

Date: October 21, 2024

To,

**Ms. Ritika Talwar**

Independent News Service Private Ltd (India TV)

India TV Broadcast Centre

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**Subject: Complaint against “Coffee Par Kurukshetra” shows aired on India Tv on October 15, 2024**

Dear Ma'am,

We, at Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), are writing to you with regards to a hate-filled provocative and demeaning show that aired on India Tv on October 15, 2024, titled “**Coffee Par Kurukshetra: यूपी में पत्थरबाजों की फौज कहाँ से आई ? UP Bahraich Violence | CM Yogi**”. The said show was surrounding the ongoing tension erupted in Bahraich’s Maharajganj area in Uttar Pradesh. On October 15, 2024, India TV aired a controversial show that disseminated Islamophobic and anti-Muslim rhetoric, capitalising on the recent violent events in Maharajganj, Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh.

The host Saurav Sharma with apparent malafide intent, generalised the incidents of violence, attributing blame solely to Muslims and portraying them as extremists and aggressors. This narrative emerged following a tragic event on October 13, when tensions during a Durga Puja immersion procession escalated into violence, resulting in the death of 22-year-old Ram Gopal Mishra. The broadcast further inflamed Islamophobic narratives and promotion of divisive sentiments against the Muslim community and Islam.

The show can be viewed on You Tube channel of the India TV and link of the broadcast can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaoVKJd24ps>



It is important to note that we are submitting this complaint within the 7-day deadline set by the NBDSA.

### **Background of the incident**

On October 13, 2024 (Sunday), a violent incident unfolded in Maharajganj, Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, during a Durga Puja immersion procession. Tensions escalated when loud music was played near a mosque, leading to gunfire that tragically claimed the life of 22-year-old Ram Gopal Mishra, a local resident participating in the procession. This incident ignited widespread violence and communal unrest in the area. In the aftermath, mobs retaliated by vandalising and setting fire to numerous properties, including homes, shops, hospitals, and vehicles. Disturbingly, a video emerged showing Ram Gopal in a heated moment, removing a green flag from a rooftop and replacing it with a saffron flag, moments before he was shot. Authorities quickly responded, arresting five suspects linked to Mishra's death following an encounter with Uttar Pradesh Police, during which two of the suspects sustained gunshot wounds. The suspects, identified as Mohammad Faheen, Mohammad Sarfaraz, Abdul Hameed, Mohammad Taleem (alias Sabloo), and Mohammad Afzal, were reportedly attempting to flee to Nepal. By October 18, the situation escalated further, with 87 individuals arrested in connection to the riots, and around 1,000 people booked after at least 11 FIRs were registered.

At the outset, we would like state that in his 34:25 minute '*Coffee Par Kurukshetra*' show on India Tv, host Sharma targeted the Muslim community, propagated anti-Islam theories and spread a divisive agenda. Based on the premise set through the details of multiple incidents across country, chosen specifically to paint the Muslim community as aggressive, the impugned show begins. The participants present during the show were: Professor Sangeet Ragi (Professor, Political Science Delhi University, Pradeep Singh, Shantanu Gupta. The show began with host Saurav Sharma introducing the topic of Bahraich violence before the guests. The narrative consistently framed Muslims and Islamophobic propaganda in a way that reinforced negative stereotypes. Muslim-majority areas were labelled as "sensitive" solely because of their demographic composition, fuelling a false narrative about the Muslim population, their festivals, and religious practices. By urging Hindus to object to the Azaan and emphasising exaggerated or imagined threats from the Muslim community, the narrative further deepened divisions and stoked communal tensions. This deliberate framing contributed to an increasingly polarised atmosphere, fostering mistrust and hostility between communities.

### **Content of the Show:**

After the host provided a brief overview of the incidents in Bahraich, highlighting how the deceased Hindu man was being blamed for the escalation of violence in what had once been a peaceful area, Professor Sangeet Ragi launched into a divisive and communal narrative. He drew a provocative comparison to the Godhra incident, stating that, similarly, during the train burning and the subsequent Gujarat riots, the blame had also been unfairly placed on Hindu *Kar Sevaks*. This framing not only distorted the current situation but also deepened communal tensions by invoking past conflicts. Ragi, with the intent to provoke and gain sympathy without ascertaining its repercussions stated that *"In this country, Hindus have always been dragged into the dock, despite the fact that Muslims imposed partition on this nation."* (Time Stamp: 5:20 – 5:30)

*“First of all congratulations to your channel and all of you deserve praise, your entire team for putting the incident in its full perspective, otherwise the channel was showing that this miscreant climbed on a Muslim community's house and that is why he was murdered. I want to start from there. If we assume that someone climbs on the house in anger, will you shoot him? After Kanhaiya Lal's murder, should the Hindu community have come out on the streets and fired bullets? Should they have used swords? There should have been riots in every city of this country? Hindu society can do this, right? It is not that Hindu society lacks strength?” (Time Stamp: 5:31 – 6:10)*

The host failed to intervene as participant Professor Sangeet Ragi made provocative statements intended to pit the Hindu community against the Muslim community. Instead of challenging these divisive remarks, host Saurav Sharma reinforced them by citing a Dainik Bhaskar report about a religious flag being hoisted in Amroha. Ragi immediately corrected him, stating that the flag had actually been raised on a temple, further spreading misinformation.

