

Notice by Gauhar Raza to Zee News sent by Email

March 15, 2016

To,
Mr. Prasanna Raghav
AVP Strategy & Execution
Zee Media Corporation Ltd

Essel Studio,
FC-19, Sector 16-A,
Noida - 201301,
India

Complaint against telecast by Zee News channel of program titled “Afzal Premi Gang ka Mushaira” from 9-3-2016 onwards

Dear Sir

We, the undersigned, hold a place of eminence in different fields of art and culture in the country. We are writing to lodge our complaint regarding an intentional, grave and repeated breach of the News Broadcasters Association's Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, by a program, titled **“Afzal Premi Gang ka Mushaira”** aired on 9th March 2016 and many times thereafter in different versions by Zee News channel.

On watching the aforesaid programme on Zee News channel on 9th March 2015 (hereinafter referred to as Zee News Programme) we are deeply aggrieved, as it contains reportage and commentary that is not only false, motivated, defamatory, derogatory but also incendiary and telecast with a view to incite hatred, ill-will against Prof. Raza and cause public disorder. The Zee News Programmes were framed in an aggressive, intimidating, and browbeating style, and was telecast with commentary and taglines labelling Prof. Raza as 'anti-national'. *The links to some of the aforesaid programmes are given below:*

- (i) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_R4is4PP3Q
- (ii) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_uVq1I33to
- (iii) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVJQjfqNcmk>

Prof. Gauhar Raza, is a scientist of repute and a renowned poet. He is held in high esteem by us and others in society. Prof. Raza commands a great degree of respect for his professional work, and his artistic and social contributions to society.

The Zee News Programme, “Afzal Premi Gang ka Mushaira”, telecast selective portions of certain poems recited by Prof. Gauhar Raza on 5th March 2016 at the 51st Annual Shankar Shad Mushaira event held at New Delhi. The mushaira is an annual event held with the objective of promoting poetry and was initiated in 1954.

Three poems were recited by Prof. Raza at the said event. One was written in 1989 about the murder of street theatre and cultural activist Safdar Hashmi; another was written in 2010 about the killing of 2 journalists in Iraq; and the third is written in 2016.

Using video clipping of the recitation of these poems by Prof. Raza at the aforesaid function, Zee News prepared programmes which have been repeatedly telecast since 9th March 2016,

including on 10th, 11th and 12th March 2016. Zee News telecast these programmes with the misleading and incendiary "Afzal Premi Gang ka Mushaira".

In the Zee News Programmes Prof. Raza's recitation of his poems recorded at the Shankar Shad Mushaira is interspersed with video clips allegedly of slogans raised at JNU on 9th February 2016 and visuals of posters of Afzal Guru and Kashmir. It must be mentioned here that the video clips which the Zee News anchor has claimed are of slogan shouting at JNU, have already been shown to be doctored through forensic analysis pursuant to an enquiry initiated by Delhi Government. Your channel, Zee news has however been intentionally and willfully broadcasting these doctored videos, without exercising the due diligence and caution that you have a duty and responsibility to exercise. In the said Zee News Programmes, the anchor, the commentary and the subtitles repeatedly refer to Prof. Raza as a member of the "Afzal Guru Premi Gang" and "Desh Virodhi Shayar". Further the Zee News Programmes says that Prof. Gauhar Raza, is part of a gang that is standing with those who support the break up of India into many parts, "*Yeh aisa gang hai jo Bharat ke tukde karne wali soch ke saath khada dikh raha hai.*" These and similar highly inflammatory, derogatory, completely unfounded and baseless statements are made throughout the Zee News Programmes.

Violations:

The Zee News Programme reporting is in gross violation of law, ethics and more particularly guidelines and standards laid down by the **National Broadcasters Association**, which Zee News as a member is obliged to respect and follow.

