avoid over-sharing of intimate and private details of our personal lives. The sanctity of the public place should transition to the online platforms, so that one's dirty linens and

personal indiscretions are not displayed for entertainment.

Instead of destruction, let us use the gift of words to bring about positivity in our lives as well as that of others. In this world bogged down with issues, we can raise our voices and make a difference, no matter how small an impact. Each of us blessed with an opportunity to be born in an age of humanity's peak in evolution, must break the shackles of our vices and sins. If our enlightened minds cannot overcome the shadows of greed, envy, cruelty, hatred; then there is little hope for our survival. A wholesome education of the mind as well as the soul is the path to humanity's liberation.

Our words must be the harbingers of change to craft a better society, their content and strength paving the way for a new dawn. We, as the educated privileged millennials have the power to establish a unique legacy for posterity, where the might of the pen can guide the ignorance of the swords towards an inclusive future era.