

**News Broadcasting Standards Authority
Order No. 68 (2019)**

Order of NBSA on complaint dated 10.10.2018 filed by Dr. Michael Williams against Zee News for telecasting a programme titled “What tactics are Christians using to convince Hindu to convert to Christianity?” dated 11.9.2018 on the programme “DNA”

The complainant has escalated the matter to NBSA vide complaint dated 10.10.2018 as there was no response to his complaint dated 1.10.2018 made to the broadcaster.

Complaint:

Complainant stated that during the broadcast of the special report titled “*DNA: What tactics are Christians using to convince Hindus to convert to Christianity?*” by Zee News Hindi Channel on 11.9.2018, the anchor made derogatory, malicious, biased and misleading statements against the Christian Community of Jaunpur. The programme included the following objectionable allegations/statements:

- (i) “There is a habit of Indians to fall for magic. Everyone likes magic, they think they will sleep at night and everything will be alright. People expect change in their lives in span of a night. Today, science is everywhere but people are changing religion in the name of Magic.”
- (ii) “In a Hindu country, state and village, where people are following Hinduism from many years, how and why are the people ready to change their religion? What are the challenges or the greed involved, that they are ready to leave Hinduism that was followed from the past 1000 years?”
- (iii) “In around 15 districts of UP in a very organized way people are turned to Christianity with the help of superstition, magic and fraud and Jaunpur of U.P is the main area of conversion. People are coming from different areas to this place and converting.”
- (iv) “The most important safety for a country is its ‘culture’. If a country is a slave country, but maintains its culture, they can still be independent; but if its culture is not maintained, then they will still be under bondage.”
- (v) “If all Indians had accepted the religion of the Britishers, India would have never been a free nation; but as we saved our culture, we are a free nation.”

The complainant stated that that the above allegations were baseless and completely contrary to the various statements of the persons who allegedly “turned to Christianity” recorded in the media report itself. The media report took interviews from various persons of Jaunpur and not one of them raised any complaints or made any allegations against anyone. In fact, the persons interviewed clearly stated that they accepted Christianity out of their own experience and choice, and this was exactly the opposite of what was presented by Zee News in its news report; and that

the anchor had concocted stories of forced conversions with the intent of injuring the tenets and beliefs of the Christian community of Jaunpur and of this country. The complainant alleged that the media report incited hatred towards the Christian community of Jaunpur and alleged that Christianity was a religion of a foreign entity; and that led to mobs attacking and disrupting Christian prayer services held in the district and denying the Christian Community from assembling and praying together across Jaunpur District.

Reply dated 17.10.2018 given by broadcaster directly to the complainant:

The broadcaster stated that there was no statement/visual, which showed any community in poor light or targeted any community; that the programme was aired to make people aware how superstitions and misconceptions are spread in the name of religion. As a responsible news channel, it had also run a disclaimer and in fact the presenter had also emphasized on the fact that the broadcasted programme was not to target any community and that people of India are free to practice and propagate religion of their choice as a fundamental right. The complainant gave a communal colour to such an important issue relating to the evil of superstitions and misconceptions being spread and being used to target poor and gullible people; the said broadcast was based on various verifiable reports about some persons targeting the gullible strata of society, in the name of Christianity, to trap emotionally, financially or physically weak people. People were shown misleading videos and objectionable reading material was distributed among the poorer sections of the town to misguide them and convert them into Christianity. The issue was widely reported in various leading national dailies. The channel also took into consideration the registration of a First Information Report on the subject matter, before airing the programme and direction of the competent Court, to register the FIR against a total of 271 persons for various penal offences like cheating, defiling places of worship and prejudicing national integration. The intent of the broadcast was to bring out the fact that gullible sections of people who were emotionally, financially or physically suffering, were being trapped into conversion in the name of religion. The questions posed by the anchor were valid as people who have been practicing Hinduism for the past many years have been converted into Christianity based on false promises of curing incurable diseases like cancer on the basis of “faith healing”. The programme was in public interest and to bring awareness among the people so that they do not fall prey to such superstitious preaching, but seek proper medical help and treatment from qualified doctors. The anchor read out excerpts from a widely circulated magazine “*Jeevan Jyoti*” which mentions that magical waters, medicine and methods shared and distributed in such prayer meetings have healed incurable diseases. These practices, which propagate the use of magic remedies to cure ailments and other such acts, are illegal and criminal as they attempt to exploit the ignorance and superstitions of poor uneducated sections of society. The said magazine talks about bringing back the dead to life which further harms the intellect and wellbeing of the gullible and illiterate people. Such statements and writings

which are widely circulated and propagated, lead to blind superstitions. Claims of curing cancer and bringing back dead to life is illegal and can misguide vulnerable people, not to seek medical treatment. The visuals clearly showed that the poor, uneducated and gullible people were misled by creating the illusion that diseases could be cured and problems could be alleviated, by converting to Christianity.

