

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority

Order No. 199 (2025)

Complainant: Mr. Indrajeet Ghorpade

Channel: Times Now Navbharat

Programme: 'अवैध मस्जिद' पर महिलाओं ने मुसलमानों पर खुलकर सब बता दिया!

Date of Broadcast: 05/06.09.2024

Since the complainant did not receive a response from the broadcaster within the period specified under the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations, the complaint was escalated on 25.09.2024, to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA.

Complaint dated 08.09.2024

The complaint was in respect of the impugned news report, which carried the following thumbnail text: 1) “अवैध मस्जिद' पर महिलाओं ने मुसलमानों पर खुलकर सब बता दिया!” (Women openly tell everything about illegal mosque) and 2) “Musalman ladke hume... *Jumme ke din toh...*”.

In the broadcast, the reporter interviewed four women about a mosque in Shimla and asked questions like: “Has the number of Muslims visiting the mosque increased?”; “Do women feel safer compared to earlier?”; “What is the change in the mahaul with the rise in the population of Muslim persons in Shimla?” and “Kya darr ka mahaul hai?”

None of the four women who were interviewed expressed that they themselves had experienced any kind of safety incidents from the people visiting the mosque or from the Muslim community in general.

However, they stated that they were scared to see so many Muslim men visiting the Mosque to pray. One of them said that she was worried that her children might become victims of rape after hearing about “Muslim community” committing rape somewhere else, and expressed that every Muslim person should have their identity verified and only those “worthy” should be allowed to stay. Another woman expressed concerns that the “issues” will increase as more Muslim men start coming to Shimla and to the mosque.

While women's safety is undoubtedly a matter of grave concern and not an issue that must be downplayed, in the report, the reporter, in an attempt to highlight local concerns, asked leading and prejudiced questions to portray that the Muslim community must be feared and that women's safety, particularly, was at a risk due to the presence and rise of Muslim people in a particular area.

The responses given by the women interviewed seemed to stem from deep-rooted Islamophobia. After successfully manipulating viewers and making them believe that the Muslim community must be feared, the same channel asked, “*kya dar ka mahaul hai?*” The responses by the four women were proof that continuous anti-Muslim reportage by the media can successfully alter people's perception towards the Muslim community and make them fear the Muslim community, despite not having faced any untoward incident from the community.

Additionally, the legality of the mosque was not yet ascertained. However, the broadcaster had already declared it *illegal*. Writing the word illegal in single or double quotation marks did not change the impact that such inaccurate and malicious reporting had on viewers. A regular viewer does not fully understand the meaning of writing words in single or double quotation marks.

The broadcaster had uploaded over 150 videos on YouTube within 48 hours, related to the Shimla Mosque. Many of these videos attempted to paint the entire Muslim community and particularly Muslim men in a negative light. Most videos baselessly labelled the mosque as illegal, some called for the demolition of the mosque, some compared Muslim people in Shimla with Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshi intruders, and others advocated for identity verification of the Muslim community in Shimla.

This is not the first time that the broadcaster has attempted to spread anti-Muslim venom. In the past, too, NBDSA has warned and fined Times Now and Times Now Navbharat for similar reportage.

The report, thumbnail, and title violated several NBDSA Guidelines, including Accuracy, Neutrality, Objectivity, Guidelines for Prevention of Hate Speech, Guidelines to prevent communal colour in reporting crime, riots, rumours and such related incidents, Guidelines on Broadcast of Potentially Defamatory Content, Section on Racial & Religious Harmony under Specific Guidelines Covering Reportage and Guidelines for the telecast of news affecting Public Order.

Reply dated 28.09.2024 by the broadcaster

The broadcaster apologized for the delay in responding to the complaint, wherein certain concerns were raised about its news report on the Shimla Mosque issue.

The broadcaster denied all averments made in the complaint. It stated that the complaint had no merit and alleged that the complainant had looked at the programming in a piecemeal manner instead of looking at it as a whole. The complainant had made selective reference to only four women, while in the news report, numerous other women provided on-record testimony, asserting that

individuals visiting the mosque had behaved inappropriately by making them feel uncomfortable through inappropriate stares. Several women had confirmed on camera that men visiting the mosque had engaged in public urination, and when confronted, these individuals responded with dismissive remarks such as, "*Just close your doors.*" Such conduct clearly constituted harassment under any reasonable interpretation.

It is strange that the concerns raised by many women were being dismissed by saying that these were Islamophobic comments. The reporting was intended to reflect public sentiment and highlight the ongoing harassment faced by women. The attempt to frame this issue under the term "*Islamophobia*" does not mitigate or excuse the seriousness of the underlying criminal acts.

As a responsible media channel, it is committed to uncovering and exposing any efforts to shield criminal actions against women under the pretext of religion or caste. Further, it stands by its journalistic duty to report on such issues without bias.

