

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority

Order No. 226 (2026)

Complainant: Mr. Indrajeet Ghorpade

Channel: Aaj Tak

**Programme: "Black and White Full Episode: Sambhal Jama Masjid और
Ajmer Dargah का क्या रिश्ता?"**

Date of Broadcast: 29.11.2024

The complainant vide application dated 23.12.2025 sought a review of the decision passed by NBDSA in the complaint dated 1.12.2024 filed in respect of a broadcast titled "Black and White Full Episode: Sambhal Jama Masjid और Ajmer Dargah का क्या रिश्ता?" aired on Aaj Tak, wherein NBDSA had vide decision dated 23.12.2025 found no violation of the Code of Conduct in the impugned broadcast.

Review Application dated 23.12.2025 filed by the Complainant

The complainant stated that, in his complaint, he had stated that the anchor further amplified the baseless claim that the Taj Mahal was once a Hindu temple, ignoring the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) clarification that the Taj Mahal is a tomb and was not built on a Hindu temple. The 2018 report by broadcaster itself, titled "*Taj Mahal is a tomb, not a Shiva temple: ASI*" explicitly debunks such claims.

NBDSA had in its order stated, "*Upon perusing the footage, NBDSA found that, during the broadcast, the anchor had given a narrative of the history of the destruction of Hindu temples over a period, which he supported with an ASI report and books written on the subject.*" The complainant stated that he was not satisfied with the order as its reasoning was not supported by scientific material; on the contrary, it relied on age-old, debunked, false narratives.

To appreciate the grounds urged in the review application, it is necessary to briefly set out the background of the original complaint.

Complaint dated 1.12.2024

The complainant stated that it is a well-documented fact that several Hindu temples in the Indian subcontinent were destroyed by Mughal and other Islamic rulers during their reign. Unfortunately, such destruction, targeting temples, palaces, forts, and other infrastructures was not uncommon in history. Hindu kings, too, have destroyed temples when they raided rival Hindu kingdoms, and several Buddhist and Jain sites of worship met a similar fate. More recently, hundreds of ancient Hindu temples and homes were demolished in Varanasi too for development.

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It is also important to note that many rulers, irrespective of their religion, granted funds for the construction of new religious sites. The history of the Indian subcontinent is vast and complex, reflecting a pattern of destruction and rebuilding across civilizations. Globally, places of worship have often been destroyed in the context of wars, and some have been reshaped or repurposed under new regimes.

Against this nuanced historical backdrop, the anchor's reportage focused solely on the destruction of Hindu temples by Muslim rulers, presenting a one-sided narrative. He further amplified the baseless claim that the Taj Mahal was once a Hindu temple, ignoring the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) clarification that the Taj Mahal is a tomb and was not built on a Hindu temple. The 2018 report by the broadcaster itself explicitly debunks such claims: Taj Mahal is a tomb, not a Shiva temple: ASI.

While the anchor appealed for peace towards the end of his report and emphasized learning the history of Hindu temples, the overall tone carried thinly veiled dog whistles against the Muslim community. His narrative appeared to connect the actions of Muslim rulers from centuries ago with the Muslim community in contemporary India, fostering division.

Additionally, in his 40+ minute segment, the anchor failed to mention the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which aims to preserve the religious character of places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947. Nor did he address the penalties for violating its provisions. This omission is significant, given the legal and social context of such discussions. The anchor did not utter a word about the six Muslim men killed in Sambhal following police violence triggered by unrest related to lower court orders.

While it is not possible to independently verify all the claims made in the report regarding Muslim places of worship allegedly being Hindu or Jain temples, the amplification of the false Taj Mahal narrative raises serious doubts about the credibility of these claims.

Such reportage, in a volatile situation such as Sambhal, where communal tensions are on edge, and while the matter remains sub judice, demonstrates an alarming lack of sensitivity and journalistic responsibility. It appears deliberately designed to cater to the biases and anti-Muslim sentiments.

The show has violated several guidelines of NBDSA, including the Code of Ethics, pertaining to Accuracy, Objectivity, Neutrality and Fairness, Religious Harmony, Specific Guidelines for Reporting Court Proceedings and Guidelines for telecast of news affecting Public Order.

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Response dated 18.12.2024 from Broadcaster

The broadcaster stated that the impugned broadcast presented in a documentary style, aimed to offer a "post-mortem" or a historical analysis of the alleged destruction of Hindu temples in the Indian sub-continent, including Sambhal. Such an analysis was based on sources such as (i) the 'Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them' by Sita Ram Goel, (ii) reports by the Archaeological Survey of India, (iii) Ajmer: Historical and Descriptive by Diwan Bahadur Har Bilas Sarda, (iv) Sambhal: A Historical Survey by Brijendra Mohan Sankhdher, and (v) personal account interviews, for which the broadcaster is not responsible. All the said sources were shown in the impugned broadcast, and the anchor specifically stated that all the claims made therein can be verified from the same and other similar sources.