Rejoinder filed on 15.2.2019 to the reply dated 17.10.2018 of broadcaster:

The complainant submitted that the broadcaster had reported malicious, biased and misleading news against the Christian community of Jaunpur, which led to communal polarization in Jaunpur district and unrelenting attacks by anti-minority groups throughout the district and even in neighbouring districts; that the said reporting by the anchor and broadcasted by Zee News, was also in clear violation of the Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards laid down by the News Broadcasters Association; that there is a consistent effort of Zee News Media and Mr. Sudhir Chaudhary to negatively influence their viewers about the Christian faith and project the same in bad light. The complainant extracted from the news report dated 11.9.2018, in support of the said contention:

- (i) The anchor irresponsibly stated that for a country, its culture is a “suraksha kavach” (protection) which is more important than the defense force or the army and then he claims that if we follow the religion or culture of the British then we would still be called slaves to them.
- (ii) The anchor uses the phrase “*aaj 70 saal baad bhi hum bbugat rahe hai*” (even after 70 years we are suffering) for inclusion of the word ‘propagate’ in Article 25 of the Constitution of India. This statement is highly derogatory and offensive to the Constitution itself. After a lot of deliberations and considerations the framers and drafters of our Constitution included the word “propagate” and it is wrong to state that people are suffering because of the same. So many self-acclaimed godmen and godwomen have arisen in India as a result of this inclusion and nobody has ever raised any concern regarding the same. It is very clear that the broadcaster intends to defame Christians who exercise their right under Article 25 and in order to achieve that objective, the broadcaster is even gone to the extent of discrediting the Constitution.
- (iii) The anchor after reading the various real-life based stories of many people who have been cured because of accepting Christianity, discredited all their statements by saying that these were lies without checking the veracity or truthfulness of those statements and thereby failed to present a fair report. The complainant further contended that neither the anchor nor the broadcaster had any right to question an important tenet and belief of Christianity that diseases are and can be cured through faith in Jesus Christ; that the broadcast was violative of right to privacy of the concerned Christian community of Jaunpur [which is explained by the Apex Court in Justice K S Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017) 10 SCC 1 stated: “The autonomy of the

individual is the ability to make decisions on vital matters of concern to life... The intersection between one's mental integrity and privacy entitles the individual to freedom of thought, the freedom to believe in what is right, and the freedom of self-determination...]”

- (iv) The anchor made several derogatory statements against the Christian community which were in violation of the Code. There was a clear attempt to offend the sensitivities of the followers of Christian faith and to create religious intolerance and disharmony against Christians; and that this became evident from the various comments that have been posted on the YouTube page where this video has been uploaded.

The complainant reiterated his allegations and contentions in the complaint. He also pointed out that the police authorities have confirmed that there are no acts of fraudulent or forceful conversions occurring (as the press statement of the police which was recorded by other news channels). The complainant reiterated that the report raised communal tensions in the district of Jaunpur as there were a series of attacks on Churches conducted by the anti-minority groups subsequent to the telecast of the impugned DNA Analysis Report. With regard to the FIR said to have been registered, the complainant submitted that the matter is sub judice; that all the accused in the said FIR were immediately released on bail or granted stay of arrest by the Hon'ble Allahabad High Court and till date no charge sheet has been filed; and that police authorities have, in press conferences, stated that no “activities” of conversions are reported from Jaunpur and people in the said areas are merely enjoying their individual right to belief.

The complainant contended that broadcaster has no right to question the right of an individual to exercise his or her fundamental right to practice any religion and relied upon the recent judgments of Supreme Court on privacy which have declared that religious freedom enjoyed by an individual is a matter of privacy.

NBSA at its meeting held on 25.2.2019 considered the complaint, response of the broadcaster, rejoinder filed by the complainant and also viewed the CD of the alleged broadcast. NBSA was of the *prima facie* view that the broadcast was in violation of Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards and Specific Guidelines Covering Reportage as follows:

A. Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards: Fundamental Principles (4) *Broadcasters shall, in particular, ensure that they do not select news for the purpose of either promoting or hindering either side of any controversial public issue. News shall not be selected or designed to promote any particular belief, opinion or desires of any interest group and 6) Broadcasters shall ensure a full and fair presentation of news as the same is the fundamental responsibility of each news channel. Realizing the importance of presenting all points of view in a democracy, the broadcasters should, therefore, take*

responsibility in ensuring that controversial subjects are fairly presented, with time being allotted fairly to each point of view. Besides, the selection of items of news shall also be governed by public interest and importance based on the significance of these items of news in a democracy.