Ragi then proceeded to present a deeply troubling narrative, portraying extremism within the Islamic community as inherent and framing the growing Muslim population as a direct threat to Hindu interests. He warned that Hindu complacency was reminiscent of the mistakes that led to the Partition of India. He emphasised that Hindu cultural practices were under siege, stating that *“Extremism within the Islamic community is inherent to its nature, and if the Hindu community continues to bury its head in the sand like an ostrich, thinking that threats will not arise, it is making the same historical mistake that culminated in 1947. I say this very seriously: think about how the partition of India happened, and where the riots began afterward. Do you know where the first riot started? It was in Aligarh, in a hostel. Today, as the numbers of this community (Muslims) increase, their aggressiveness is also rising. They feel that they are becoming capable of influencing Indian politics; we (Muslims) were 9.6 percent before, and now we are at 18 percent.” (Time Stamp: 6:50 - 7:47)*

By linking current tensions to historical events, Ragi's statements fuelled a false narrative that Muslim influence poses a threat, contributing to communal polarisation.

*“Has anyone ever considered this? Did the land of Bengal ever think that its Chief Minister would say that the time for Durga immersion must change during the Azaan or Muslim festivals? If we claim that there is equality of all religions in this country, then why is there no equality for us (Hindus)?” (Time Stamp: 7:48 – 8:13)*

*“Furthermore, what if tomorrow Hindus start saying, 'Look, this country belongs to Hindus; you have been given Pakistan'? I openly support this view that Muslims have been given 35 percent of the land while 23 percent are Muslims and 9 percent remain here.” (Time Stamp: 18:14 – 18:35)*

*“What if tomorrow they come and say that in Hindu-majority areas, you cannot perform Azaan because it disturbs us? If on the day of Durga's immersion, you need to play music or dance, and that disturbs you, you (Muslims) mention Azaan five times a day, which disturbs us. In Hindu-majority areas, we will not allow this. Our land is becoming impure.” (Time Stamp: 18:36 – 9:07)*

*“If your bhajans are considered impure, then the Hindu community will react; it's not as if they will not respond.” (Time Stamp: 9:08 – 9:15)*

These statements are deeply problematic and Islamophobic as they perpetuate harmful stereotypes and promote religious intolerance. The speaker suggests that Hindu practices are being unfairly restricted in favour of Muslim traditions, creating a false narrative of Hindu victimhood. By framing Azaan and Muslim festivals as disruptions to Hindu customs, the speaker fosters animosity between the two communities. Furthermore, the assertion that Muslims were "given Pakistan" and that India belongs primarily to Hindus is a dangerous and divisive remark that undermines the

secular fabric of the nation. It stokes communal tension by portraying Muslims as outsiders who do not belong, disregarding India's pluralistic identity. The inflammatory language about "impurity" and implied threats of retaliation escalate these sentiments, encouraging hostility and deepening societal divisions, which can incite violence and further marginalise the Muslim community.

Ragi further said that *"somenhere, Gandhi also acknowledged this. He said, 'The average Hindu is a coward, and the average Muslim is a bully.' Additionally, Gandhi stated, 'A communal Muslim is the rule, while a secular Muslim is an exception.' In contrast, he said, 'A secular Hindu is the rule, while a communal Hindu is an exception.'"* (Time Stamp: 9:16 – 9:43)

Ragi's reference to Mahatma Gandhi is a deliberate attempt to vilify Muslims, claiming that Gandhi described the average Hindu as a coward and the average Muslim as a bully. This rhetoric is clearly part of a calculated propaganda effort aimed at demonising the Muslim community. By selectively invoking Mahatma Gandhi's words, Ragi distorts historical context to reinforce harmful stereotypes, fuelling communal divisions and perpetuating a narrative that frames Muslims as aggressors and Hindus as perpetual victims.

*"I want to add one last thing, you see the reaction of Hindu society, it is not for its expansion, it fights to protect itself. It comes on the road, but it runs inside, most of the people who die from bullets, are killed by police bullets. Islamic mentality, Islamic aggression is for its expansion. So that is why they create a colony and we will not let you enter that colony. A village has become Muslim majority, now we have to expand further, now we will not let you enter it. It has become an exclusive zone."* (Time Stamp: 9:44 – 10:20)

Ragi's additional claims, particularly his assertion that police officers in India regard Muslim-majority areas as "communally sensitive," are designed to cast these communities as dangerous and fear-inducing. His remarks reinforce harmful stereotypes, portraying Muslims as a threat. By framing these areas as exclusive zones in need of protection from so-called "Islamic aggression," Ragi fosters an atmosphere of mistrust and deepens communal divisions. His claim that these perceptions are rooted in Islamic theology only amplifies the stigmatisation and fear surrounding Muslim citizens. This rhetoric is not only inflammatory but also deeply harmful, as it promotes an exclusionary and divisive narrative that can incite discrimination and violence.

