

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority

Order No. 206(2025)

Complainant: Mr. Indrajeet Ghorpade and Mr. Utkarsh Mishra

Channel and Programmes:

1. "Reena Ahmad Letter Controversy: रीना की चिट्ठी..अहमद का नाम..किसका काम ? MP | Love Jihad" aired on India TV
2. "NCERT Books: तीसरी क्लास की किताब...NCERT पर सवाल | Love Jihad | Ncert Books | Third Class | Books" aired on India TV
3. "Baba Bageshwar ने उठाया चिट्ठी पर बड़ा सवाल ? | Baba Bageshwar on NCERT Book | Chhatarpur News" aired on News18 MP/Chhattisgarh
4. "NCERT की किताब में Love Jihad वाली 'चिट्ठी'!, भड़के Bageshwar Baba | Pandit Dhirendra Krishna Shastri" aired on News18 MP/Chhattisgarh
5. "Bhopal : NCERT की किताब को लेकर विवाद, तीसरी क्लास के बच्चों को लव जिहाद पढ़ाने का आरोप | Love Jihad" aired on Zee Madhya Pradesh/ Chhattisgarh
6. "DNA: NCERT में लव जिहाद का चैप्टर 17! NCERT Textbook Reena Ahmad Letter Controversy | Madhya Pradesh" aired on Zee News
7. "NCERT Book Treated: NCERT की किताब...'लव जिहाद' का पाठ? बागेश्वर बाबा के बयान से सियासत में उफान!" aired on ABP News
8. "NCERT की तीसरी कक्षा के एक चैप्टर पर सवाल..बाबा बागेश्वर ने विवादित चैप्टर हटाने की मांग की" aired on ABP News

Date of Broadcast: 22.09.2024

Since the complainants were not satisfied with the response received from the broadcasters, India TV and News18 MP/Chhattisgarh, and did not receive a response from the other broadcasters, Zee Madhya Pradesh/ Chhattisgarh, Zee News and ABP within the time stipulated under the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations, on 10.10.2024 and 14.10.2024, the complaints were escalated to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA.

Complaint dated 29.09.2024/30.09.2024

The issue being reported involved a fictional letter from a chapter titled "*Chitti Aayi Hai*" in an outdated NCERT Class 3 EVS book. The letter, written by a character named Reena to Ahmed, was misrepresented by certain interest groups as part of a "*love jihad*" conspiracy.

The broadcasters were recently censured for their coverage of the "*love jihad*" issue. Despite this, they chose to highlight this news story, which was entirely subjective, highly polarising, and largely promoted by groups seeking notoriety and popularity through such claims. The platforming of individuals promoting these claims and, in some cases, the anchors' subtle endorsement through dog-whistling and ticker

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displays, represented an attempt to normalise divisive discourse within public debate. This was a clear violation of Fundamental Principle Number 4 of the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards.

The platforming of such individuals, along with their glorification by labelling those who have lodged complaints against this content as "*Jagruk Pita*," also constituted a violation of the Specific Guidelines for Anchors conducting Programmes including Debates.

The undue prominence given to the highly subjective and unverified opinions of individuals making these claims violated the principles of neutrality and objectivity, as well as Guidelines 1, 2, and 3 of the Guidelines to Prevent Communal Colour in Reporting Crime, Riots, Rumours, and Related Incidents. The sensationalization and communalization of such an innocuous incident amounted to targeted coverage, perpetuating harmful stereotypes historically used to attack, intimidate, or dehumanize members of a particular community and thus effectively violated the Guidelines on the Prevention of Hate Speech.

1. India TV

Headline: Love Jihad ki Chitti

Tickers:

Kitab mein Chitthi aai, Love Jihad ki sajbish lai
Syllabus bana Love Jihad
Love Jihad ja chapter -- Reena aur Ahmed
Reena ki chitthi, Ahmed ka naam, kiska kaam
Ek Chitthi chap gai, school school mein batt gai
Reena ne Dipti ko kyon nahi likha patra

In the impugned broadcast, the channel interviewed the police and presented NCERT's response, towards the end. The overall tone of the reporting showed the letter in a negative light. There was no condemnation of such divisive cases.

