

Decision dated 11.3.2016 regarding complaint from Mr. Govind Gopal against telecast of alleged objectionable programme 'DNA' by Zee News TV Channel----- Letter dated 8.12.2015 received from the Under Secretary (BC-II), MoI&B

Complaint:

NBSA at its meeting held on 6.1.2016 noted that MoI&B vide letter dated 8.12.2015 had forwarded a complaint dated 12.10.2015, received from one Mr. Govind Gopal, regarding a DNA programme telecast on 7.10.15 at 9 pm to 10 pm on Zee News wherein they had shown the video of women candidates who were participating in UP Panchayat elections and called these women "illiterate", which was clearly visible in the video thereby insulting and denigrating the image of women.

The broadcaster in their response had vehemently denied that Zee News in its DNA programme had branded the women candidates contesting Panchayat Election in U.P, as illiterate and in this way the channel has insulted and denigrated the women; is totally misconceived and hence denied. The broadcaster stated that the intention of the programme was to show how the political parties have treated the women representation in the local body elections, wherein the deserving candidates are not allowed to come forward and women coming from the politicians' family always take the lead; and that there were many candidates who did not know the name of the Prime Minister of the country and the Chief Minister of the concerned state. The broadcaster stated that the anchor had also conducted the programme in a very impartial, neutral and objective manner, without showing bias towards any person or group and hence there was no violation of NBSA Guidelines. Since, proper reporting standards had been followed and in view of the above submissions, the broadcaster requested for withdrawal of this false complaint. They also stated that they have not received any complaints from any of such women candidates on whose behalf the complainant has raised a grievance and that showed the accuracy and objectivity of the telecast. It was submitted that since the complainant was not the aggrieved person, he has no *locus standi* to raise any such issue.

Decision:

NBSA considered the response from the broadcaster and also viewed the programme. NBSA was of the *prima facie* view that the broadcast by its tone, visuals, remarks with question marks, and background soundtrack showing ridicule, had clearly disparaged the women candidates who were contesting the Panchayat elections and the programme violated the Guidelines of NBA/NBSA relating to objectivity, neutrality, fairness, good taste & decency. NBSA decided that in view of the above violations observed by NBSA, a notice is issued to the broadcaster and they be directed to appear before NBSA for a hearing at its next meeting.

Accordingly, the broadcaster was directed vide letter dated 18.2.2016 to file within 14 days, any further response and also to appear before the NBSA for a hearing. The broadcaster responded by stating that it had stated its defence and justification

in its reply to NBSA to the complainant on 22.12.2015 last year and there was nothing more to add.

At the hearing held on 11.3.2016 the following were present:

Zee Media Corporation Ltd. [Zee News]

1. Mr. Tejveer Bhatia, Advocate
2. Mr. Rohan Swarup, Advocate
3. Mr. Harsh Tripathi

During the hearing, broadcaster's counsel submitted that the object of the programme was clear from the message of the Anchor at the end of the program, which was to bring to light the problems during the panchayat elections held in the State of Uttar Pradesh, one of which is where the seats reserved for women candidates, normally, the erstwhile male members make their womenfolk (wife/sister/daughter) to contest the panchayat election irrespective of the fact that they may lack education and minimum basic knowledge. It was submitted that they did not have any intention to either ridicule, insult or denigrate any particular individual or gender, and the intention was to bring out the exploitation of the policy for reservation for women candidates.

NBSA pointed out that testing of knowledge ought to have been more objective, with reference to local issues relevant to Panchayats, i.e. availability of water, sanitation, electricity, roads, schools and medical facilities etc.; that the manner in which the questions were asked about who is the Chief Minister of UP and who is the Prime Minister of India, and the derisive laughter at the answers, delivered a message that the object of the programme was to merely ridicule the lack of general knowledge and alleged ignorance of the women contesting Panchayat elections, thereby indicating a gender prejudice.

The broadcaster reiterated that the object of the programme was not to hurt any one's feeling, but to show the reality. The learned Counsel for the broadcaster submitted that even though there was no intent on part of Zee News of hurting/ridiculing/denigrating any individual or gender, in view of what was explained by NBSA that the programme was likely to have hurt the sentiments of women in general, and women contesting elections in particular, the broadcaster would express its regret; and that it will be careful in future to ensure that women are not ridiculed or made the object of derision. NBSA decided to accept expression of regret and close the matter on receipt of such letter expressing regret. Thereafter, inform the MoI&B accordingly.