Principles of Self-Regulation relating to Impartiality and objectivity in reporting and Ensuring neutrality. B. *Specific Guidelines Covering Reportage: Fundamental Standards* (A) *All news reporting must be done in “public interest”;* (C) *‘Content’ of matter broadcast should not be shown out of ‘context’;* (E) *Broadcasters should exercise care and objectivity in featuring activities, beliefs, practices, or views of any racial or religious group in their content to prevent any negative impact thereof.*1. *Accuracy*1.6 *Facts should be clearly distinguishable from, and not be mixed-up with, opinion, analysis and comment.*2. *Impartiality, Neutrality & Fairness* 2.1 *For balanced reportage, broadcasters should remain neutral and ensure that diverse views are covered in their reporting, especially on a controversial subject, without giving undue prominence to any particular view.*

NBSA therefore decided to call both parties for a hearing at the next meeting of the NBSA.

On being served with notice, the following persons were present at the hearing on 25.3.2019

On behalf of Complainant:

1. Dr. Michael Williams [Complainant]
2. Mr. Sanbha Rumnong, Advocate
3. Mr. Jaiwant Patankar, Advocate

On behalf of Zee Media Corporation Ltd. [Channel: Zee News]

Ms. Ritwika Nanda & Ms Devika Chopra, Advocate
Ms. Annie, Asst. Manager, Legal

The complainant stated his complaint and the rejoinder given to the broadcaster he had spelt out in details the derogatory, malicious and misleading statements in the programme. He wished to draw the attention of the NBSA to the following extracts from the news report dated 11.9.2018 and of the anchor to negatively influence their viewers about the Christian faith and project the Christian community in bad light and highlight the consequences thereof.

- a. *Sudhir Chaudhary irresponsibly at one instance states that for a country, its culture is a “suraksha kavach” (protection) which is more important than the defense force or the army and then he claims that if we follow the religion or culture of the British then we would still be called slaves to them.*

- b. *In another instance he uses the phrase “aaj 70 saal baad bhi hum bhugat rahe hai” (even after 70 years we are suffering) for inclusion of the word ‘propagate’ in Article 25 of the Constitution of India. This statement is highly derogatory and offensive to the Constitution itself.*
- c. *In another instance Mr. Sudhir Chaudhary is reading the various real-life based stories of many people who have been cured because of accepting Christianity. He later discredits all their statements by saying that these are lies without checking the veracity or truthfulness of those statements to present a fair report.*

The complainant stated that that the anchor read out excerpts from a widely circulated magazine “*Jeevan Jyoti*” which mentions that magical waters, medicine and methods shared and distributed in such prayer meetings have healed incurable diseases. However, the publishers were not called to ascertain the veracity of the report. The channel spoke to various persons who had converted to Christianity but none of them have responded to say that they were being forcefully converted. On the contrary all the persons whom the channel spoke to said that they had converted on their own volition. To state that a “minority religion” as a “foreign entity” is nothing but defamatory and malicious. He stated that he is ashamed that such reporting passes off as journalism. Such reporting he stated if not checked will be cancerous, will kill the secular fabric of India and lead to wide spread violence and religious intolerance. He submitted that the biased and misleading news against the Christian community of Jaunpur led to communal polarization in Jaunpur district and unrelenting attacks by anti-minority groups throughout the district and even in neighbouring districts. He stated that post the broadcast large crowds descended on the churches and hoisted the national flag resulting in the churches to shut down. Moreover, subsequent to this reporting many churches in the district of Jaunpur have been attacked and prayer services which were previously conducted peacefully have been disrupted by members of Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The media report took interviews from various persons of Jaunpur and not one of them have raised any complaints or allegations against anyone regarding “motivated” conversions. In fact, the interviewed persons have clearly stated to have accepted Christianity out of their own experience and choice. Hence there is no question of any evil or suspicious activity happening in the district of Jaunpur. Even the police authorities have confirmed that there are no acts of fraudulent or forceful conversions occurring. The concerned police officer had clarified in his press statement which was recorded by other news channels. Zee News gave a communal color to the prevailing situation in Jaunpur by spreading this lie to its viewers. With regard to the registered FIR, the matter is sub judice before the court of law and the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India has already laid guidelines on media to not report on such pending cases. That all the accused in the said FIR were immediately released on bail or granted stay of arrest by the Hon’ble High Court of Judicature of Uttar Pradesh at Allahabad and till date no charge sheet has been filed. Furthermore, police authorities in press conferences have openly stated that no “activities” of

conversions are reported from Jaunpur and people in the said areas are merely enjoying their individual right to belief. The complainant further submitted that it is shocking to note that the anchor goes in great detail to find flaws in the Constitution of India.