In fact, it is the complainant's own claim that "*several Hindu temples in the Indian subcontinent were destroyed by Mughal and other Islamic rulers during their reign.*" However, the complaint notably failed to cite any sources in the complaint, whereby the sources as cited by the anchor can be rebutted, let alone challenged. Reference in this regard may be made to the complainant's statement in the email stating that he "*cannot independently verify all the claims made in the report regarding Muslim places of worship allegedly being Hindu or Jain temples.*"

Upon the establishment of the premise of the impugned broadcast at the 09:50 mins mark, the anchor clarified from the 10:12 mins mark onwards that the broadcaster does not, in any manner, advocate for the demolition of any mosques, or the reconstruction of Hindu temples, or the initiation of any movement or struggle aimed at achieving any specific objective related to these issues. Pertinently, the anchor reiterated at the 40:12 mins mark that he had no intention of fanning a fire or inciting communal violence, but is solely interested in presenting claims that form part of published records. At no point in the impugned broadcast did the anchor glorify violence or the need for the reinstatement of Hindu temples, instead focusing on the allegations and claims made by certain published authors and analysed the said claims.

The anchor suggested that it is important to understand the accurate history of the past, not to incite communal violence or unrest, but to gain a clearer understanding of the present and the core principles of Indian civilization and cultural history. Additionally, there is no instance in the impugned broadcast in which the anchor put forth his personal views or claimed that the views expressed were the broadcaster's.

The complainant has further alleged that the anchor has "*further amplified the baseless claim that the Taj Mahal was once a Hindu temple, ignoring the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) clarification that the Taj Mahal is a tomb and was not built on a Hindu temple*", with respect to the same, the premise of the programme, being that of presenting varied

claims about the destruction of Hindu temples in the Indian sub-continent, including Sambhal, is reiterated.

One such claim made - notably not made by broadcaster is that the site of the Taj Mahal has a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, referred to as Tejo Mahalay Temple, built in 1212 by the Hindu king Parmardi Dev. Additionally, such a claim by a third party avers that the concerned land was bought by Shah Jahan from King Jai Singh, and after that, the Taj Mahal was built. Reference may also be made to the articles published by Voice of America and Bar and Bench, respectively, which detail third-party claims about the Taj Mahal.

Moreover, historian Stephen Knapp also documents an article by Dr. V. S. Godbole on his website stating that the land concerning the Taj Mahal had been bought by Shah Jahan. All the statements made were based on petitions filed in courts, the sources cited therein, books, and articles, and the broadcaster, through the anchor, ensured that many of these sources were referenced in the impugned broadcast. The impugned broadcast was not aimed at evaluating the veracity of such claims and forming opinions on these matters. Rather, it was solely aimed at presenting the contentions and claims made in the said petitions, published books, and reports.

In fact, the broadcaster's own publication stating that, as per ASI, Taj Mahal is a tomb and not a Shiva Temple, evidences its journalistic objectivity and commitment to neutrality.

With respect to the complainant's claim that the reportage in the impugned broadcast did not intentionally cover or discuss the death of six Muslim men as a result of controversy in Sambhal, the premise of the impugned broadcast is reiterated. The said broadcast did not focus on the matter sub judice before the Hon'ble Courts, but briefly mentioned it at the outset.

The complainant has also contended that the anchor failed to refer to the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, in the impugned broadcast. However, it is submitted that the Act was not relevant to the subject matter or focus of the impugned broadcast. Moreover, there is no explicit obligation on the anchor or the broadcaster to mention the Act, considering that this was not an academic program. As such, the alleged omission is inconsequential and did not undermine the broadcast's content or suggest any prejudice against the interests of any religious group.

With respect to violation of accuracy and objectivity, it submitted that it had relied on the sources outlined above to present the subject matter of the impugned broadcast. Furthermore, in accordance with the Code, it is entitled to offer

individuals the opportunity to present their perspective, ensuring a balanced approach to the matter.

Regarding the violation of principles of neutrality and fairness, it submitted that while the impugned broadcast presented a historical perspective on the destruction of Hindu temples in the Indian subcontinent, based on researched claims from third-party sources, this should not be interpreted as the broadcaster endorsing these claims as the sole or definitive account, nor does it imply a dismissal of potential opposing viewpoints. No motive can be attributed to it, as it had acted impartially and relied on well-researched accounts and sources.

It is submitted that there has been no violation of the Specific Guidelines for Reporting Court Proceedings, as the impugned broadcast accurately and authentically reflected the events that transpired in Court. The broadcast presented a fair and balanced account of the proceedings, ensuring that the interests of the contesting parties were reasonably represented. Importantly, the impugned broadcast did not reflect the anchor's personal opinions, nor did it suggest that the claims made by the third parties cited in the broadcast represented the views of the channel or the broadcaster.

The intention behind the impugned broadcast was to serve the public interest by shedding light on the arguments of certain individuals, with an emphasis on the intellectual and historical aspects of those claims, rather than on the controversy itself.

The impugned broadcast consistently underscored its public interest significance, particularly through the anchor's discussions of the importance of understanding history and the need for relevant educational material, framing the subject matter within a broader context of informed debate and historical clarity. Thus, no violation of the Guidelines on telecasting news affecting Public Order was made out. Additionally, the impugned broadcast did not, in any manner, aim to disrupt religious harmony and as such, stood categorically in its condemnation. Adequate precautions, implorations, and clarifications were made throughout to prevent any form of anti-religious harmony sentiments and actions.