The Zee News Programme violates the principles of impartiality, objectivity and neutrality, prescribed by the News Broadcasters Association's Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards. The Zee News Programme has cast serious allegations on the character and integrity of Prof. Gauhar Raza and caused harm to his personal and professional reputation. The Programme is intended to lower his moral and intellectual character in our estimation and others in society. The Zee News Programme has manipulated and distorted facts and circumstances and indulged in malicious propaganda to incite hatred against Prof. Raza, and project him as disgraceful and loathsome to the viewers. Through the multiple telecast of this Zee News Programme, branding Prof. Raza as an "anti-national" poet in an extremely surcharged atmosphere in our society, has placed his personal security at risk and jeopardised his professional work. This is evident from the hateful, intimidating, threatening and abusive messages and comments that have been directed at Prof. Raza through social media and email, pursuant to the telecast of the Zee News Programme.

The National Broadcasters Association has laid down that,

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. (Section 1, Fundamental Principles, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA.)

The Programme aired by Zee News has displayed a blatant disregard for both professional integrity and truth. The commentary by the Zee News Anchor distorts and manipulates Prof. Raza's poetry to give it a different imputation and colour, with the intent to malign him and incite hatred, violence and ill-will against him.

The NBA has prescribed that neutrality is a fundamental principle of electronic journalism,

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. (Section 1, Fundamental Principles, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA.)

The principles for self-regulation laid down by the NBA place further emphasis on impartiality, objectivity and accuracy in reporting:

1) *Impartiality and objectivity in reporting: Accuracy is at the heart of the news television business. (Section 2, Principles for Self-Regulation, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA)*

The NBA standards, specifically direct News channels that,
...news channels must strive to ensure that allegations are not portrayed as fact and charges are not conveyed as an act of guilt. (Section 2, Principles for Self-Regulation, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA)

The Zee news Programme falls foul of the above mentioned binding standards of self regulation. The Zee News Programme is highly defamatory and repeatedly pronounces Prof. Raza guilty based on its prejudiced and baseless conclusion. It is claimed by Zee News on its website that its programme is viewed by millions across the globe. The harm caused by the Zee News Programme is therefore very serious and substantive.

It is indeed unfortunate, that the Zee News Programme has systematically undermined the very purpose for which the NBA has prescribed 'Principles for Self-regulation',

*The purpose of putting together the principles of self regulation is to avoid compromising the genre of television news by broadcasting content that is **malicious, biased, regressive, knowingly inaccurate, hurtful, misleading**, or aimed at willfully concealing a conflict of interest. (Section 2, Principles for Self-Regulation, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA.)*

The NBA rightly states that the media including electronic media plays a crucial role in ensuring a healthy democracy. The aforesaid programme aired by Zee News is however a shameful blot on India's high tradition of an independent and impartial media that promotes interplay between diverse and plural views, and encourages informed debate.

As socially responsible citizens, we are deeply invested in and concerned about upholding the Fundamental Principles and values enshrined in the Indian Constitution. We therefore reiterate that the baseless and politically motivated vilification and targeting of poet Prof. Raza, is part of a pattern manifest in Zee News's reporting against artists, thinkers and public intellectuals who express diverse and plural opinions or points of view, which Zee news channel takes upon itself to label as 'anti-national'.

Therefore, as concerned citizens, we request you to take the necessary, prompt action to:

- Issue a Corrigendum with respect to Prof. Gauhar Raza, which is telecast prominently at the same timings as the aforesaid programme was telecast, and as many times as the aforesaid programme was telecast from 9.3.2016 onwards by Zee News.
- Issue a public apology for telecasting inaccurate information and malicious propaganda against Prof. Gauhar Raza prominently on your channel.
- Give an undertaking that Zee News shall not telecast the aforesaid programme.

- Pay a compensation of Rs. 1 crore to Prof. Gauhar Raza as damages, for the intentional harm caused to his reputation and the incitement of hatred against him, by the multiple telecasts of the aforesaid programme.

