

ABC justice is a slap on the face of Australian Hindus

It shows either incompetence of adjudicator or their submission to someone's Anti-India, Anti-Hindu agenda

The ABC's coverage of the Ram Temple ceremony in Ayodhya, particularly the TV [coverage](#) broadcast on January 22 by reporter Avani Dias was seen by many Hindus as deliberate, inaccurate and biased.

We all have heard an image is worth a thousand words. Clearly a 2 plus minute is worth a lot more.

Thus, it had to be - at least factually accurate.

But many felt it was produced, as if to offend Australian Hindus, where the ABC was showing its 'might'.

ABC stories online took similar liberties with facts, which for some was deliberate to push one-sided agenda.

274 Australian Hindus complained to the ABC.

The matter was investigated and the ABC Ombudsman, Fiona Cameron who produced a [report](#) which, in short, says there was nothing wrong with the ABC coverage **and there has been no breach of the ABC's editorial standards.**

But there is a problem.

In the Analysis section in second para the report says:

ABC News acknowledged that in the Hindu tradition, the Babri Mosque was built by Muslim invaders on the ruins of a temple where the Hindu god Ram was born, a fact that was made clear in some of the reports that were broadcast and published, but which was excluded in one version of the report seen by many of the complainants.

It is a clear, written admission of wrong-doing.

Despite that admission, in a courageous move, the Ombudsman says as below:

Ombudsman's Finding

The program did not breach the ABC's editorial standards for accuracy.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, the Ombudsman finds that the reports did not breach the Corporation's editorial standards for accuracy.

The Ombudsman notes the one version of the report, that did not include reference to the fact that in the Hindu tradition, a Hindu temple stood on the site a thousand years ago and it is the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram, could have benefitted from that broader context. One version of that report that is published on ABC News Online is accompanied by a written story that does include that context. As the absence of that information was not materially misleading to the audience, we are satisfied it is not a breach of the editorial standards.

There is the second admission in writing above.

But the conclusion still is that the ABC's coverage committed no breaches of its editorial standards for accuracy.

By adopting the untenable position, the Ombudsman says the missing information in the video story can be found in another story which can be found by visiting ABC online.

It cannot get more ridiculous than that, especially by someone whose role is to adjudicate the complaints judiciously.

The 'anti-Hindu' video/TV story broadcast on January 22 is – cleverly worded to paint the new temple as some illegal structure over the mosque. Reporter Avani Dias in her video says:

"Its construction has been contentious, the temple stands on the site of a 16th century mosque, torn down by Hindu mobs in 1992.

"In 2019 India's highest court ruled the mosque demolition was illegal, but still granted the site to Hindus."

The report makes no mention of the finding that the mosque stood over a Hindu temple which was not only material but fundamental to the issue and subject of decades of litigation and final adjudication in 2019 in the Supreme Court of India.

On page 905 of the judgement, referring to the report of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), all 5 judges unanimously found as below:

Excerpt from the 2019 judgement

The report of the ASI indicates the following position:

(i) Archaeological finds in the area of excavation reveal significant traces of successive civilisations, commencing with the age of the North Black Polished Ware traceable to the second century B.C.;

(ii) The excavation by the ASI has revealed the existence of a preexisting underlying structure dating back to the twelfth century. The structure has large dimensions, evident from the fact that there were 85 pillar bases comprised in 17 rows each of five pillar bases;

(iii) On a preponderance of probabilities, the archaeological findings on the nature of the underlying structure indicate it to be of Hindu

religious origin, dating to twelfth century A.D.;

(iv) The mosque in dispute was constructed upon the foundation of the pre-existing structure. The construction of the mosque has taken place in such a manner as to obviate an independent foundation by utilising the walls of the pre-existing structure; and

(v) The layered excavation at the site of excavation has also revealed the existence of a circular shrine together with a makara pranala indicative of Hindu worship dating back to the eighth to tenth century.

A reasonable inference can be drawn on the basis of the standard of proof which governs civil trials that:

(i) The foundation of the mosque is based on the walls of a large pre-existing structure;

(ii) The pre-existing structure dates back to the twelfth century; and

(iii) The underlying structure which provided the foundations of the mosque together with its architectural features and recoveries are suggestive of a Hindu religious origin comparable to temple excavations in the region and pertaining to the era.

Concluding paragraph 170 on page 116 of the Addenda to the main 926-pages long judgement, says that the “faith and belief” of Hindus that the site is birthplace of Lord Ram and was a religious temple structure before the construction of the Mosque **“is proved by documentary and oral evidence”**.