2. India TV

Headline: NCERT ki kitab mein Love Jihad

Tickers:

Paryavaran ki kitaab, nikla Love Jihad ka chapter
NCERT ki kitab mein padha rahe Love Jihad

The channel interviewed the person who had filed the case. No other party was interviewed. There was no condemnation of such divisive cases.

3. News18 MP Chattisgarh

Headline: Love Jihad wali chitthi ! Baba ki chetavni !

Tickers:

Love Jihad wali Chitthi

Baba ki chetavni

NCERT ki kitab, Love Jihad ka chapter

Reena ne Ahmed ko kyon likhi chitthi?

Chitthi par bhadke Pandit Dhirendra Shastri

Chitthi aai, fir vivaad lai

The broadcaster parroted Dhirendra Shastri's words, who had said, "*kyo prayojak tareekon se tum hinduo ki betiyon ko inn Ahmadon ke chakkar mein padwana chahte ho? Ye chitthi love jihad ko badhava dene ke liye dali gai hai. Ye kitab wapas leni chahiye. Ahmed ka naam badalkar Adarsh, etc. rakhna chahiye*". There was no condemnation of such divisive cases.

4. News18 MP Chattisgarh

Headline: Love Jihad wali chitthi ! Baba ki chetavni !

Tickers:

Love Jihad wali Chitthi

Baba ki chetavni

NCERT ki kitab, Love Jihad ka chapter

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5. Zee Madhya Pradesh Chattisgarh

Tickers: *Paryavar vishay se chali Love Jihad ki hawa*

The reporter interviewed two individuals associated with the field of education. Both refused to make a comment. The reporter in the end passionately stated, "*No one is speaking freely. What is the intention behind writing such a chapter? What good is it doing for society? The writers should answer, the responsible persons must answer, someone must answer what was the need for including a chapter with a letter from Reena to Ahmed. What will a class 3 girl student learn from this? She could've written the letter to someone else. What message are you trying to give a girl, in such an environment? Leftists are sitting in NCERT, an ex MP has made this allegation*". It is abundantly clear that the reporter had an issue with the letter. There

was no condemnation of such divisive cases, and no one was interviewed who could condemn such divisive and malicious cases

6. Zee News

Headline:

School mein Love Jihad wali chitthi

NCERT mein Love Jihad ka chapter 17

Reena ne Ahmed ko kyon likha letter?

Salma ne Sunil ko kyon nahi likha patra?

Tickers:

Love Jihad ka beej bone ki koshish

Hindu ladki ne Muslim yuvak ko likhi chitthi

*Class 3 ke kitab mein **chipi chitthi** pe vivaad*

The broadcaster used a graphic of a woman wearing a half-burkha and a half-ghunghat. Multiple people were interviewed, all of whom either supported the case or made no comments. No one condemned the case, including the channel.

7. ABP News

The impugned broadcast had visuals of the letter with the names of Reena and Ahmed highlighted. Further, the music sensationalized the issue, and the video was not accompanied by any commentary. There was only amplification.

8. ABP News

The reporter called the complainant a “Jagruk pita”, and Dharendra Shashtri “Maharaj ji”. In the broadcast, a platform was given to men like Dharendra Shashtri to promote communal divide. Dharendra Shashtri condemned the letter in the book, questioning why the boy's name cannot be changed to a Hindu name, and spoke about *Love Jihad and Land Jihad*. The reporter was a mute spectator. The channel did not condemn the issue.

Response dated 07.10.2024 from India TV

At the outset, the contents of the complaint are denied as being misconceived and incorrect. Moreover, the allegations raised were vague, generalized, and did not reflect the portion of the telecast by which the complainants were allegedly aggrieved.