*"You see that if you talk to the police officers of this country, all the Muslim-dominated areas in this country are declared communally sensitive and this is not just here, it is the case all over the world. It means that a society lives with this kind of mentality and attitude and its inspiration is from its theology."* (Time Stamp: 10:21 – 10:40)

The host, before moving on to the next guest, engaged with Ragi's provocative comments and misleading theories about the Muslim population and Islam. He asked, **"ठीक है, इस पर आगे बात करते हैं कि इसका Sanction कहाँ से मिल रहा है?"**. In response, Ragi asserted that this sanction originates from *"Theology"* (Islamic theology). The host skilfully navigated Ragi's controversial views on Islam, probing deeper into his assertions. (Time Stamp: 10:41 – 10:45)

The host intentionally generalised Muslim citizens as responsible for violence by emphasising a series of incidents linked to communal tensions during Durga Puja processions. By citing specific events—such as unrest in Bahraich, Garhwa, Kaushambi, Howrah, and Sitamarhi—the host aimed to paint Muslims as instigators of conflict. This narrative reinforces negative stereotypes and

fosters a divisive view of the Muslim community, ignoring the complexity of the situations and the broader societal context. Such framing promotes fear and mistrust, further deepening communal divides. **(Time Stamp: 10:46 – 11:46)**

The host then referenced the Nuh violence and Delhi's Jahangir Puri riots, encouraging the guests to generalise these incidents as reflective of the Muslim community's dominance and propensity for violence, he said *"I'm asking again, where do the stones keep coming from, sir? I don't find stones lying on the road."* **(Time Stamp: 11:47 – 12:44)**

The next participant, Pradeep Singh, introduced his own inflammatory and communal rhetoric in response to the host's questions. Singh escalated the discussion by stating, *"Where do the stones come from? We have seen the visuals of that during the Delhi riots"* **(Time Stamp: 12:45 – 12:50)**

Building on this, Singh invoked a communal incident to generalise and perpetuate the narrative that Muslims inherently harbour animosity towards Hindu festivals and rituals due to an extremist mind-set. He referenced a riot in Gujarat, where temples and shops were allegedly burned, leading to the deaths of 660 people. This selective invocation of communal violence across the country appeared aimed at portraying Muslims as hostile to Hindus and their celebrations. Singh further fuelled this divisive narrative by claiming, *"They (Muslims) need an excuse, they don't want provocation, they want an excuse, they have already been provoked that they (Hindus) should not pass through our area."* **(Time Stamp: 12:45 – 13:52)**

Singh also cited an incident in Tamil Nadu where, according to him, Muslims refused to allow a *Hindu Shobha Yatra* to pass through a Muslim-majority area near a mosque. He claimed that the district administration sided with the Muslim community, arguing that since they constituted 90 percent of the local population, they believed they had the authority to impose such restrictions. However, Singh noted that the Madras High Court ultimately rejected this request and allowed the *Shobha Yatra* to proceed. **(Time Stamp: 14:00 – 15:32)**

What Singh failed to mention, and what the host also neglected to address, is the history of anti-social elements deliberately playing loud music and throwing colours at mosques during religious processions in such areas. These provocative actions have often created law and order situations, raising tensions between communities. These critical aspects, which help explain the community's concerns and requests for restrictions, were completely overlooked in the discussion, further skewing the narrative to portray the Muslim community in a negative light.

The host then brought the Muslim community back into the discussion, stating that *"But they (Muslims) considered it their right to such an extent that they went to court!"*. Singh responded to the host that ***"They (Muslim) thought that this is a very natural thing. When you have this kind of mentality, you can guess what you can do. They (Muslims) always have an excuse to commit violence."*** **(Time Stamp: 15:33 – 15:57)**

The host's remark, suggesting that Muslims "considered it their right" to challenge the Sobha Yatra in court, and Singh's inflammatory response that Muslims "always have an excuse to commit violence," are extremely dangerous and divisive. Such statements not only demonise an entire community but also perpetuate the false notion that Muslims are inherently violent and antagonistic. This type of rhetoric normalises communal hostility, fosters mistrust, and further marginalises the Muslim population. By framing legal recourse as evidence of a violent mind-set, it distorts the legitimate use of the judicial process and feeds into Islamophobic propaganda. This

kind of language can incite hatred, provoke violence, and deepen societal divisions, undermining social harmony and peace.

Then the host added his word "बहाना और हथियार". Singh once again with intent to portray the image of Muslim as an enemy of Hindu Community and their festivals, attempts challenge to inter-faith religious co-existence and fake propaganda and hate-ridden narrative that Muslims citizens and Muslim Dominated areas are threat for Hindu Population and Hindu Festivals. In this line, Singh added *"There is no Hindu festival that passes without stone pelting or attempts to disturb it, and you cannot point to a single occasion involving Muslims where Hindus have engaged in stone pelting or tried to stop it."* **(Time Stamp 15:58 – 16:16)**

The point raised by Professor Ragi regarding the sensitivity of areas due to Muslim dominance and extremist ideologies was further fuelled and supported by Singh, who reinforced Ragi's communal segregation and divisive arguments by stating that *"What Ragi Ji was saying about sensitive areas—there is not a single Hindu-majority area in India that can be labelled as sensitive. In places where Hindus are in the majority, it is not considered sensitive. However, if we pass through areas where Muslims are in the minority, then it becomes sensitive. This has become the language of the administration. This is the result of secularism, and regarding this, what Yogi Ji said—that 'if you divide, you will be cut'—he mentioned today that Guru Rabindranath Tagore wrote, 'The problem is that if a Muslim calls out, thousands or millions will gather, but if we call out, no one will come together.' He is speaking about Hindus."* **(Time Stamp: 16:19 - 17:21)**