The deliberate omission of the above findings, tilts the report to suggest the complete opposite as if the Muslims in India have been wronged by even the highest court of the country.

The absence of a mention in the report of these fundamental findings that the Hindu temple existed before the Mosque was built over it, the assertion by Avani Dias that the Supreme court of India despite declaring the demolition “illegal”, granted the site to Hindus, does materially change facts being conveyed.

The ABC defence

The report offers this lame explanation for this bit of Avani Dias’s report

We further note how the Indian Supreme Court judgement on the matter determined the mosque was illegally demolished, but awarded the site to Hindus in an acknowledgment that there was a “faith and belief” among Hindus that it was the site of Ram’s birth.

Firstly, Avani never mentions the acknowledgement by the Supreme Court of Hindus’ “faith and belief”.

Secondly, the Ombudsman's report also, in an act of complete refusal to do justice to the complainants, refuses to add, that the Supreme Court found that, as referred to above, the "faith and belief" of Hindus **"was proved by documentary and oral evidence"**.

That omission has completely changed the message of the ABC story, not just material but fundamentally.

How can the Ombudsman say that **"the absence of that information was not materially misleading to the audience"** and make a finding of no breach?

2000 deaths claim - DEBUNKED

Avani Dias in her report claimed 2000 Muslims died in the riots following the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition.

"The demolition of the Babri Masjid Mosque sparked nationwide riots between Hindus and Muslims.

"2000 people died mostly minority Muslims."

It can be verified that this claim of 2000 Muslim deaths is false, misleading, exaggeration of facts and untenable by the ABC's editorial standards.

All reputable publications at the time, including the New York Times and the Washington Post reported the number of deaths to be 200.

As shown in the screengrab of a Google search, ***The Washington Post*** reported deaths of only 200 following the demolition of Babri Masjid. One can see the date stamp of 8 December 1992. (Link: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/12/08/200-indians-killed-in-riots-following-mosque-destruction/7ce3e7cf-354d-439c-8c69-b7db290dea3c/>)

Further down, the search also lists 8 December 1992 the New York Times reporting deaths of 200 following the 1992 demolition of the mosque. (Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/08/world/at-least-200-killed-in-india-as-muslim-hindu-riots-rage.html>)

Also in the search list, the India Today's **2011** story seems to suggest more than 1000 people died in Hindu Muslim riots following Babri Masjid demolition but a closer look debunks that as the number includes deaths for other reasons than Babri Masjid, including fight "over chicken" in a slum in Mumbai. (Link: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/babri-masjid-bloody-aftermath-across-india-147823-2011-12-04>)

"Police arriving at the scene of ferocious fighting in Bombay's Dharavi slum discover that the cause is not the Babri Masjid but a stolen chicken" says the author of the article.

Discussing deaths in Assam following the news of demolition of the Babri Masjid, the article also notes Muslims to be the perpetrators:

“As the news spread like a raging prairie fire, furious Muslims went on the rampage killing Hindus and destroying temples.”

The article makes it clear that the number of deaths being quoted cannot necessarily be attributed to the demolition of the Babri Masjid alone.

Only the Wikipedia online claims the number of dead in riots following the 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid to be **2000**.

The ABC Ombudsman’s report says this of the 2000 deaths claim:

We are satisfied the reporter’s statement that 2000 people died and most were minority Muslims is in keeping with the ABC’s editorial standards for accuracy. We observe how it has been reported by a broad range of the world’s most reputable media organisations, ever since that event, that the majority of deaths were Muslims.

The question is for the ABC management to ponder over is – Is the Wikipedia online resource more reputable than the Washington Post and the New York Times?

The report also sneakily adds the words “ever since that event”.

Avani Dias’s story clearly suggests the inaccurate figure of 2000 deaths of Muslims in riots following 1992 demolition.

Is Modi changing a secular India into a Hindu nation?

Avani Dias’s 22 January TV story finished with the punchline:

“Cementing what many say is his plan to transform the country from a secular democracy into a Hindu nation”.

The Ombudsman defended it saying:

ABC News has identified a range of information that supports the claim, such as the enactment of Hindu nationalist policies, including the Citizenship Act of December 2019 that provided easier routes to citizenship for every religion other than Muslims in India, and which the United Nations said was fundamentally discriminatory.

