

**News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority****Order No. 195 (2025)****Complainant: Indrajeet Ghorpade****Programme: Pujya Puri Shankaracharya Ji on Origin of the Caste System****Channel: CNN- News18****Date of Broadcast: 03.01.2024**

Since the complainant was not satisfied with the response of the channel, on 25.01.2024, the complaint was escalated to the second level, i.e., NBDSA.

**Complaint dated 05.01.2024**

The complainant stated that the complaint was in respect of the impugned show aired on CNN-News18 on 3.01.2024. Through the show, the broadcaster had promoted: (1) the caste system, a social evil, (2) the Hindu-Rashtra theory that attacks the secular fabric of India and, (3) several superstitious, unscientific beliefs.

He stated that the show violated the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, Section 1 – Fundamental Principles 1, 4, and 6, Section 2 - Principles of Self-Regulation relating to impartiality and objectivity in reporting, ensuring neutrality, refraining from advocating or encouraging superstition and occultism, and corrigendum.

**Response dated 24.01.2024 from the channel:**

The broadcaster in its submissions denied all the allegations made in the complaint and clarified that the interview was entirely consistent with the applicable NBDSA's guidelines/advisories and applicable laws.

The interview in question was a live discussion with Puri Shankaracharya Ji, who is a prominent sage of Hinduism ("Seer"), wherein several questions were posed to him by the anchor, especially related to the relevance of the caste system. The anchor at the beginning specifically asked the Seer whether '*karma*' should be the basis of identifying humans rather than '*caste*', to which the Seer gave his views on the issue, quoting the Hindu scriptures.

It should be noted that the anchor had continuously stressed the point during the interview that '*karma*' should be the basis of fulfilment and deeds rather than caste and at no point did the anchor promote caste or belief of any particular group nor questioned the social fabric of India as alleged or raised in the complaint. The anchor merely sought views of the Seer on various issues and continued to question him. All the questions raised to the Seer were neutral and were made to seek his views while also questioning the same from time to time. The channel or the interviewer



in no way tried to project these views as facts, indisputable or final. The channel/interviewer neither promoted/backed the Seer's views nor concluded anything based on the same.

It is preposterous on the part of the complainant to claim that the interview promoted superstition and occultism. The interview was merely to know the Seer's views of karma and why karma shouldn't be the basis of judging anyone, rather than caste. It is also worth mentioning that the Seer's statements were about religious beliefs, faith, and philosophies of karma and dharma. Moreover, since the interview was not in the form of a debate, no third parties were invited. All the statements made during the interview were the Seer's own statements, and thus, the channel or the anchor neither verified nor supported such statements, and as such, the channel is not responsible for the speaker's statements. Again, the channel/interviewer had neither promoted/backed the Seer's views nor had it concluded anything based on the same.

The anchor or the channel did not promote or support any statements/beliefs of the Seer as it were his own views, but the anchor did question the same from time to time.

The broadcaster stated that it hoped it had addressed the complainant's concerns and assured of its continued commitment to the applicable rules and regulations.

#### **Email dated 25.01.2024 from the Complainant to NBDSA**

The complainant stated that he was not satisfied with the channel's reasoning and believed that the entire show violated the guidelines stated in his grievance.

#### **Decision of NBDSA at its meeting held on 14.03.2024**

NBDSA considered the complaint, response from the broadcaster, and, after viewing the footage of the broadcast, decided to call the parties for a hearing.

#### **Written Submissions dated 24.03.2024 from the Complainant**

The anchor asked leading questions to a Hindu religious leader (interviewee), who spread caste supremacy, unscientific information about the Bhopal gas disaster, superstitious beliefs, and attacked the secular nature of India by advocating for India to become a Hindu state.

The anchor smiled, nodded, and with folded hands said "jee gurudev" (Yes Divine Teacher), without any effort to oppose or debunk the false information, superstition, casteism, and promotion of Hindu Rashtra by the interviewee.

#### **Time-stamp of violations:**



Interviewee - 1:55 - If education, defence, economy and service are to be balanced and maternal power and modesty of women are to be protected, then it is necessary to follow caste system.

Interviewee - 2:20 - No matter how much training you give to feet, they cannot do the work of hands and mouth. That is why the varnam system is also within the limits of the traditionally accepted jaati system.

Interviewee - 3:47 - It is clear that birth takes place according to past deeds. Caste is decided by birth. Caste is a result of past deeds.

Anchor: 4:20 - Can a person change his caste through his deeds?

Interviewee - 4:38 - One can adopt the character of a Brahmin, but one cannot marry the daughter of a Brahmin. People of other castes can adopt the nature of a Brahmin, but the limits/rules of 'beti-roti' (employment/marriage) will be according to the caste system only.