In the impugned broadcasts, a news story from Madhya Pradesh was telecast, in which it was explained that a parent of a third-standard girl had found a section of an NCERT textbook objectionable and had filed a complaint with the SDOP office. The parent was interviewed, who explained that, in his view, a letter in the textbook written by a fictional character, “Reena,” to her friend, “Ahmed,” would influence young minds, given the recent incidents of “love jihad”. Following the complaint,

certain groups in Madhya Pradesh raised the issue with the concerned authorities and also held a protest seeking the removal of the allegedly objectionable content from the textbook, prompting national and regional parties to take a view on the issue, making the story newsworthy. The reporting faithfully presented the story and examined its likely impact on local politics.

The story was shown in a sober and non-sensational manner, including, the interview with the parent had who filed the complaint, protestors, Shri Rameshwar Sharma, MLA from Bhopal constituency and member of Bharatiya Janata Party, Shri Kamal Nath, prominent leader of the Indian National Congress and former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and the concerned official from the SDOP office in Khajuraho. The detailed response issued by NCERT was also shown in full and read out in voice-over. It was also reported that the broadcaster had solicited comments from the school where the young girl was studying; however, no response was received.

At no point in the impugned broadcasts did the broadcaster endorse any actions of the concerned entities or express an opinion. It simply reported the news as it transpired, with accuracy and no embellishment. The tickers shown during the story must be read in the context of the voice-over and the visuals on screen. The tickers only showed the allegations raised and did not reflect the broadcaster's view/opinion on the issue.

The complaint appears to suggest that the way to deal with controversial issues is not to report on them at all. This is contrary to the duty of the free press. The media serves the inviolable right of the citizenry to know what is happening around the world. Selecting news that is exclusively positive or that appeals to all sensibilities constitutes shirking of this responsibility.

The impugned videos did not violate principle 4 of the fundamental principles contained in Section 1, the Specific Guidelines for Anchors conducting programmes including debates, the Guidelines to Prevent Communal Colour in Reporting Crime, Riots, Rumors, and Related Incidents and Guidelines for Prevention of Hate Speech.

The news was selected as it involved an issue of public importance and was newsworthy. The viewers were left to form their own opinion on the issue. No communally inflammable statement, improper language, or words were spoken, which had the tendency to indoctrinate any community. No expressions were used that target, ridicule or endanger any community. The reporting was only focused on the event as it occurred, and no comments were made during the reporting, which could be classified as hate speech. No religion-linked adjectives were uttered by the anchor. No character assassination or attacks were made in the news reporting. Furthermore, no communal agenda was pushed during the programme. The anchor did not take any side in the issue, and no personal views or opinions were given, as

alleged. Further, no allegations were portrayed as facts. In fact, the news reporting was based on primary evidence, given that the complainant himself was interviewed and NCERT's response was shown and read out.

Furthermore, the complainant in the news program was referred to as "abhibhavak" or guardian, and not "jagruk pita" as has been falsely alleged. The complainant was not glorified in any manner. Rather, the entire focus of the reporting was on the issue raised by the complainant and nothing else.

Response dated 09.10.2024 from News18 MP/Chhattisgarh

The impugned broadcasts were a report on statements made by Pandit Dharendra Shastri of Bageshwar Dham ("Baba Bageshwar"), who had objected to the content of the NCERT books. In both links, the same clip of Baba Bageshwar was played, in which he expressed his views on the material in the third-grade lesson book, and no statements or comments were made by the channel. The channel did not make any reference to any religion anywhere. Moreover, there was no malicious intent to paint any religion in a negative light. Any claims to the contrary are firmly denied.

The program clearly mentioned that the said view and objections to the content of the NCERT book have been raised by Baba Bageshwar. All statements were his own and were made on his own accord in the clipping, and thus, the channel or the anchor never supported such statements.

The broadcasts were conducted in strict adherence to all relevant rules, regulations, guidelines, and applicable laws.