Professor Ragi then escalated the discussion towards targeting of Islam and portraying Muslims as enemy of this country by citing a statement attributed to Maharshi Arvind, asserting that a time will come when Hindus must take to the streets. He stated that *"Maharshi Arvind wrote somewhere that a time will come when Hindus will have to take sticks and come out on the streets. I am not speaking in my own language; this is what Maharshi Arvind has written. To tackle this, meaning to address the mind-set of Islam, Hindus will have to go out on the streets. Today, people were asking where this mob of extremists has come from. Look, I repeatedly say, the day society becomes sensitive, it will stand up. Then it will not worry about any organisation and will not be dependent on any political party. When society awakens, it will awaken completely."* **(Time Stamp: 17:22 – 18:04)**

Professor Ragi's remarks, invoking Maharshi Arvind to suggest that Hindus will eventually need to "take sticks and come out on the streets" to confront the "mind-set of Islam," are profoundly dangerous. By portraying Muslims as enemies of the country and framing violence as an inevitable and even necessary response, Ragi is fuelling communal hatred and inciting potential violence. This kind of rhetoric not only deepens divisions between communities but also legitimises vigilantism and mob justice under the guise of protecting Hindu interests. His suggestion that society will awaken and take matters into its own hands without reliance on political or organisational structures is a direct call for unchecked aggression, promoting an atmosphere where law and order are abandoned in favour of violent confrontation. Such statements are not just provocative but perilous, as they incite societal unrest, encourage hatred, and could lead to widespread violence against the Muslim community.

Furthermore, the host once again shifted the discussion to a communal theme, actively engaging in a provocative dialogue. He supported the points made by Professor Ragi, clearly affirming his statements without any interruption. The host added that, *"It is now on record that stones are always ready as weapons everywhere, often kept on rooftops. In this case (Babraich), they (Muslims) also had a gun."*

Another guest, Shantanu Gupta, shifted the discussion to the Delhi riots, engaging both himself and the host in the topic. Gupta asserted that during the Delhi riots, petrol bombs were stored in crates. He emphasised that there was a systematic planning and machinery behind the riots, suggesting that Muslims are habitual offenders in such instances due to the organised storage of stones and petrol bombs. He stated that *“During the Delhi riots, when drones were deployed, you would find petrol bombs stored in crates, similar to how bottles of cold drinks are kept in crates”*

Then, Shantanu Gupta displayed a photo on his mobile, stating that *“stones were also kept in it (Crates) and the stones were managed very well, just like the builders make them from gravel, the stones were kept of a very big size that if a person hits his head, he will die. So, they were prepared and as Ragi ji said, “this is a matter of today, not a matter of ten years”.* (Time Stamp: 18:14 – 18:39)

From the **18:40 minute** mark, the show shifted to an extreme and divisive tone, openly targeting the Muslim community. Guest Shantanu Gupta spoke upon the topic of Azaan, which was completely unrelated to the main theme of the discussion. This shift was a direct result of the communal rhetoric established by guests Professor Ragi and Singh. Host Sourav Sharma showed no interest in performing his duty as a host and restraining the guests from delving into vilifying the religious practices of a specific minority community. It appeared that there was a pre-planned, unanimous agenda among all the guests and the host to target the Muslim community through various means and stereotypes.

Shantanu Gupta added that *“Illustrators have said, B.R. Ambedkar has written in his book that there are three reasons for the fight between Hindus and Muslims, first is teasing and slaughtering cows, second is religious conversion and third is playing music or organising any program in front of mosques, which means they are annoyed with them (Hindus) since then, we are hearing Namaaz five times and what are we hearing in Namaaz five times, ‘Allah is the greatest no other god is worthy of worship’, which means no other god is worthy of worship. We are hearing this five times, and what are we saying, Mata ki Jai and in this we are not saying anything against anyone, but what are they saying in Azaan, ‘No other god is worthy of worship’.”* (Time Stamp: 18:40 – 19:14)

Shantanu Gupta's claims are not only false but also indicative of a broader misinformation campaign aimed at inciting communal tensions. His assertion that B.R. Ambedkar identified three specific reasons for conflict between Hindus and Muslims is misleading and taken out of context. Moreover, Gupta's interpretation of Islamic practices, particularly the wording of the Azaan, is deeply flawed. The Azaan is a call to prayer that expresses the oneness of God, not a declaration of animosity towards other faiths. This misrepresentation distorts the essence of religious practices and fosters an unnecessary narrative of hostility. By framing the Azaan as inherently exclusive or provocative, Gupta perpetuates divisive stereotypes that further alienate communities and stoke fear. Such rhetoric is dangerous as it misinforms the public and undermines the values of coexistence and mutual respect that are essential for a pluralistic society.

Shantanu Gupta's comments on the Azaan, implying that many do not understand its significance, were intentionally provocative and aimed at stirring existing narratives around religious practices. He stated, *“आधो को तो अज्ञान का मतलब भी नहीं पता होगा, अगर मतलब पता होगा तो सच में हमें कोई दिक्कत नहीं होगी.”* Following this, both host Sourav Sharma and guest Pradeep Singh echoed communal sentiments regarding the Azaan, with Singh saying, *“दिक्कत यही है कि दिक्कत नहीं है,”* while Sharma emphasised, *“मैं वही कह रहा हूँ कि किसी के दिमाग में नहीं आता कि क्यों हो रही है अज्ञान?”* (Time Stamp: 19:15 – 19:26).

Although Sharma later claimed there was no issue with the Azaan, his framing of the conversation suggested an attempt to provoke doubt and question the legitimacy of this long-standing practice, which has coexisted peacefully within India's diverse cultural landscape. This line of questioning not only undermines the significance of the Azaan but also seeks to challenge the very essence of interfaith coexistence in the country. By casting suspicion on a religious observance integral to the Muslim community, Sharma and his guests foster a sense of division and distrust among viewers. Their remarks resonate with a troubling trend that attempts to paint Muslims as outsiders whose traditions are unwelcome in the public sphere.