Interviewee - 5:24 - One can attain supreme power only after being born in the Brahmin caste. The 'charam' (ultimate) caste is Brahmin only.

Anchor: 6:25 - Today, there is a western narrative that the biggest flaw in Hindu religion and in Hindustani people from Bharat is that they believe in caste and this system, which they call caste system. (What are your thoughts?)

Interviewee - 6:50 - The name of the universe itself is 'bhed' (difference, discrimination).

Interviewee - 7:24 - In our country, education, defence, commerce and service is balanced, therefore, even without family planning, population is safe, motherhood is safe, that is why caste system is absolutely expected.

Interviewee - 8:30 - Only Brahmins have the right to perform 'yagya' (fire ritual). Only Brahmins have the right to accept donations. Only Brahmins attain 'acharatva' from the house of God. If you point a finger at God, then God will say that according to such and such deeds, he has been confirmed in the Brahmin caste. We will have to accept this.

Anchor: 9:13 - Has Bhagwan explained who is Brahmin and who is Guru?

Interviewee - 9:25 - Only Brahmins have 'purn Gurutva'. (Gives example from Mahabharata, that says Shudra people cannot give 'upadesh', only Brahmins can).

Anchor: 14:05 - What is Hindu Rashtra?

Interviewee - 14: 15 - Everyone's ancestors are Sanatani Hindu. Who were Mohammad Sir's ancestors? Aren't everyone's ancestors Sanatani Hindu?!

Interviewee - 15:51 - Aren't everyone's ancestors Hindu? This is a historic fact. Who won't believe it?!

Anchor: 16:17 - Same people say India must be declared as a Hindu Rashtra. Some say this would be majoritarianism, where people of one caste, religion and community are being promoted and others are being subjugated. Is this right or wrong? (Interviewee talks about something else, so Anchor once again asks)

Anchor: 18:03 - Do you think India must be declared as a Hindu state?

Interviewee - 18:10 - (Declaring India as a Hindu state) is not wrong, it is right. But who will do it? The Prime Minister cannot do it. This is our job. First, we need to create an atmosphere for it. 80% work is done by changing (people's) mindset. 20% is done through struggle.

Interviewee - 20:05 - If you pass by crematoriums, the atoms/particles from there will influence your thoughts in a certain way. Whereas if you pass by a temple, the particles from there will influence you (differently) accordingly.

Interviewee - 20:44 - The air that contains water from Mansarovar has the ability to convert crows into swans.

Interviewee - 22:21 - The impact of the Bhopal gas leak was lesser in areas where there was cow dung and in areas where cows lived.

Interviewee - 22:35 - The ficus religiosa tree (peepal) exhales oxygen at night. Cows also exhale oxygen.

On being served with the notice, the following persons were present at the hearing on 10.04.2024:

**Complainant**

1. Mr. Indrajeet Ghorpade

**Broadcaster**

1. Mr. Puneesh Kochar, Senior Counsel – Legal
2. Mr. NC Satpathy, Editor, Special Projects, Editorial & Content



### Submissions of the Complainant

The complainant submitted that the impugned broadcast was an interview conducted by the Managing Editor of the channel with the Hindu religious leader, Puri Shankaracharya Ji. From a perusal of the broadcast, it is apparent that the broadcast had two-fold objectives, *first* to promote the evil of the caste system and Brahmin supremacy, and *second*, to normalize the idea that India must be converted from a secular country to a Hindu Rashtra.

During the broadcast, the following tickers “Hindu Rashtra Possible?”, “Hindu, Hindutva, Hindustan” and “Decode the ‘real’ Hindu” were aired and leading questions were asked by the anchor to the religious leader, such as “what is Hindu Rashtra”; “do you think India must be declared as a Hindu state” and whether the views of a certain section, which believes that “Hindu Rashtra amounts to majoritarianism, where people of one caste, religion and community are being promoted and others are being subjugated was right or wrong”. The answer to these questions raised by the anchor was quite obvious, and any law-abiding citizen of the country, especially the news channels, would be well aware that the secular fabric of the country should not be damaged and India should not be converted into a Hindu Rashtra.

The interviewee, however, in response to these questions, stated that “declaring India as a Hindu state was not wrong, it is right. But who will do it? The Prime Minister cannot do it. This is our job. First we need to create an atmosphere for it. 80% work is done by changing (people's) mindset. 20% is done through struggle.” The complainant submitted that this programme appeared to be a part of the ‘80%’ efforts to create an atmosphere for the Hindu Rashtra.