Response dated 21.10.2024 from ABP News

1. At the very outset, all assertions and/or contentions, if any, by way of the complaint are denied and disputed.
2. It had aired an interview with one Dharendra Shashtri on an issue which was being discussed on various news channels as well, i.e., with regard to the fictional letter from a chapter titled "Chitti Aayi Hai" in an outdated NCERT Class 3 EVS book. As a reputed news channel, it is its duty and right to facilitate meaningful discussions and allow the interviewees to speak and express their opinions. However, it is impossible for an anchor or the channel to cross-check each and every statement made by a guest during an interview. The purpose or intent of airing any issue/ program is not in way to propagate any social or communal disharmony as alleged.
3. During an interview, the views expressed by guests are their own, and the channel or the anchor has no control over what a guest is likely to say in response, and the broadcaster cannot be held responsible for the same. It is further stated that

the anchor taking the interview had in no manner or in any statement made any biased and/or politically and/or religiously aggravated statements. To reiterate, no explicit remarks were made by the anchor in any manner whatsoever, which could be construed as promoting social disharmony or perpetuating harmful stereotypes to attack, intimidate, or dehumanise members of a particular community, as alleged by the complainants.

4. Furthermore, it is also stated that merely calling the interviewee “Maharaj Ji” did not in any manner whatsoever mean that the anchor or the broadcaster was biased or promoted the views of the interviewer or was a disciple of the interviewee.
5. The discussion with the interviewee was based on the complaint made by an individual whom the anchor referred to as the “Jagruk Pita”, which, if translated, would mean someone who is watchful, which cannot be the reason for any kind of social or political disturbance. The topic of the interview was based on such reported information, which was already available in the public domain. The anchor had not expressed his views; rather, he had only raised questions that the interviewee had answered. The manner of presentation is the prerogative of the anchor. It is denied that the broadcaster violated any guidelines while broadcasting the said interview. Rather, the broadcasts were in complete adherence to the principles of impartiality, neutrality and objectivity.
6. The allegation that dramatic music was played for the sole purpose of sensationalising the issue is wholly denied. It had ensured that the reporting did not cross boundaries of good taste and decency, and adequate precautions were taken while showing the visuals in the second link.
7. It is also pertinent to note that the complainants did not mention or raise any tickers in their complaint. Hence, it is unclear what the complainants were aggrieved by. The headlines were merely statements made by the interviewee during the interview process. While reporting on the incident, the broadcaster did not present the interviewee's views as a constructive solution to the issue, nor did it use any sensational headlines. The statements and opinions of the interviewee do not represent the opinions of the anchor or the broadcaster.
8. As per the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards & Guidelines, a news channel cannot broadcast a program that is provocative, but it does not preclude the channel from discussing such provocative issues. Even though the topic of discussion was provocative, the anchor and the broadcaster adhered to the principles of impartiality and neutrality.

Response dated 02.12.2024 from Zee Media Corporation Ltd.

At the outset, every allegation, averment, and insinuation levelled in the complaint is denied, as they are false, frivolous, unfounded, and misleading. In response to the allegations in the complaint, it is submitted as under:

1. The impugned programmes did not violate any of the guidelines, code of ethics and principles of self-regulation or any of the guidelines of the Specific Guidelines for Anchors conducting programmes, including debates. The impugned programme was completely neutral, objective, and impartial.
2. In response to the complaint, it is submitted that the allegations raised by the complainant are entirely unfounded and motivated. The complainant has fundamentally misconstrued and misinterpreted the contents of the program in question, which presented factual information about a specific situation without fabricating details or attempting to incite religious animosity. The report highlighted a specific situation wherein Mr. Raghav Pathak, the father of a class 3 student in Khajuraho, Chhatarpur, had made a complaint regarding the contents of a chapter in her daughter's textbook. The report published in no way fabricated details nor sought to incite religious animosity. The broadcast focused solely on presenting the concerns raised and the underlying context of the issue.
3. It had specifically covered the complaint made by Mr. Raghav Pathak, in which he had raised objections regarding the content of a chapter in the NCERT textbook titled "Chhithi Aayi Hai". The complainant expressed concern as to why a class 3 girl would write a letter to a Muslim boy, ending with the phrase "Tumhari Reena". This broadcast simply reported the facts as stated in the complaint and did not seek to interpret or modify the content in any way.
4. It is crucial to emphasize that the program was purely factual. At no point was personal opinion introduced or an attempt made to influence the narrative. It had covered the complaint made by the father of a student regarding the text in question and aired his concerns, accompanied by an interview with Mr. Raghav Pathak, the broadcaster had also presented his statements in the program, along with the corresponding video footage. The primary goal was to inform our viewers about the issue raised and to provide transparency surrounding the matter.
5. The report included not only the viewpoint of the complainant but also those of key authorities who hold responsible positions in the education sector. It had interviewed and aired statements from the SDOP of Khajuraho, Mr. Salil Sharma, the Principal of CM Rise School in Bhopal, former Chairman of the MP Textbook Standing Committee, Dr. Prakash Bartunia, and former Parliamentarian Mr. Raghunandan Sharma. These interviews aimed to provide a well-rounded