Moreover, the host's affirmation of Professor Ragi's provocative statement about why Hindus should endure the Azaan five times daily further escalates the tension. Sharma's remark, “*अगर आपको (मुस्लिम) अपने घर के सामने से डीजे चलना allowed नहीं है तो मेरे कान में क्यों पाँच बार आवाज़ सोचिये क्या होगा*” (Time Stamp: 19:41 to 19:52), underscores a dangerous double standard that suggests that the religious rights of one community can be questioned and undermined, while simultaneously stoking resentment towards another.

The overall tone of the show reflected a deliberate strategy to explore and amplify stereotypes and false narratives about Muslims and Islam, rather than fostering understanding or respect for diversity. At no point did Sharma attempt to rein in the divisive rhetoric or discourage his guests from making incendiary statements that could have far-reaching implications for social harmony. Instead, he appeared eager to explore these contentious issues, creating an environment ripe for hate and suspicion among viewers. Such a platform not only endangers communal harmony but also threatens the fabric of India's pluralistic society, where coexistence and mutual respect should be paramount.

The guest Pradeep Singh reacted to the narrative staged by all the participant and said “*Look! What is happening now started during the time of the CAA; then the pandemic came and the momentum stopped. This is a direct preparation for civil war. They (Muslims) say, 'The time has come for the decision of who will fight.' The time has come for the decision of who will fight.*” (Time Stamp: 19:54 – 20:15)

Prof. Ragi expressed his affirmation towards the objectionable remark made by guest Pradeep Singh. What disturbing and disappointing that host Saurav Sharma even not stopped and interrupted the guest for making such communal and provocative remark.

The discussion was against brought to Dr. Ambedkar's book, wherein Prof. Ragi said to host Saurav Sharma that “*I say again and again that the summary and quotations from Ambedkar's book should be sent to every Hindu household in this country; it will open their eyes.*” and he mentioned about the Mohammad Bim-Qasim and Mughal in reference with the Ambedkar's book. He said that “*देखिये ना! यानि लूटेरा कौन हैं हमारे देश में, “We and they” हर नेशनल नैरेटिव में होता है, हम और वे, वे कौन थे? ये लूटेरे!*”. Moreover, this kind of language promotes a “we vs. they” mentality, deepening divisions between Muslims and non-Muslims. Over the reference of a book made by Prof Ragi, host Sharma said that “*ये किताब सच में आँखे खोल देने वाली है*” (Time Stamp 24:17 – 25:22)

Prof. Ragi further amplified his divisive and communal views by suggesting that “*Today, it's a call of the times. Forget about whether the BJP is winning or someone else. That's just a by-product. The day the Hindu community does not unite, just look at what has happened in Bangladesh today.*”



Host Saurav Sharma, failing to impose any restrictions on the panellists regarding their communal and provocative views, referenced a tweet from Samajwadi Party Chief and MP Akhilesh Yadav about the recent violence in Bahraich. In his tweet, Yadav criticised the Uttar Pradesh government's administration for poorly managing the Yatra's route and questioned what song was played during the procession that may have provoked tensions within the community **(Time Stamp: 25:26 - 26:14)**.

By quoting Yadav's tweet without critical context, Sharma effectively allowed the conversation to veer towards blame and speculation rather than focusing on the need for constructive dialogue and understanding among communities.

Following this, Shantanu Gupta reiterated harmful stereotypes by suggesting that Muslims are inherently extremist and incapable of accepting or respecting other religious beliefs. He stated, *“दिवकत हैं कि मैं दुसरे भगवान, दूसरी प्रथा, दुसरे कल्चर के बारे में सुन भी नहीं सकता.”* Such assertions perpetuate a damaging narrative that paints Muslims as intolerant, further entrenching societal divides. Gupta's comments reflect a broader pattern of discourse that disregards the complexities of individual beliefs and practices in favour of reductive generalisations.

Pradeep Singh then escalated the rhetoric, responding to Gupta's assertion by claiming, *“The basic problem is why you (Hindus) are existing; you should not exist. Your existence should not exist. The problem is not with anything. It is not with DJ, it is not with any bhajan, it is not with idol immersion; it is with our (Hindus) existence, our being, and as long as we exist, the problem will remain. So, we will have to decide whether we want to stay or not”* **(Time Stamp: 27:00 – 27:29)**.

This statement is particularly alarming as it suggests that the mere presence of Hindus is a problem for other communities, framing existence itself as a point of contention.

Such rhetoric not only stokes communal tensions but also undermines the possibility of peaceful coexistence in a diverse society. By fostering an environment of hostility and distrust, these statements can potentially incite further violence and discrimination against the Muslim community, which is already facing significant challenges in maintaining its identity and rights within a polarised socio-political landscape. Sharma's failure to challenge or moderate these extreme views reflects a troubling disregard for the responsibility of media figures to promote dialogue rather than division.

At the **27:00 mark** of the show, the hateful conversation culminated in irresponsible statements and unfounded claims that targeted the Muslim community. These discussions relied on unresolved theories and propaganda, which can foster fear and anger among the general public. This was exacerbated by the continuous and unrestricted airing of provocative, hate-filled theories and stereotypes by all panellists, under the watchful eye of host Sourav Sharma.