During the broadcast, the interviewee made several remarks concerning the caste system and supremacy of the Brahmins, which were not only demeaning in nature but were also violative of the Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards and Guidelines. Some of them are “No matter how much training you give to feet, they cannot do the work of hands and mouth. That is why the varnam system is also within the limits of the traditionally accepted jaati system.”; “One can attain supreme power only after being born in Brahmin caste. The ‘charam’ (ultimate) caste is Brahmin only”; “One can adopt the character of a Brahmin but one cannot marry the daughter of a Brahmin. People of other castes can adopt the nature of a Brahmin, but the limits/ rules of ‘beti-roti’ (employment/ marriage) will be according to the caste system only.”; “In our country, education, defence, commerce and service is balanced, therefore, even without family planning, population is safe, motherhood is safe, that is why caste system is absolutely expected”; “Only Brahmins have the right to perform ‘yagya’ (fire ritual). Only Brahmins have the right to accept donations. Only Brahmins attain ‘acharatva’ from the house of God. If you point a finger at God, then God will say that according to such and such deeds, he has been confirmed in the Brahmin caste. We will have to accept this” and “Only Brahmins have ‘purn Gurutva’”, he also gave an example from the Mahabharata, which says that Shudra



people cannot give '*upadesh*', only Brahmins can.

At no point in time did the anchor attempt to counter any of the statements made by the religious leader or provide any other perspective. Instead, he kept on repeating "*ji gurudev*" in the broadcast.

The interviewee also during the broadcast made several superstitious and unscientific claims such as "*the air that contains water from Mansarovar has the ability to convert crows into swans*" and "*the impact of Bhopal gas leak was lesser in areas where there was cow dung and in areas where cows lived*", and was not countered by the anchor.

### **Submissions of the Broadcaster**

The broadcaster submitted that the impugned broadcast was a live discussion with Puri Shankaracharya ji. Admittedly, during the interview, the Seer had expressed his views and opinions. However, the anchor had, at several instances in the broadcast, interrupted the Seer and questioned him whether karma should be the basis of identifying humans rather than caste.

The interview was conducted in the lead-up to the Ram Mandir consecration. Further, during this time, there was a lot of discussion on Sanatan and the caste system. Therefore, it did not find anything objectionable with interviewing the Seer and seeking his views on Hinduism, Sanatan, and the caste system. It was not the broadcaster who had promoted discussions on Sanatan Dharma; rather, such discussions had been rife since the statement was made by a DMK Minister.

The interviewee was free to air his opinion, which the channel had no control over. However, in no way did the anchor or the channel try to project the views of the Seer as being facts or indisputable. It reiterated that all statements, opinions, or views expressed by the Seer were his own, and the anchor and the channel did not support the statements.

In rebuttal, the complainant submitted that the anchor should have questioned the views expressed by the interviewee, which was not done in the instant case. Further, the anchor himself during the broadcast stated that "*Today there is a western narrative that the biggest flaw in Hindu religion and in Hindustani people from Bharat is that they believe in caste and this system, which they call caste system.*", which implies that the anchor also was echoing similar views as the interviewee.

### **Decision**

NBDSA at its meeting held on 22.02.2025 considered the complaint, response of the broadcaster, gave due consideration to the arguments of the complainant and the broadcaster and reviewed the footage of the broadcast.

The airing of the views of the Puri Shankaracharya on caste and Hindu Rashtra may not be objectionable, as NBDSA sees no reason why the Shankaracharya's views cannot be aired on TV. In all fairness, the anchor does provoke the matter of the rigidity or flexibility of the caste system. At the same time, he could have exercised restraint in driving the discussion towards that end, having regard to the Constitutional mandate which discards casteism and promotes secularism. Thus, the questions put to Puri Shankaracharya should have been carefully chosen, keeping in mind the aforesaid ethos.

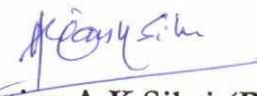
NBDSA therefore expects not only this channel but all the channels to adhere to the aforesaid constitutional principles while airing such programmes.

NBDSA decided to close the complaint with aforementioned observations and inform the complainant and the broadcaster accordingly.

NBDSA directs NBDA 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 NBDA;
- (c) Host this Order on its website and include it in its next Annual Report and
- (d) Release the Order to media.

It is clarified that any statement made by the parties in the proceedings before NBDSA while responding to the complaint and putting forth their view points, and any finding or observation by NBDSA in regard to the broadcasts, in its proceedings or in this Order, are only in the context of an examination as to whether there are any violations of any broadcasting standards and guidelines. They are not intended to be 'admissions' by the broadcaster, nor intended to be 'findings' by NBDSA in regard to any civil/criminal liability.

  
**Justice A.K Sikri (Retd.)**  
Chairperson

**Place: New Delhi**

**Date :** 08.05.2025