perspective on the matter, ensuring that all sides of the issue were represented. The program did not endorse any specific viewpoint but sought to present the facts for public consumption.

6. The reporter conducted interviews with relevant authorities to understand the rationale behind including the controversial chapter in the curriculum. The reporter did not endorse any particular viewpoint but simply sought to uncover the facts behind the inclusion of the chapter and to provide clarity on the matter.
7. It is important to clarify that the ticker and headlines used in connection with the aforementioned programs were not solely its original creation nor entirely devoid of context. Rather, they were directly derived from the issue at hand, the complaint filed by Mr. Raghav Pathak, which triggered the entire discussion. The intent behind the use of such headlines was to ensure that the viewers fully understood the nature of the complaint and the public interest surrounding the incident. The headlines were designed to provide clarity and transparency, not to mislead or sensationalize the issue.
8. It is respectfully submitted that the reporters and anchors involved in the program were solely focused on ascertaining the facts pertaining to the issue at hand. At no point did they express any personal objection to the chapter in question, nor did they endorse or promote any particular viewpoint. Their role was strictly to seek the truth, aiming to present the issue in an objective and neutral manner. The interviews conducted and the explanations provided following the interviews were solely intended to help the audience gain a clearer understanding of the matter, ensuring that all aspects of the issue were fully explained and presented for public awareness.
9. Their actions and presentation of the program were in full accordance with the ethical responsibilities expected of media professionals.
10. Thus, in view of the aforesaid, it had neither breached any of the fundamental principles of NBDSA, any guidelines of Guidelines to Prevent Communal Colour in Reporting Crime, Riots, Rumors, and Related Incidents, any principles of Code of Ethics or any of the provisions of Specific Guidelines for Anchors Conducting Programmes including debates nor had it sensitized or communalised the issue, as alleged in the complaint.

Decision of NBDSA at its meeting held on 13.12.2024

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

On being served with the Notices, the following persons were present at the hearing on 22.05.2025:

Complainant

1. Mr. Indrajeet Ghorpade
2. Mr. Utkarsh Mishra

Broadcasters

India TV

1. Mr. Tejveer Singh Bhatia, Advocate
2. Ms. Ritika Talwar, Legal Head & Vice President -HR

News18 MP/Chhattisgarh

1. Mr. Brajesh Kumar Singh, Group Editor – Integration & Convergence, Editorial & Production
2. Mr. Gautam Dubey, Head Legal Counsel
3. Mr. Apurv Narula, Principal Counsel Legal

Zee Madhya Pradesh/ Chhattisgarh and Zee News

1. Ms. Ritwika Nanda, Advocate
2. Ms. Annie, Senior Manager - Legal

ABP News

1. Ms. Ashika Daga, Counsel
2. Mr. Avinash Kumar Rai, News Editor

Submissions of the Complainants

In the impugned broadcasts, the broadcasters promoted the conspiracy theory of 'love jihad' based on a chapter in the third standard EVS textbook. The chapter titled "*Chitti Aji Hai*" contained a letter addressed by Reena to Ahmed. An objection was raised to this chapter by one Raghav Pathak, who was the parent of a third-standard female student, on the grounds that it promoted love jihad. This incident was widely covered by the news channels. In the impugned broadcasts, the broadcasters presented only one perspective while covering this incident and used the term 'jihad' loosely.