Participant Ragi gradually presented his divisive views, after receiving affirmation from the host without interruption and stoppage, which contributed to potential creating fear and a sense of threat among Hindus regarding Muslim citizens. His comments appeared intended to disturb the harmonious diversity of our country and attempt that Hindus should think why Muslims are living here. Throughout the discussion, he openly propagated divisive narratives against Muslims on national television, and at no point did the host intervene to curb these statements or prevent the panellist from spreading communal rhetoric.

Ragi, attempting to sow doubt and foster a sense of segregation among the majority population of this country against the Muslim community, stated that *"In the last meeting of the Muslim League, the Muslims told Jinnah, 'Brother, you have left us.' I have read Jinnah's speech; I don't remember the exact date, but he said, 'No, you must stay here.' At that time, many were saying, 'We want Pakistan by laughing, and we will take India by fighting.'*

*"Those who talk about Ghazwa-e-Hind, that Ghazwa-e-Hind has already happened, sir!" (Time Stamp: 27:30 – 28:01)*

In conclusion, host Saurav Sharma posed a question to the panellists: *"What is the solution to this? Is strictness from the police the remedy? Or should we avoid going into those so-called sensitive zones? What is the solution?"*

Pradeep Singh responded with a troubling assertion, stating, *"The solution is to assert your power and your rights. Those who are personally supporting these individuals (Muslims), the rioters, should be asked what they would do if their own homes were attacked."* This comment is deeply problematic, as it not only incites fear but also creates a dichotomy that positions Muslims as the perpetual aggressors, further entrenching the narrative of victimhood among Hindus. By suggesting that support for Muslim communities equates to siding with violence, Singh aims to vilify those advocating for coexistence and mutual respect.

At the end of the show, panellist Ragi escalated the inflammatory rhetoric by framing the situation in terms of a cosmic battle, stating, *"In the battle between gods and demons, who are the gods and who are the demons? Who is the divine society, and who is the demonic society? It is necessary to understand the population of this country and to be prepared for it" (Time Stamp: 32:52 – 34:21).*

This statement is particularly concerning, as it not only dehumanises the Muslim community but also incites a sense of righteous indignation among Hindus, implying that they are engaged in a moral fight against an evil adversary.

Such language fosters a dangerous narrative that equates religious differences with a fundamental struggle between good and evil, thereby justifying hostility and violence against perceived opponents. By invoking a binary of divine versus demonic, Ragi's remarks serve to galvanise extremist sentiments, undermining efforts to foster harmony and understanding in a country marked by its rich diversity. The host's failure to challenge or provide a counter-narrative to these extremist views further exemplifies the media's role in perpetuating division rather than promoting dialogue and coexistence. This show, characterised by its provocative and hate-filled discourse, ultimately contributes to an environment where communal tensions can escalate, posing a significant threat to societal cohesion and peace.

### **What does the show entail?**

In concluding this complaint, it is crucial to highlight the disturbing absence of calls for peace and the cessation of violence during the broadcast in question. Rather than fostering constructive dialogue aimed at promoting harmony, the participants resorted to inflammatory rhetoric that deepened societal divisions based on religion. Throughout the half-hour segment, discussions

surrounding the Bagraich violence served as a pretext for unjustly implicating the entire Muslim community in a narrative steeped in suspicion and fear.

The statements made by guest Pradeep Singh, alongside Professor Ragi, reflect a deeply troubling incitement to civil unrest, posing a significant threat to national unity and integrity. Singh's assertion that current tensions represent a "direct preparation for civil war" explicitly incites fear and division, portraying Muslims as adversaries in an escalating conflict. This rhetoric dangerously implies that Muslims are the instigators of violence, perpetuating a narrative of victimisation among Hindus. Ragi's comments further entrench this perilous ideology, suggesting that the time has come for Hindus to unite against Muslims, thus creating a false dichotomy that alienates an entire community.

Equally alarming is the host's failure to challenge these incendiary remarks. Instead of guiding the discussion towards peace and understanding, he allowed it to devolve into a rhetoric that promotes hostility and division. By not intervening, the host effectively endorsed a narrative that could incite violence and exacerbate communal tensions. This negligence not only undermines the principles of responsible journalism but also jeopardises the social fabric of the nation, highlighting the urgent need for media platforms to exercise greater accountability.

As demonstrated in the previously referenced excerpts, it is evident that the discussions were not only misguided but also profoundly troubling. The framework of the show perpetuated unfounded conspiracy theories about the Muslim population and alleged biases against Muslim-majority areas. Such narratives distort the reality of communal relations and contribute to the degradation of societal cohesion. The participants' comments cultivated an atmosphere rife with stereotypes, casting Muslims as inherently linked to violence and unrest while neglecting the complex nature of the issues at hand.

The intentional focus on these themes reveals a concerning agenda aimed at fostering discord rather than encouraging understanding or resolution. The discussions lacked a sincere commitment to addressing the underlying causes of conflict and instead seemed designed to scapegoat a marginalised community. By dragging the Muslim population into the conversation surrounding the Bagraich violence, the show trivialised the complexities of societal issues, igniting further animosity and fear.

Host Saurav Sharma exacerbated the situation by citing multiple incidents to construct a sensational narrative aimed at boosting TRP ratings, thereby endangering the livelihood and security of the Muslim community. His reference to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's writings distorted their original intent, suggesting that Muslims exploit Hindu vulnerabilities. By asserting that "*Muslims exploit the weaknesses of Hindus*," Sharma painted an entire community in a negative light, overlooking the nuanced realities of communal relations in India.

