

**What is TikTok?** TikTok is a media app with an ever increasing popularity especially in the Indian market, for creating and sharing short videos. According to Wiki, it is owned by ByteDance, launched as Douyin in China in September 2016 and introduced to the overseas market as TikTok one year later and is reported to have been developed in 200 days having got around 100 million users within a year. It was branded as TikTok for the international market when it started to expand into other countries later and is now stated to be available in over 150 nations and in 75 languages. It is now said to have surpassed even Facebook, YouTube and Instagram to have become the world's most downloaded app in the iOS for some time.



**How to use?** We have to download the app in our android or other phone (even Apple iOS) from the play store available and login to create a user with our Facebook or Google user or a separate user independent of these. After giving details of our basic data like date of birth, we will find a list of popular videos available there and then we can upload our voiceover or record our voice matching and in sync with the video, to give an effect that the video actually 'speaks' these words. Admittedly it is fine as a technology fine and understandable with an appreciable innovation and use.

**What is the flip side?** Already the technology users especially the mobile app users are flooded with enormous amount of memes. Every time we open WhatsApp in our mobile, we see memes of celebrities some on jokes, some in lighter vein and quite a few others bordering on defamation, mud-slinging and character assassination of the celebrity. Police are finding it difficult to tackle with the problem of defamation (slander, libel and calumny etc and let us not go into the legal nuances and definitions of all these!) in a social networking site and the courts often deliberates, discusses and decides whether it is a penal offence vilification, mud-slinging or a character assassination or defamation or just a joke, enjoying 'freedom of expression in a public domain'. Memes are created and posted by people out of just curiosity, fun or just with a desire to share a joke written or made with some creativity and their successes are rated depending upon the times they are re-tweeted, or forwarded or shared and spread as viral in the internet. In the process, the celebrity or the politician or other person whose picture or video is the subject of meme, attains lots of popularity, sometime notoriety too, with some of them taking it seriously and proceeding towards further legal action and quite a few, rather a substantial number just ignoring it.

In this backdrop, it is now the age of apps like TikTok with all its lip-synced songs, music, memes etc. Faced with the serious problem of this app being used (or misused, to be more appropriate?), the Government of Tamil Nadu has decided to approach the Centre seeking

ban on this app itself. While the right of the government seeking a ban on any app, or for that matter, any internet web page or a website or contents, is not questioned, and we do admit government's right and appreciate its judicious usage of such right with due restraint, we have to look at the practical implications of such an action. Blocking of such right may be an immediate remedy, but does it pay in the long run? We are all aware that if a building site is demolished because of its illegality in construction (ie gross violation of municipal guidelines etc), and demolished, it takes at least a few months if not years if some one wants to construct, out of audacity, a similar site in the same place. On the other hand, a webpage (ironically also called a site ie website) is blocked or brought down, it takes hardly a few minutes and not months or weeks to bring up a similar site with a small change in the name, with the same objectionable contents. And it is again a legal process to block or bring down this site.

**What is the solution then?** It is not the severity of laws that serves as a deterrent to crime, but it is the certainty of punishment. Governments have to anyway, act indefatigably, tirelessly leaving no stones unturned, in its ever ending pursuit of updating with the latest in technology, alertness in action constantly endeavouring to bring some kind of regulation in the Internet. Not for nothing is the Internet called an 'uncontrolled beast'. Hence any efforts to bring some control on this beast should be welcome and not despised under the garb of curtailment of freedom of expression. After all, what one finds funny and jocular, may be taken as offensive and objectionable by another. If this app is blocked, perhaps something else may crop in a slightly different name, with maybe even more features and aiming the same audience and users. Will the government take efforts to seek a ban on all those, one after the other? Already, Facebook is reportedly working on a new app almost on similar lines, with standalone music and video sync capabilities like karaoke type of comparable features.