In the broadcasts aired on News18 MP/Chhattisgarh, the entire broadcast was structured on the views expressed by Baba Bageshwar on this subject, who claimed that Hindu women were in danger and through love jihad, there was a plan to increase the Muslim population in the country. It was further alleged that Muslim men conceal their religious identity and wear a kalava in order to trap Hindu women. The tickers aired during the broadcasts reinforced this narrative of Baba Bageshwar. Further, sensationalist visuals were used, and there was no critical engagement on

whether this was a polarized or divisive claim. The broadcasts lacked any critique of the people making such claims.

In the broadcasts aired on Zee News and Zee Madhya Pradesh/Chhattisgarh, the broadcaster also interviewed teachers. However, at the end of these broadcasts, it was claimed that the inclusion of the chapter in the textbook was suspicious and that no discussion had taken place on this issue. In the first impugned broadcast, the ground reporter very passionately said, *“No one is speaking freely. What is the intention behind writing such a chapter? What good is it doing for society? The writers should answer, the responsible persons must answer, someone must answer what was the need for including a chapter with a letter from Reena to Ahmed. What will a class 3 girl student learn from this? She could’ve written the letter to someone else. What message are you trying to give a girl, in such an environment? Leftists are sitting in NCERT, an ex MP has made this allegation”*. The questions raised in the statement were the reporter’s, clearly indicating that he was also opposed to the inclusion of this chapter in the EVS textbook.

The other Hindu group's version was taken in the broadcast aired on India TV, including an extremely rabid individual who was blackening the textbook. No questions were raised by the broadcaster to the said individual.

A common element across all the broadcasts was the absence of critical engagement with such a divisive claim. In addition to News18 MP/Chhattisgarh, even ABP News interviewed Baba Bageshwar and called the complainant Raghav Pathak, a *“jagruk pita”*.

The complainants reiterated the tickers aired during the broadcast, which had been reproduced in the complaint and stated that none of the channels attempted to speak to NCERT, which had published the textbook.

Submissions of News18 MP/Chhattisgarh

The broadcaster at the outset submitted that it was unable to understand the grievance raised by the complainant. He submitted that, based on a chapter published in an NCERT textbook, certain views were expressed by Baba Bageshwar, an influential figure. These views were aired as they are, with no slant from the broadcaster. As a news broadcaster, it was its duty to report the story. Further, it is not necessary that every report include the other’s viewpoint or perspective.

The broadcaster questioned whether the term “love jihad” can be construed to be unconstitutional or unparliamentary and whether there was any embargo against the usage of the term. In any event, it submitted that the term was not used by it; rather, it was used by Baba Bageshwar. In the past, it has not only broadcast views expressed by Baba Bageshwar but also aired views criticising him.

Further, this event was not only reported by it but also by other channels and newspapers. Additionally, it submitted that there was no blanket ban on reporting the views expressed by Baba Bageshwar.

As a broadcaster, it cannot pass judgment on the views expressed by Baba Bageshwar, whether he is a rabid individual or not. Regarding the issue of counter views not being projected in broadcasts, it is submitted that news channels initially report the development, followed by debates and questions on the matter.

It reiterated that it had not given the broadcast a slant. As a broadcaster, it provides a platform to others to express and project diverse views.

In rebuttal, the complainant submitted that, as far as the broadcaster's submission concerning diverse viewpoints being projected subsequently was concerned, the complainant submitted that, in the instant case, only the views of Baba Bageshwar were projected on the channel, and no subsequent programmes were conducted with diverse viewpoints. Historically, the channel has been guilty of projecting only perspective.

Baba Bageshwar was neither an educationalist nor the complainant; therefore, it was entirely within the channel's discretion to further project his views. The channel consciously chose to air only Baba Bageshwar's views, rather than those of NCERT, the complainant, or any other parents on the subject. Furthermore, the channel selected the tickers it aired. Therefore, it cannot take the defence that it was only projecting the views of Baba Bageshwar. The tickers gave the impression that they were factual in nature.

As far as the broadcaster's submission that there was no judicial embargo on the use of the term "love jihad" was concerned, the complainant submitted that while they were not advocating for a blanket ban on the term "love jihad", they expected the channels to refrain from using the term loosely, in compliance with the past Order of NBDSA, particular in this case, where a letter written from a Hindu girl to a Muslim boy, was published in a government textbook.