Moreover, the discourse framed Muslims in a suspicious manner, effectively dehumanising an entire community. This portrayal is not only damaging but also contributes to the increasing polarisation of society. It is essential to recognise that such media representations can have real-world consequences, often leading to further marginalisation and discrimination against Muslims. Instead of providing an objective analysis of the situation, the show seemed to promote an agenda that could incite violence and exacerbate existing tensions.

According to the guidelines of the News Broadcasting Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA), hosts are expected to maintain neutrality and avoid favouring one community over another. However, this expectation was clearly not met. As evidenced by the videos and highlighted statements, both the host and participants seemed focused on questioning whether Hindus in India should “*open their eyes*” to the so-called “*agenda of Muslims.*” As an anchor of a news channel, which is supposed to uphold a neutral and unbiased theme, Sharma failed to introduce any non-communal topics into the debate.

This disregard for established guidelines issued by the NBDSA not only violates the ethical standards of the channel but also contravenes our constitutional principles. Given the channel’s extensive viewership, it can be presumed that these prejudicial views have already reached significant segments of the population, both through television broadcasts and social media platforms.

## **Violations**

### **The Violations of NBDSA principles:**

Following are the codes of ethics and principles of self-regulation as laid out by the NBDSA that have been violated by India TV:

## **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

- 1) Professional electronic journalists should accept and understand that they operate as trustees of public and should, therefore, make it their mission to seek the truth and to report it fairly with integrity and independence. Professional journalists should stand fully accountable for their actions.
- 4) Broadcasters shall, in particular, ensure that they do not select news for the purpose of either promoting or hindering either side of any controversial public issue. News shall not be selected or designed to promote any particular belief, opinion or desires of any interest group.
- 5) The fundamental purpose of dissemination of news in a democracy is to educate and inform the people of the happenings in the country, so that the people of the country understand significant events and form their own conclusions.
- 6) Broadcasters shall ensure a full and fair presentation of news as the same is the fundamental responsibility of each news channel. Realising the importance of presenting all points of view in a democracy, the broadcasters should, therefore, take responsibility in ensuring that controversial subjects are fairly presented, with time being allotted fairly to each point of view. Besides, the selection of items of news shall also be governed by public interest and importance based on the significance of these items of news in a democracy.

## **PRINCIPLES OF SELF REGULATION**

**2. Ensuring neutrality:** TV News channels must provide for neutrality by offering 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.

## **9. Racial & Religious Harmony:**

### **9.1 Racial and religious stereotyping should be avoided.**

9.2 Caution should be exercised in reporting content which denigrates or is likely to offend the sensitivities of any racial or religious group or that may create religious intolerance or disharmony.

## **Specific Guidelines for Anchors conducting Programmes including Debates**

The Anchors/Presenters/Journalists/Editors should:

- a. Not make any derisive or derogatory statements about individuals, communities or religious beliefs and practices while reporting, commenting, analysing or debating on any issue or topic in any programme/s including debates.
- b. All communally inflammable statements/declarations are prohibited as per the Code of Ethics and therefore should not be uttered during the programmes. Members are aware that such utterances are subject to penalty under the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations.
- c. While deciding panellists for debates, Anchors, Editors and Broadcasters/Publishers should avoid inviting fringe elements, extremists and separatists who are known for espousing rabid/fanatic views/opinions thereby giving them an opportunity to air and spread their divisive and provocative views.
- d. Caution, inform, guide, advise and brief the panellists (either by e-mail or personally), prior to participating in a debate, to refrain from making any provocative and divisive statements and bring to the attention of the panellists the Code of Ethics and the Guidelines issued by NBDSA. These emails, if any, should be kept on record and may be produced before NBDSA in case of any future complaint/s.
- e. Advise and warn the panellists from making provocative and divisive statements during the debates. In case of non-compliance, mute the panellist/s if he/she continues to make such statements which may incite hatred amongst communities or result in racial and religious stereotyping or which denigrates or creates religious intolerance or disharmony.
- f. Ensure that panel discussions and /or the programmes including debates do not become a platform to encourage or expound extremist/divisive views or spread falsehood or fake facts about individuals, communities, religious beliefs and practices.
- g. Refrain from using religion-linked adjectives in a pejorative manner and refrain from any character assassination/attacks whatsoever on the basis of religion, political affiliations, prejudices etc. in any programme/s including debates.

h. Avoid pushing any communal agenda during a programme including a debate. Anchors must ensure that they do not take any sides and do not harass or harangue panellists to force any admission, opinion or comment.

It may be noted that adding a Disclaimer to any programme including debates does not absolve Editorial personnel, Anchors, Journalists and Producers of their responsibility in case of violation of the Code of Ethics and the Guidelines. Editorial Policy of a particular channel cannot be a defence to a breach of the Code of Ethics and the Guidelines.

The channel also stands in violation of **the Cable Television Network Rules, whereby the programme Code under Rule 6 states that**

- (1) No programme should be carried in the cable service which: -
  - (c) Contains attack on religions or communities or visuals or words contemptuous of religious groups or which promote communal attitudes;
  - (e) Is likely to encourage or incite violence or contains anything against maintenance of law and order or which promote-anti-national attitudes;
  - (h) Contains anything affecting the integrity of the Nation;

Further, the inflammatory and unverified content of the show amounts to inciteful, hate speech which is a punishable offence under various sections of the **Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, 2023 (BNS)**:

**Sections 196** [promotion of enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony];

**298** [deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs];

**302** [uttering, words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person]; and

**356 (1) and (2)** [publication or circulation of any statement, rumour or report causing public mischief and enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes].