We request you to take the aforesaid actions immediately, failing which we will bring the matter to the attention of the News Broadcasters Association.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. Ashok Vajpeyi, Poet
Ms. Shubha Mudgal, Singer
Ms. Sharmila Tagore, Actor
Mr. Naseeruddin Shah, Actor
Ms. Syeda Hameed, Writer

15 March 2016

To,
Mr. Prasanna Raghav
AVP Strategy & Execution
Zee Media Corporation Ltd

Essel Studio,
FC-19, Sector 16-A,
Noida - 201301,
India

**Complaint against telecast by Zee News channel of program titled
"Afzal Premi Gang ka Mushaira" from 9-3-2016 onwards**

Dear Sir

I, the undersigned, am writing to lodge a complaint regarding a malicious and grave and repeated breach of the News Broadcasters Association's Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, by a program, titled "Afzal Premi Gang ka Mushaira" aired on 9th March 2016 and many times after including on 10th, 11th and 12th March 2016.

I watched the programme on Zee News channel on 9th March 2016 which contained reportage and commentary that is not only defamatory, malicious, false, motivated, and derogatory but also incendiary and telecast with a view to incite hatred, ill-will against me and endanger the security of me and my family. I am deeply aggrieved by this programme. The Zee News Programmes were framed in an aggressive, intimidating, and browbeating style, and was telecast with commentary and taglines labelling me as 'anti-national' poet.

The links to some of the aforesaid programmes are given below:

- (i) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_R4is4PP3Q
- (ii) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_uVq1I33to
- (iii) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVJQjfqNcmk>

It is well known that I am a scientist of repute and a poet of stature. My professional contribution as well as my contribution to the field of culture command great respect and admiration.

The Zee News Programme, "Afzal Premi Gang ka Mushaira", telecast selective portions of certain poems recited by me on 5th March 2016 at the Annual Shankar Shad Mushaira event held at New Delhi.

At the aforesaid event, I recited three poems; one poem which I had written in 1989 about the murder of street theatre and cultural activist Safdar Hashmi; another poem that I had written in 2010 about the killing of 2 journalist in Iraq and the third poem that I have written in this year.

Zee News has prepared programmes using video clipping of my recitation of these poems at the aforesaid function, and has repeatedly telecast the same since 9th March 2016. Zee News has telecast the programme with the sensational, misleading and incendiary title "**Afzal Premi Gang ka Mushaira**".

The Zee News programme has interspersed the video clips of selected lines from the recitation of my poems at the Shankar Shad Mushaira with video clips allegedly of slogans raised at JNU on 9th February 2016 and visuals of posters of Afzal Guru and Kashmir. The Zee News anchor repeatedly referred to me as a member of the "Afzal Guru Premi Gang". In the said Zee News Programmes, the anchor, the commentary and the subtitles repeatedly refer to me as a member of the "Afzal Guru Premi Gang" and "Desh Virodhi Shayar". Further the Zee News Programmes says that I, am part of a gang that is standing with those who support the break up of India into many parts, "*Yeh aisa gang hai jo Bharat ke tukde karne wali soch ke saath khada dikh raha hai.*" These and similar highly defamatory and derogatory statements made throughout the Zee News Programmes are, completely unfounded and baseless.

I must state here that video clips which the Zee anchor has claimed are of slogan shouting at JNU, it is well known that these are doctored videos and the same has been proved by forensic analysis carried out by other TV channels and an enquiry ordered by the Delhi Government.

Violations:

The programme telecast by you is in serious violation of a series of guidelines and standards laid down by the **National Broadcasters Association**, which Zee News as a members of the NBA is obliged to respect and follow.

The NBA has laid down that,

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. (Section 1, Fundamental Principles, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA.)

The NBA has prescribed that neutrality is a fundamental principle of electronic journalism,

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. (Section 1, Fundamental Principles, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA.)

The principles for self-regulation laid down by the NBA place further emphasis on accuracy of information and facts,

1) Impartiality and objectivity in reporting: Accuracy is at the heart of the news television business. (Section 1, Fundamental Principles, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA.)

Further, the NBA standards, specifically direct News channels that,

...news channels must strive to ensure that allegations are not portrayed as fact and charges are not conveyed as an act of guilt. (Section 1, Fundamental Principles, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA.)