The broadcasting of news and current affairs is essential to support a marketplace of ideas, as recognised by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*, (2015) 5 SCC 1. While studying and interpreting the history, it has to be borne in mind that there are often multiple perspectives of a singular historical event, each of which is driven by one's own understanding of the social, cultural, intellectual, and emotional settings that shaped people's lives and actions in the past, as well as the varied sources which point towards differing versions of the same historical

events. To see a contrary interpretation of a historical event as propaganda against a certain community is not only unreasonable but also detrimental to the country's peaceful political and religious environment. Each individual is entitled to form their own theories and perspectives while exercising reasonable care and caution, and the media has the fundamental duty to present each such view and theory to enable its viewers to make an informed decision.

Having said that, it is aware that each incident in history can be perceived from multiple schools of thought and as such, these theories can always be subjected to a debate and discussion. However, such varied views and theories do not warrant any unsubstantiated and baseless allegations of inciting inter - community violence to further the indoctrination of one's own views and beliefs, thus hindering the media's fundamental right of speech and expression and fundamental duty to disseminate all views and thoughts without any discrimination or favoritism.

In light of the above, it is submitted that the impugned broadcast was televised with journalistic objectivity and in good faith for the public good. Considering the absence of any substantial basis to continue the proceedings for violations of NBDSA guidelines, the present proceedings ought to be discontinued.

Decision of NBDSA at its meeting held on 11.02.2026

After considering the review application filed by the complainant in respect of the decision dated 23.12.2025, NBDSA decided to call the parties for a hearing.

On being served with the notices, the following persons were present at the hearing on 12.03.2026:

Complainant

1. Mr. Indrajeet Ghorpade

Broadcaster

1. Ms. Vrinda Bhandari, Advocate
2. Ms. Shivangi Goswami, Legal Counsel
3. Mr. Manish Kumar, Senior Managing Editor & Head

Submissions of the Complainant

The complainant submitted that in 2018, the India Today Group itself had published an article clarifying the ASI's stance, in which the ASI had rejected the claim that the Taj Mahal was built on top of a temple. Despite the ASI's stance that this was a blatant lie, the impugned broadcast repeated this claim. The claim appeared deliberately designed to suggest that this is how Muslim rulers have been, thereby implicating the broader Muslim community as well.

In the broadcast, it was stated that no churches were built on top of temples; instead, only mosques were constructed over them. This statement overlooked examples in which even Hindu temples have been built on Buddhist shrines or on top of mosques. The failure to include the ASI report on the subject of Taj Mahal amounted to deliberate suppression of relevant facts.

Submissions of the Broadcaster

The broadcaster submitted that this claim was not the view of the channel, they were merely presenting the claims made by third parties. In this regard, the broadcaster invited the Authority's attention to articles published in Voice of America and Bar and Bench, in which third-party claims about the Taj Mahal are detailed. Moreover, historian Stephen Knapp has also documented an article by Dr. V. S. Godbole on his website, wherein it was stated that the land concerning the Taj Mahal had been bought by Shah Jahan. Nowhere in the broadcast was it claimed that this was the majority view. It reiterated that it had only reported on claims being made by third parties.

Decision

NBDSA considered the review application filed by the complainant. After re-examining the record, including the complaint, the broadcaster's response, and the footage, and after considering the submissions advanced by the parties during the hearing of the review application, NBDSA is of the view that its decision, which had returned a finding of no violation, requires reconsideration to the limited extent that the claims made in the broadcast regarding the Taj Mahal are concerned.

NBDSA noted that it was the submission of the broadcaster that the "*programme presented in a documentary style, only aimed to offer a "post-mortem" or a historical analysis about the alleged destruction of Hindu temples in the Indian sub-continent*". For this analysis, the broadcaster had relied, inter alia, on sources such as reports from the Archaeological Survey of India. It was this submission by the broadcaster and the anchor's statement that it was important to understand the accurate history of the past, which raises the issue as to why Taj Mahal was included in the impugned broadcast, particularly in view of the broadcaster's own admitted earlier reportage of the statement made by the Archaeological Survey of India, which debunked the claim of a temple underneath the Taj Mahal.

NBDSA was of the view that there was selective reliance on official records across different segments of the programme. While the broadcaster had relied on the Archaeological Survey of India's report when covering claims about the Qutub Minar, it omitted similar official records when reporting on the Taj Mahal. As a result, the broadcast fell short of the standards of neutrality and impartiality mandated under the Code of Conduct.

In respect of the submission of the broadcaster that under the Code of Conduct, "*Neutrality does not always come down to giving equal space to all sides*", it would be pertinent to bring to the attention of the broadcaster that the question raised herein was not whether sufficient prominence was given to other views, but rather whether the broadcaster had presented any counter view, at all, particularly, one which is grounded in official records. In view of the same, NBDSA directs the broadcaster to edit the programme insofar as the Taj Mahal is concerned.

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 28-05-2026