On January 13, while hearing a batch of petitions seeking action against hate speech the bench of Justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna (Supreme Court of India) said that the news anchors who promote or indulge in hate speech should be punished by imposing a fine and taken off air. The bench also said that the news media must realise that they occupy a position of great strength and what they are saying impacts the whole country. “They should realise that they have no right to speak their minds whichever way they want,” said Justice Joseph. The bench also said that news channels were creating a rift in the society. During a hearing in September 2022, in the Hon’ble Supreme Court, a Justice of the Court (Justice Joseph) had expressly stated that TV channels were using hate to increase their ratings.

From the multiple complaints that we have raised before NBDSA over the years against the India Tv channel, it is evident that certain news channels are always seeking a communal agenda to increase their viewership. Controversial and communal topics attracts viewer attention as it is a

matter of debate and thus, these channels tend to pick up any news that can be given a communal turn and sometimes even create a news point to further their divisive agenda.

In the case of ***Amish Devgan vs. Union of India and others*** [Writ Petition (Criminal) No. 160 of 2020 decided on December 7, 2020], the Supreme Court held thus,

*“The unity and integrity of the nation cannot be overlooked and slighted, as the acts that ‘promote’ or are ‘likely’ to ‘promote’ divisiveness, alienation and schematism do directly and indirectly impinge on the diversity and pluralism, and when they are with the objective and intent to cause public disorder or to demean dignity of the targeted groups, they have to be dealt with as per law....Such threats not only insidiously weaken virtue and superiority of diversity, but cut-back and lead to demands depending on the context and occasion, for suppression of freedom to express and speak on the ground of reasonableness. Freedom and rights cannot extend to create public disorder or armour those who challenge integrity and unity of the country or promote and incite violence.”*

*“In this context, it is necessary to draw a distinction between ‘free speech’ which includes the right to comment, favour or criticise government policies; and ‘hate speech’ creating or spreading hatred against a targeted community or group....The object of criminalising the latter type of speech is to protect the dignity (as explained above) and to ensure political and social equality between different identities and groups regardless of caste, creed, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, linguistic preference etc.”*

In ***Pravasi Bhalai Sangathan v. Union of India and ors.***, reported in AIR 2014 SC 1591, while hearing a plea urged in public interest that the existing laws of the country are not sufficient to cope with the menace of "hate speeches", had the occasion to consider what a "hate speech" is. The court stated thus,

*"7. Hate speech is an effort to marginalise individuals based on their membership in a group. Using expression that exposes the group to hatred, hate speech seeks to delegitimise group members in the eyes of the majority, reducing their social standing and acceptance within society. Hate speech, therefore, rises beyond causing distress to individual group members. It can have a social impact. Hate speech lays the groundwork for later, broad attacks on vulnerable that can range from discrimination, to ostracism, segregation, deportation, violence and, in the most extreme cases, to genocide. Hate speech also impacts a protected group's ability to respond to the substantive ideas under debate, thereby placing a serious barrier to their full participation in our democracy."*

If the channel truly valued the principles of secularism and communal harmony, it would uphold these values in its reporting. However, it is evident that, in blatant disregard for these constitutional principles, the channel has aggressively promoted an anti-minority agenda. By portraying the Muslim community in a suspicious light and amplifying Islamophobic rhetoric, the channel has contributed to harmful and divisive discourse.

During the broadcast, the host Saurav Sharma and guests like Pradeep Singh and Professor Ragi made statements that directly incited fear and division. Sharma's failure to challenge Singh's inflammatory comments—such as framing the tensions as a “direct preparation for civil war”—created an atmosphere ripe for communal unrest. Singh's assertion that the fundamental issue lies in the very existence of Hindus undermines the essence of pluralism and posits a dangerous narrative that pits communities against one another. Professor Ragi's suggestion that Hindus need to unite against Muslims further exacerbates this climate of hostility, reducing complex societal issues to a binary conflict between ‘gods’ and ‘demons.’

Such rhetoric not only deepens the societal divide but also legitimises aggression towards the Muslim community, painting them as a monolithic threat. The repeated framing of Muslims as instigators of violence serves to dehumanise them, promoting a culture of mistrust and animosity. By allowing these harmful narratives to flourish unchallenged, the channel not only fails in its duty as a responsible media outlet but also endangers the very fabric of communal harmony in the nation.

We are sure that a channel such as yours is aware of the recent matters pending in the Hon'ble Supreme Court, wherein specifically the role of television channels and anchors has come in for sharp questioning. In view of this, it is in best interest, that you remove the above-mentioned content from all social media accounts of your channel and your own website, and issue a public apology for the communal reportage. In an event we do not receive a satisfactory response from you, we will be compelled to submit a complaint to the NBDSA. You are also put on notice that failure on your part to satisfy the complainants with an apology on your news channel may result in legal consequences for your channel at the appropriate fora, at your risk to costs. We also urge more sensitive and responsible coverage of issues in future.

Yours sincerely,

Nandan Maluste, CJP President

Teesta Setalvad, CJP Secretary