The broadcaster submitted that if the issue raised in the broadcast was insignificant, there would have been no reason for NCERT to withdraw the chapter from its book.

Submissions of India TV

The impugned broadcast solely reported a news story from Madhya Pradesh, where a parent had raised objections to a letter in an NCERT textbook. A balanced view was presented in the broadcast, with interviews with various stakeholders, including the parent, protestors, political figures, and education officials, aired. Further, the views of NCERT were obtained and read over in the broadcast. Additionally, the

views of concerned officials from the SDOP office in Khajuraho were also obtained, who suggested that a complaint should be filed with the relevant authorities. There was no slant in the broadcast. Admittedly, the term “love jihad” was used by the parent in the interview given on the channel and by the protestors. As a result, the term appeared in the tickers and was broadcast.

In rejoinder, the complainants submitted that the Guidelines for Prevention of Hate Speech clearly state that “*Editorial Policy of a particular channel or any purported ‘balance of participants’ cannot be a defense against a breach of the Code of Ethics and the Guidelines.*” In the impugned broadcast, only extremist and divisive views were aired. Further, NBDSA had previously cautioned the broadcasters against broadcasting any content that could be construed as stereotyping or promoting conspiracy theories. In the impugned broadcast, there was no critical engagement. To sensationalize the broadcast, music was played whenever the words Reena or Ahmed were mentioned.

In the second impugned broadcast, a graphic of a woman with half of her face hidden behind a hijab was aired. From the tickers aired, it was evident that the broadcaster had come to the conclusion that there was a chapter on love jihad in the NCERT textbook. Apart from speaking to the NCERT Official and Mr. Kamal Nath, a minister in Congress, by and large, the broadcasts gave ample space to divisive individuals to voice their claims without their views being challenged.

In the broadcast, a platform was provided to propound a claim that may have little legitimacy. It is not our submission that the broadcasters cannot discuss controversial subjects; however, the Code of Conduct, in particular the Guidelines, emphasizes balance and casts an obligation upon the broadcasters to avoid fringe and extremist elements.

Further, while the broadcaster had aired the NCERT statement, it was shown for only 15 seconds at the conclusion of the impugned broadcast. The remaining 7-minute broadcast only promoted the claim of love jihad and the views of the fringe elements. If the broadcast were truly neutral, impartial, and balanced, the emphasis should have been on NCERT’s views.

The broadcaster, in rejoinder, submitted that the submissions of the complaint appear to be predicated on the broadcaster’s refraining from airing any news report on the subject, merely because the term “love jihad” was being used. If that were not the case, the complainants would have no objection. The broadcaster reiterated that it cannot be asked to refrain from reporting on a subject merely because it could be regarded as controversial.

The anchor had clearly stated that it was reporting a controversy that had arisen. The reporting was objective, and the anchor did not express any slant or views. In the

broadcast, only the views of other persons were aired. While some of the tickers that were aired used exclamation marks, the broadcasts had to be evaluated in their entirety, without being dissected.

Submissions of ABP News

The broadcaster denied the allegation that by airing the impugned broadcast, it had targeted the minorities. It submitted that the impugned broadcast arose from a complaint filed by a parent with the police regarding a chapter published in the NCERT textbook, and that thereafter protests ensued. In the impugned broadcast, it had merely reported what was happening. The term “love jihad” was used in the complaint filed by the parent and by other people. It reiterated that it had accurately reported the story without expressing any views. In view of this, no objection could be raised against the broadcaster.

In rejoinder, the complainant submitted that the second broadcast featured an interview with Baba Bageshwar, during which the reporter was seated at the Baba's feet and referred to him respectfully as “Maharaj ji,” and addressed the complainant as a “jagruk pita” (an aware father). This clearly reflected the channel's bias. The first impugned broadcast lacked any visuals and served only to amplify the complaint against the chapter. However, by playing dramatic visuals and background music, a sensationalist tone was adopted, creating the impression that a major conspiracy was underway.

