

**News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority**

**Order No. 200 (2025)**

**Complainant: Mr. Indrajeet Ghorpade**

**Channel: ABP News**

**Programme: Brij Bhushan Singh Exclusive: हरियाणा चुनाव और विनेश फोगाट पर  
बृजभूषण सिंह का विस्फोटक इंटरव्यू**

**Date of Broadcast: 07.09.2024**

The complainant did not receive a response from the broadcaster within the time stipulated under the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations. The complaint was therefore escalated on 27.09.2024 to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA.

**Complaint dated 12.09.2024**

The complainant stated that in the interview with former BJP MP and former WFI President, Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the anchor engaged and encouraged the character assassination/defamation of Olympic wrestler and Congress party member Ms. Vinesh Phogat. Ms. Vinesh Phogat, along with six other female wrestlers, including a minor, had filed a case of sexual harassment against Mr. Singh and protested for several months due to government inaction. In the interview, Mr. Singh and the anchor were seen laughing at the accusations and mocking Ms. Vinesh Phogat. The anchor and Mr. Singh referred to a picture of Ms. Vinesh Phogat with the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Rahul Gandhi, in which they are holding hands. Mr. Singh said that one day, Ms. Vinesh would accuse Mr. Rahul Gandhi too of sexually harassing her and would claim that she was not able to let go of his hand, even though she wanted to. The anchor laughed and said, "*Chaupai ki bahi, jo hota hai, sab par aata hai*".

The complaints of sexual harassment, especially against powerful men, are often met with denial, deflection, and outright mockery. The accused frequently attempt to delegitimize the victim's experience, shifting the narrative to discredit them. Victims, particularly women, face a barrage of shaming, not just from the accused but also from society, which often questions their intentions and credibility. When news channels engage in this kind of public shaming and mockery, it not only deepens the trauma for the victims but also emboldens perpetrators of such crimes. The anchor's participation in Mr. Brij Bhushan Singh's attempt to humiliate Ms. Vinesh Phogat during the interview was an egregious violation of media ethics. Defamation, particularly of sexual harassment victims, undermines their quest for justice and discourages others from coming forward with their own stories. The insensitivity shown by the media in such instances has a chilling effect, reinforcing a culture of silence around crimes against women.

Data on crimes against women in India paints a grim picture. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), in 2022, there were 4,45,256 reported crimes against women in India, which is a 4% increase from 2021. This is almost 51 FIRs every hour. However, it is well-documented that many cases go unreported due to fear of societal backlash and victim-blaming. When media houses choose to align themselves with the mockery of such serious accusations, they play a dangerous role in perpetuating a toxic culture that minimizes crimes against women. The responsibility of news outlets is to report with sensitivity and integrity, not to act as platforms for defamation.

### **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. Raunak Das Sharma, Counsel
2. Mr. Rohit Kumar Saval, VP – News & Programming
3. Ms. Disha Sachdeva, Deputy Manager

### **Submissions made by the parties during the Hearing**

#### **Submissions of the Complainant**

The complainant submitted that Ms. Vinesh Phogat is an Olympic-level wrestler. She, along with some other wrestlers, had made certain allegations of sexual harassment against Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the former President of the Wrestling body, who is also associated with the BJP.

In the interview with Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the anchor posed leading questions regarding a recent photo of Ms. Phogat and Mr. Rahul Gandhi, in which they were holding hands as she was about to join the Congress Party. In response, Mr. Brij Bhushan remarked that it is likely in future Ms. Phogat would make allegations of sexual harassment against Mr. Gandhi as well. Further, the anchor was also laughing and belittling the accusations of sexual harassment. His grievance was also to the insinuation that Ms. Phogat had filed false allegations of sexual harassment against Mr. Brij Bhushan.



Not only was this a sheer mockery, but it was also in poor taste and in clear violation of the Code of Conduct. Furthermore, the complainant questioned the broadcaster what the anchor meant by “*chaupai ki bhai jo hota hai sab par aata hai.*”

### **Submissions of the Broadcaster**

In response, the broadcaster submitted that it was shocked by the allegations levelled against it, as it was well known to have covered incidents of sexual harassment, including interviewing the women. In fact, it had also interviewed Ms. Vinesh Phogat herself, where she had spoken about her turbulent time with Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan. Therefore, it does not make light of women rights or sexual harassment as alleged. Further, in the impugned broadcast, the anchor did not make any comment himself, which could be construed as being offensive or defamatory.

The broadcaster requested NBDSA to grant it additional time for written submissions, where it could also reproduce the links for Ms. Vinesh Phogat's interview, which was also broadcast on the channel, wherein Ms. Phogat had also levelled certain allegations against Mr. Brij Bhushan. The said interview was also for a duration of 25 minutes. It is an unbiased channel that provides a platform for both sides. The anchor did not indulge Mr. Brij Bhushan; rather, he was trying to obtain more information from him. The interview was live in nature, and no aspect of the interview was censored. Furthermore, there was no malice on the part of the broadcaster.