The Counsel for Zee News submitted that the word “tactic” was not used in the title of the programme. The complainant has given a communal colour to such an important issue wherein, they tried to generate public opinion on the evil of superstitions and misconceptions being spread and being used to target poor and gullible people. The said broadcast was on lines of various verifiable reports wherein some people in name of Christianity are targeting the gullible strata of society, emotionally, financially or physically weak people, in their trap. People are shown misleading videos and distributing objectionable reading material among the poor class of the town and misguiding them to convert them into Christianity. This issue was also widely reported in various leading national dailies, they have also taken into consideration the registration of First Information Report on the subject matter, before airing the programme. The concerned Court has directed registration of FIR against a total of 271 persons for various penal offences like cheating, defiling places of worship and prejudicing national integration. She submitted that it was adequately emphasized that the said programme was not to target any community and people of India are free to practice and propagate religion of their choice as a fundamental right. The programme was aimed at bringing forth the fact that gullible, emotionally, financially or physically suffering people are being entrapped in the name of religion. The questions posed by the anchor were valid as people who have been practicing Hinduism for the past many years have been converted into Christianity based on false promises of curing incurable diseases like cancer on the basis of “faith healing”. The programme was in public interest and to make aware people not to fall prey such superstitious acts of some people and get such diseases treated from Doctors and seek proper medical help. Media is duty bound to act in the interest of people by cautioning them not to fall prey for such magical remedies.

NBSA considered the submissions made by both the parties and also viewed the broadcast. NBSA noted that the problem lay in the manner the programme was conceptualized and presented by Mr. Sudhir Chaudhury, the anchor of the programme. It was not a debate programme so that the views of others could be ascertained to balance the programme. It was a one-sided programme with only the views of the anchor.

NBSA noted that the following statements (translated text) made by the anchor in the programme may indicate bias, to deliberately present a situation not in existence:

“In a Hindu country, state and village, where people are following Hinduism from many years how and why are the people ready to change their religion? What are the challenges or

the greed involved, that they are ready to leave Hinduism that was followed from the past 1000 years?"

"The most important safety for one country is 'their culture'. If one country is a slave country but have its culture maintained, they can still be independent, but if it's culture is not maintained, then they will still be under bondage."

"If all Indians accepted the religion of the Britishers then we would never be a free nation but we could save culture and that's why we are a free nation."

NBSA noted that the anchor did not ensure a full and fair presentation of news, which is the fundamental responsibility of a news channel. The anchor should have ensured that the controversial subject was fairly presented. NBSA was of the view that the broadcast violated the *Principles of Self-Regulation relating to Impartiality and objectivity in reporting and Ensuring neutrality. B. Specific Guidelines Covering Reportage: Fundamental Standards (A) All news reporting must be done in "public interest"; (C) 'Content' of matter broadcast should not be shown out of 'context'; (E) Broadcasters should exercise care and objectivity in featuring activities, beliefs, practices, or views of any racial or religious group in their content to prevent any negative impact thereof.1. Accuracy1.6 Facts should be clearly distinguishable from, and not be mixed-up with, opinion, analysis and comment.2. Impartiality, Neutrality & Fairness 2.1 For balanced reportage, broadcasters should remain neutral and ensure that diverse views are covered in their reporting, especially on a controversial subject, without giving undue prominence to any particular view.*

NBSA therefore decided to censure the channel for its failure to make a full and fair presentation of news and also warn the channel to be more careful in future and maintaining neutrality. NBSA also noted that any future violations by the channel/ anchor would be viewed seriously. NBSA also directed that the video of the said programme, if hosted on the website of Zee News or any other links, should be removed immediately and confirmed to NBSA. NBSA decided to close the complaint with the above observations and inform the broadcaster and the complainant accordingly.

NBSA directs the NBA to send:

(a) A copy of this Order to the complainant and the broadcaster (b) circulate this Order to all Members, Editors & Legal Heads of NBA; (c) host this Order on its website and include it in its next Annual Report. and (d) release the Order to media.

Sd/-
Justice R.V. Raveendran (Retd)
Chairperson

Place: New Delhi
Date: May 1, 2019