

**Decision dated 10.1.2017 regarding letter dated 8.9.2016 received from the Section Officer (BC-II), MoI&B regarding alleged violation of the content by News Nation on 4.6.2016 at 17:25:33**

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**Compliant:**

The EMMC report relates to telecast of a programme titled “Darna mana hai ” wherein the channel showed ten haunted places of the country, i.e Bhangarh fort of Alwar district in Rajasthan, Kuldhara village in Jaisalmer, Barog Tunnel in Himachal Pradesh , Church in Goa, Agrasen’s *Bawri* in Delhi, Malcha Mahal, Delhi, G P Bloc in Meerut, Darjeeling’s Kurseong Dow Hill & Sanivar Vada in Pune. According to the report, the channel, instead of demonstrating to viewers that there was no truth in the ghost stories and persuading them not to believe in superstition & occultism, the programme spread superstition/occultism, which a news channel should not be doing.

**Response dated 30.9.2016 from the broadcaster**

The broadcaster in their reply stated that the show was planned, executed and aired as a part of the channel's policy to bring awareness among public about irrational and superstitious beliefs and to educate them; that they had identified locations where signboards and signage had been put up by the civic administration describing them as places which need to be avoided by people after a particular time; and that while executing the show, utmost care was taken on their part not to create any fear psychosis, but to highlight illogical beliefs which hold no rationale in the modern age. The broadcaster also stated that in the course of showing these locations, they also warned viewers not to believe in unfounded stories as they only help spread of superstition. The broadcaster also assured that it would be more cautious and careful in future, and lay more emphasis on lifting the veil of superstition/s.

NBSA at the meeting held on 11.11.2016 considered the report, and also viewed the CD. NBSA noted that the news channel telecast the said programme at a prime hour (17:25:33 hrs), when there would be substantial viewership including young children, advocating blind belief in superstition and occult. NBSA noted that the programme *prima facie* violated the Principles of Self Regulation relating to “Refraining from Advocating or Encouraging Superstition and Occultism” & “Specific Guidelines Covering Reportage” relating to “Accuracy, Good Taste, Supernatural, Occultism & Paranormal & Children’s interest”. NBSA decided to issue a show cause notice to the broadcaster for wilful violation of the above guidelines and to file a further response, if any, and also to appear before the NBSA.

**Response dated 4.1.2017 to show cause notice from the broadcaster**

The broadcaster responded to the show cause notice and denied the EMMC’s statement that their show glorifies or promotes superstition in any manner. It contended that in the programme they had presented the views of the people in the concerned localities and had in no way tried to support or reinforce the same. On the contrary throughout the show, terms like “*Afwbaon Se Savdhan Rahen*”, “*Afwbaon*

*Ki Kahani, Duniya Virani,* ‘mystery’, ‘suspense’, ‘story’, ‘belief’, and ‘according to people’, have been used repeatedly; that it was factually incorrect to state that through the said programme they have tried to promote superstition, fear, etc. It was submitted that initially, when the show was being conceptualized, the name that was proposed for this show was ‘Darna Zaroori Hai’; that it was changed to ‘Darna Mana Hai’, in a conscious effort to prevent unnecessary fear amongst the viewers. It was contended that several reputed news, science and knowledge channels, have also run similar series on haunted places as these showed the experiences of living people which cannot be ordinarily explained, such broadcasts cannot be branded as promoting superstition, and any such attempt would curtail and curb open thought and speech.

The following persons appeared for the hearing on 10.1.2017:

**News Nation Network Pvt. Ltd. [News Nation]:**

Ms. Kanika Sinha, Advocate

Mr. Sarvesh Tiwari, Executive Editor

Mr. Ajay Verma, Executive Editor

Mr. Anshul Batra, Intern

During the hearing, the Counsel representing the broadcaster reiterated what was stated in their response to the Show Cause Notice and reiterated that their intention was not to create any fear psychosis but to educate the viewers not to get influenced by beliefs, which have no bearing on facts and the show was not intended to garner TRP’s. The representatives of the broadcaster stated that they abide by the NBSA Code of Ethics & Regulations and it was never their intent to violate the regulations or mislead the viewers in any manner. They assured that they would be extremely careful in the future while telecasting such stories.

**Decision:**

Having considered the complaint, response and submissions, and having viewed the CD, NBSA was of the view that the programme glorified superstition; that the presentation was lurid intended to sensationalise the belief in ghosts and create fear in the minds of viewers. NBSA was of the view that the duty of a news channel was to educate the masses, create a scientific temperament and not to mislead with unsubstantiated half truths.

NBSA however decided that in view of the assurance given by the broadcaster that they would be responsible in future and will take utmost care and caution while airing such programmes, that the complaint be closed with a warning and any future transgressions would be dealt with severely.

In view of the above, channel was directed to be careful with regard to the content telecast on the channel and abide by the NBSA Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards, Guidelines & Advisories, issued from time to time.

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