While the idiom used during the broadcast roughly translates to “*blessings for all equally for everyone*”, it would submit the meaning of the idiom along with its written submissions.

### **Written Submissions dated 25.03.2025 of the Broadcaster**

1. The coverage was an honest endeavour to capture Mr. Brij Bhushan's opinion on Ms. Vinesh Phogat, an Olympic wrestler, joining the Congress Party, and as such, the coverage was deserving of public attention and concern.
2. Such coverage was merely an attempt to gather information for public knowledge, and therefore cannot and does not constitute any violation of defamation, humiliation, mockery and/or public shaming, in any capacity whatsoever. The coverage as a whole was far from sensationalizing or glorifying the character assassination or defamation of Ms. Phogat. In any interview, the answers of the interviewee often raise further questions, and in this instance, the questions asked by the anchor were directly related to the comments Mr. Brij Bhushan made earlier.

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3. Without prejudice to any of the above, the coverage of the issue was a *bona fide* attempt, in the course of journalistic endeavour, to understand the nuances of the situation, and broadcasting the coverage was material to this endeavour. There was no malice intended, and none of the words uttered by the anchor had any malicious intent.
4. The coverage was a live video, and it was not at all scripted. As such, the portion of the coverage of the video had been taken out of context since the comments made by the anchor were in line with the soliloquy of Mr. Brij Bhushan Singh. No particular indulgence was extended by the anchor.
5. The broadcaster takes the allegations of women's safety and women's sexual harassment very seriously and would never make light of such matters. The same can be substantiated through a video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5t0J-I1Tgk> (time stamps: 6:45, 7:53, 9:33) wherein Ms. Vinesh Phogat was interviewed at length, and further in the same interview, Ms. Vinesh Phogat had also levelled certain allegations pertaining to Mr. Brij Bhushan Singh. The broadcaster always ensures to remain unbiased and present both sides of the story, in due diligence of its journalistic responsibilities.
6. Also, as requested by the Hon'ble Authority, the words "*Chaupai ki bahi, jo hota hai, sab par aata hai*" as spoken in the video roughly translate to "*It is said that the blessings of a powerful person come to everyone around them*".
7. If, NBDSA is of the view that the coverage in itself encouraged the character assassination/defamation of anybody in any extent, the broadcaster tenders an unconditional apology for the same and regrets any impact the coverage may have had in this regard and will modulate its future coverage of such incidents in terms of any guidance that NBDSA may provide.

### 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.

NBDSA observed that no objection could be raised to the broadcaster interviewing Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan and seeking his views on various aspects, provided that the broadcast was conducted in strict adherence to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and objectivity as enshrined in the Code of Conduct.



Having viewed the footage of the broadcast, NBDSA observed that Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan was given an opportunity to express his views without any meaningful questions/interjections being raised by the anchor/interviewer, which could have provided an alternative perspective. In order to have the discussion more objectively, it would have been appropriate to put the questions projecting the views of the other side. This would have also ensured that the discussion is not one-sided and has taken into consideration the other perspectives as well, though it was always open to Mr. Brij Bhushan to counter such views.

NBDSA noted that it was submitted by the broadcaster that it had also interviewed Ms. Vinesh Phogat in another programme, and thereby had broadcast her version also. NBDSA viewed that programme as well and finds that whereas Ms. Phogat was confronted with the version of Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan, the same was lacking in the interview with Mr. Brij Bhushan Sharan, who was not similarly questioned with reference to Ms. Phogat's account. For this specific reason, NBDSA found that the impugned broadcast was lacking in objectivity and was aimed at projecting the views of Mr. Sharan only.

In view of the above, NBDSA found that the impugned broadcast was in violation of the Specific Guidelines for Anchors conducting Programmes including Debates. In respect of the principles of Neutrality, the broadcasters are required to offer *"equality for all affected parties, players and actors in any dispute or conflict to present their point of view. Though neutrality does not always come down to giving equal space to all sides (news channels shall strive to give main view points of the main parties) news channels must strive to ensure that allegations are not portrayed as fact and charges are not conveyed as an act of guilt."*

Further, in view of the fact that the broadcaster had submitted in its written submissions that if NBDSA found that the coverage in itself had encouraged the character assassination/defamation of anybody, it was tendering its unconditional apology in advance, regretting the impact the coverage may have had in this regard and also indicated its willingness to modulate its future coverage of such incidents in accordance with any guidance that NBDSA may issue, NBDSA decided to close the complaint with the observation to take care of the issue highlighted by NBDSA in this order.

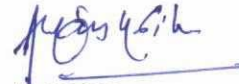
NBDSA decided to close the complaint with the above observations and inform the complainant and the broadcaster accordingly.

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