The NBA has prescribed certain 'Principles for Self-regulation',

*The purpose of putting together the principles of self regulation is to avoid compromising the genre of television news by broadcasting content that is **malicious, biased, regressive, knowingly inaccurate, hurtful, misleading**, or aimed at willfully concealing a conflict of interest. (Section 2, Principles for Self-Regulation, Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, NBA.)*

The Zee news programme violates the principles of impartiality, objectivity and neutrality, contained in the News Broadcasters Association's Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards. The programme aired by Zee News has displayed a blatant disregard for either professional integrity or the truth. Each of the 'Principles for Self-regulation' have been flouted by Zee News

by telecasting content that is malicious, biased, regressive, knowingly inaccurate, hurtful, misleading.

Further, the commentary by the Zee News Anchor distorts and manipulates my poetry to give it a different imputation and colour, and falsely states that I made statements in support of Afzal Guru. Not only has the Zee News programme distorted the words of my poem, but has also added unfounded allegations against me which are designed to promote hatred against me. The programme carries only baseless conclusions after providing the viewer with inaccurate and concocted statements.

The Zee News Programme falls foul of the above mentioned binding standards of self regulation. The Zee News Programme is highly defamatory and repeatedly pronounces me as 'anti-national' based on its prejudiced and baseless conclusion.

The Zee News Programme has caused serious and severe harm to my reputation and has endangered the safety of my family and me.

It is claimed by Zee News on its website that its programme is viewed by millions across the globe. The harm caused to my image and reputation by the Zee News Programme is therefore very serious and substantive.

The programme portrayed cast serious allegations on my character and integrity and has caused harm to my personal and professional reputation. The programme is intended to lower my moral and intellectual reputation in the estimation of society, as well as to manufacture ill-will against me. The programme has manipulated and distorted facts and circumstances and indulged in malicious propaganda to incite hatred against me, placing the safety and security of my family and me at risk as well as jeopardising my professional work. Pursuant to the telecast of this programme, I have received several intimidating and threatening messages and emails which have been influenced by the baseless and malicious allegations made against me in the Zee News Programme. I have also seen several hateful comments directed at me in reference to the Zee News Programme on social media. The hate campaign manufactured by Zee News is causing a grave apprehension of harm to me and my wife Shabnam Hashmi who is also in public life.

Therefore, I request you to take the necessary, prompt action to:

- Issue a Corrigendum with respect to the Zee News Programme on me, which is telecast prominently at the same timings as the aforesaid programme was telecast, and as many times as the aforesaid programme was telecast from 9.3.2016 onwards by Zee News.
- Issue a public apology for telecasting inaccurate information, defamatory and malicious propaganda against me prominently on your channel.
- Give an undertaking that Zee News shall not telecast the aforesaid programme.
- Pay a compensation of Rs. 1 crore to me as damages, for the intentional harm caused to my reputation and the incitement of hatred and ill-will against me, by the multiple telecasts of the aforesaid programme.

- Remove all the copies of the said programme from all channels of information including all website, social media and internet.

I request you to take the aforesaid actions immediately, failing which we will bring the matter to the attention of the News Broadcasters Association.

Professor Gauhar Raza

Address: 94 C Akash Ganga Plot 17, Sector 6, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075

Professor,

Academy of Scientific and Industrial Research; New Delhi

Chief Scientist and Head of Department

Science Communication through Multi-Media,

Council of Scientific & Industrial Research; New Delhi

International Fellow, Mapungubwe Institute of Strategic Reflection, South Africa;

Member Advisory Committee, MACAS, LSE, UK;

Editor, Journal of Scientific Temper, NISCAIR;

Keynote Speaker at the Inaugural session of International Conference on Science Communication, University of Lorraine, France, 2012;

Represented the country as a poet when India was Guest of Honour at Book Festival, Leipzig, 2006;

Member, Editorial Board, Public Understanding of Science, London;

Former Member, Editorial Board, Journal of Science Communication, Italy;

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