The broadcaster responded by stating that it was unclear how merely sitting at someone's feet could be construed as taking sides or being offensive. It was further clarified that both individuals were seated on the same platform during the interview. As far as the use of the term “Maharaj ji” in reference to Baba Bageshwar was concerned, the broadcaster submitted that it was a matter of personal belief, to which no objection could reasonably be raised. Further, with respect to the complainant's grievance regarding the usage of the term “jagruk pita”, the broadcaster stated that since the complaint was filed by a father, the only individual to come forward, he was referred to as such by the reporter in the broadcast.

Furthermore, the Order sought to be relied upon by the complainants, requiring the broadcasters not to use the term 'love jihad' loosely, was not applicable in the present case, where the subject itself was 'love jihad'.

In rebuttal, the complainant submitted that the term love jihad was used by the reporter who raised a question concerning the same to Baba Bageshwar; therefore, there was no merit in the broadcaster's submission that it had used the term love jihad because the same had been used in the complaint filed by the father, which was referred to by the broadcaster. While sound and visuals may be the prerogative of

the channel, the NBDSA has in the past also taken into account the impact of visuals, effects, and music to establish sensationalisation, which cannot be discounted.

The broadcaster submitted that there were several formats of television programme, such as debates, discussions and interviews, and it is not possible for the broadcaster to raise a rebuttal in every single programme. Additionally, the broadcast must be seen in its entirety. In the instant case, the visuals aired were from Baba Bageshwar's own Mahasabha, and the complainant has failed to point out any objectionable ticker that was aired during the broadcasts.

Submissions of Zee Madhya Pradesh/ Chhattisgarh and Zee News

The broadcaster submitted that it fails to comprehend what objection could be raised to a reporter posing questions. Furthermore, the reporter clearly questions the writer about the chapter's intention; therefore, it is evident that the reporter was merely investigating and had not rendered his personal opinion or passed judgment. In the broadcast, the interview of SDPO Khujrao, the Principal of the school, and the Former Chairman of the MP Textbook Standing Committee and a former Parliamentarian, was aired; therefore, it was evident that its objective was merely to elicit views on the subject. It reiterated that the term "love jihad" was used in the complaint filed against the chapter, and it had merely reported facts as they were. A perusal of the broadcast in its totality would reveal that a complaint was filed by a father against the letter in a chapter in a Class 3 textbook, and it had only raised questions pertaining to the same.

Decision

NBDSA considered the complaint, gave due consideration to the arguments of the complainant and the broadcasters and reviewed the footage of the broadcasts.

At the outset, NBDSA finds that merely because in a chapter of a NCERT textbook, it is shown that a letter is written by a girl to a boy, who belonged to different religions, was no reason to give the narrative of "love jihad". The curriculum and chapterisation is by NCERT, which is a government body, and its specific task is to prepare the curriculum and material for the books for school students. India is a secular country, which is the constitutional mandate as well. Therefore, giving of this slant to a particular chapter in an NCERT book by the broadcasters would amount to the violation of the Code of Conduct. No doubt one parent had made a complaint in respect of the aforesaid chapter by raising a grievance to the effect that a girl from a particular religion was shown to have written a letter to a boy from a different religion and the explanation of the broadcasters is that they covered the said complaint as a news item. However, had the telecast been limited to covering the said complaint as news, there might not have been any objection. Instead, this complaint was turned into a debate by the broadcasters with a specific narrative, and while doing so, the broadcasters did not take the interviews of any other persons or

parents. Likewise, some channels took interview of the person whose views are well known and did not bring on the channels persons holding different views as well. Thus, the way programmes were structured clearly showed a lack of objectivity.

NBDSA therefore disapproves the manner in which the news item was dealt with.

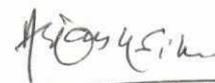
NBDSA further directs the broadcasters to remove the videos of the impugned broadcasts, if still available from the website of the channel(s), or YouTube, and remove all hyperlinks, including access, which should be confirmed to NBDSA in writing within 7 days of the Order.

NBDSA decided to close the complaint with the above observations and inform the complainant and the broadcasters 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 : 02.12.2025