Decision of NBDSA at its meeting held on 13.12.2024

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

On being served with the Notices, the following persons were present for the hearing on 22.02.2025:

Complainant

1. Mr. Indrajeet Ghorpade

Broadcaster

1. Mr. Kunal Tandon, Senior Advocate
2. Ms. Kirtima Maravoor, Compliance Officer – NBDSA
3. Mr. Utkarsh Singh, News Editor, TNNB

Submissions of the Complainant

The complainant submitted that at the time of the impugned broadcast, the broadcaster had uploaded nearly 150 videos on the subject. While he was not stating that there should be a limit on the number of times a channel can report on a subject, however, it was relevant to bring to NBDSA's attention that within 48 hours, over 150 videos regarding the mosque in Shimla were uploaded by the broadcaster, pictures of some of which were also included in the complaint. One of the thumbnails of the video stated that "*Avaidh Masjid ko lekar Shimla ke Hinduon ne Musalmano par kya kaha,*" and there was an image of a woman with a speech bubble insinuating that she said "*yaha se hathaya jaye*". The complainant submitted that many such thumbnails and bubbles had been made with ill intent.

In the impugned broadcast, the reporter spoke to four Hindu women in the vicinity and questioned them whether there had been an increase in the Muslim population and whether there was an atmosphere of fear. The questions were leading in nature, and the responses received from the women were a reflection of the damage that reportage, such as the impugned broadcast, had caused with their repeated anti-Muslim coverage. One of the women said that she was scared that her children would be raped, while another woman stated that their identities should be verified and only those who are deemed worthy should be allowed to enter Shimla.

The leading questions posed by the reporter were further compounded by the ill-intentioned thumbnails; for example, in one of the thumbnails, two women were included, and the speech bubble on the first woman read "*musalman ladke hume...*" and on the second woman read "*jumme ke din toh...*" The complainant questioned what the channel wanted to insinuate to the viewers with such speech bubbles, especially when none of the women interviewed by the reporter had flagged any incident or safety issue.

Submissions of the Broadcaster

The impugned broadcast concerned certain issues such as overcrowding, congestion, traffic in Shimla, and its impact on women's safety, without singling out any particular community, contrary to the complainant's assertions. In the broadcast, four independent-minded adult women were questioned by the reporter, who did not influence their responses. Between time stamps 0:50 to 0:57, the first woman expressed no problem with long-time residents of Shimla. However, she voiced her concerns about the strangers moving to Shimla, emphasizing the necessity of conducting verification. She did not single out any specific community, focusing solely on the necessity of verification. Then, the reporter raised the issue of overcrowding. Between 1:08 and 1:14, one of the women suggested conducting background checks on all men entering Shimla and permitting only those deemed worthy so that proper verification could be conducted. Thereafter, at 6:12 to 6:42 and 8:21 to 8:41, the reporter interviewed several women, asking about the challenges they faced as residents of the area. During these discussions, all women expressed concerns about their safety without referring to any community.

The broadcast must be seen in its entirety and not from the perspective of a hypersensitive person. The discussion centred around a mosque that originally consisted of only a ground floor. It has been alleged that additional floors had been constructed illegally, and no action had been taken to address this issue. It was in this background that the reporter raised questions about whether there had been a rise in the number of people, alongside questions about women's safety and the general atmosphere in the vicinity. The discussion was regarding the illegal construction of the Mosque; questions were raised around the community.

However, the same cannot be tantamount to targeting a community. It is further not permissible to cherry-pick statements made by the women. The broadcast must be evaluated in its entirety rather than through selective excerpts. Isolating certain statements without considering the full context can lead to a distorted interpretation.

The right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) can only be interdicted under Article 19(2). The press has the right to provide fair commentary on matters affecting the public at large. This right encompasses not only freedom of expression through the press, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2), but also the editorial discretion regarding the mode and manner of presentation.

In rejoinder, the complainant submitted that the broadcaster had failed to explain what it meant by the thumbnail *"musalman ladke hume..." "jumme ke din toh..."*, particularly when none of the women interviewed had faced any harm from any member of the Muslim community. Further, despite the issue concerning the mosque being sub judice at the time of the impugned broadcast, the broadcaster labelled the mosque as illegal construction.

The broadcaster reiterated that the thumbnail should be read in its entirety to understand the context. Further, no motive could be attributed to it. In the thumbnail, the full statement cannot be carried.

Decision

NBDSA 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.

Upon perusing the footage, NBDSA observed that the thumbnail text *"'अवैध मस्जिद' पर महिलाओं ने मुसलमानों पर खुलकर सब बता दिया!"* and *Musalman ladke hume... Jumme ke din toh...* aired was inconsistent with the statements made by the women interviewed during the broadcast. The thumbnail text gave the impression that Muslim men were harassing women, though it was not so stated by the women interviewed. Thus, this was not only misleading but also not in the interest of communal harmony.

In view of the above, finding that the inclusion of thumbnails did not project the correct version of the statements of the women interviewed, NBDSA held that the broadcaster had violated the Guidelines.

NBDSA is observing that in many programmes broadcast, due care is not taken in choosing the tickers and thumbnails, which give a distorted version of the actual narratives of the discussions/interviews. NBDSA expects that the tickers and thumbnails should conform to the actual version of the discussions/interviews.

Accordingly, NBDSA decided to close the complaint by issuing an advisory to all broadcasters highlighting that the tickers and thumbnails should conform to the actual version of the discussions/interviews.

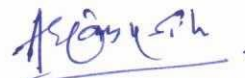
NBDSA further also directed the broadcaster to edit/remove the thumbnail from video of the said broadcast, if still available on the website of the channel, or YouTube, which should be confirmed to NBDSA in writing within 7 days of the Order.

NBDSA decided to close the complaint with the above 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 : 06-06-2025