Again, it simply shows complete lack of knowledge, research and analysis and understanding for two reasons:

Firstly, the report writer did not know that the Act is called the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019. It was brought in to amend the Indian citizenship laws to fast tracks citizenship for - Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Parsis minorities facing persecution in Muslim majority Islamic countries being Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

The laws in relation to access to India's citizenship under other circumstances remains unchanged for all, including Muslims, even today.

Secondly, it shows how ABC does not read beyond headlines. The [UN article](#) the Ombudsman refers to does not conclude what the ABC Ombudsman has sought to establish. It acknowledges India in December 2019, the same month the CAA was passed, **joining the international community in endorsing the Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration, which commits countries to ensure that all measures governing migration are based in human rights.**

It further acknowledges the legal framework of the country was looking into the new law to ensure India met its human and international obligations.

Further, the Ombudsman's report lists three articles with links as its source material to validate ABC's content.

[What Is the Future of Hindu Nationalism in India? – The Diplomat](#)

[Dissent Is 'Anti-National' in Modi's India | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/20/what-is-hindu-nationalism-and-who-are-they>

Sadly, those articles, even if stretched to the breaking point, do not help the Ombudsman, the narration in the story and thus the ABC.

On the contrary, the TV coverage on 22 January with its anti-Hindu headline and the picture playhead thumbnail saying "**Sectarian Temple**", with the size and projection it has, will become an independent source and resource for all anti-Hindu and anti-India viewers, columnists, academics and leaders.

How does the Ombudsman plan that there is someone from the ABC sitting and watching every click on that "**Sectarian Temple**" story to ensure that the viewer does not leave the ABC online site without having a read of the other online story which has the missing information?

Impractical and ludicrous as it is, how does that justify the Ombudsman's decision not to remove or correct the story?

And now to the ABC's editorial policy, accuracy and correction and clarification principles.

ABC editorial policy

ABC's editorial policy says, *"The ABC has a statutory duty to ensure that the gathering and presentation of news and information is accurate according to the recognised standards of objective journalism. Credibility depends heavily on factual accuracy."*

It also says, *"The ABC requires that reasonable efforts must be made to ensure accuracy in all fact-based content."*

“The accuracy standard requires that opinions be conveyed accurately, in the sense that quotes should be accurate and any editing should not distort the meaning of the opinion expressed.”

Accuracy Standards

2.1 Make reasonable efforts to ensure that material facts are accurate and presented in context.

2.2 Do not present factual content in a way that will materially mislead the audience. In some cases, this may require appropriate labels or other explanatory information.

As one can see, the 22 January report on Ram Temple by Avani Dias fails on both these given standards.

Corrections and Clarifications

ABC’s editorial policy on corrections and clarifications lists the following standards ABC journalists must adhere to:

3.1 Acknowledge and correct or clarify, in an appropriate manner as soon as reasonably practicable:

- a** significant material errors that are readily apparent or have been demonstrated; or
- b** information that is likely to significantly and materially mislead.

ABC carries a commitment to accuracy, which in their own words, ***“includes a willingness to correct errors and clarify ambiguous or otherwise misleading information. Swift correction can reduce harmful reliance on inaccurate information, especially given content can be quickly, widely and permanently disseminated. Corrections and clarifications can contribute to achieving fairness and impartiality.”***

Flouting the ABC’s editorial policy commitments and standards on accuracy, correction and clarification, the report has found no breaches of editorial standards have occurred.

Does the author of the Ombudsman report know the ABC’s editorial policies?

I believe the clear breaches of the accuracy and editorial standards need to be immediately corrected by the ABC and its Ombudsman report accordingly amended.

And the ABC should unconditionally apologize to Australian Hindus.

The ABC Ombudsman’s attempt to cover the ABC’s breach by saying that ***“one version of that report that is published on ABC News Online is accompanied by a written story that does include that context”***, is abysmal, unprofessional, untenable and completely unacceptable to the complainants.

For reasons only known to the Ombudsman Fiona Cameron, her attempt to redefine the accuracy standards and the editorial policy principles of the ABC, completely undoes the organization's claimed standards and harms its reputation.

As is, the report is a slap on the face of Australian Hindus who felt completely let down by the inaccurate and biased or 'botched' reports of the event by the ABC.

The Preamble to the ABC's editorial policy guidelines says:

"The ABC belongs to the Australian people.

"Earning and retaining their trust is essential to fulfilling the ABC's charter and its responsibilities under the ABC Act..."

My question to the ABC Managing Director David Anderson and Ombudsman Fiona Cameron is – Do you not include Australian Hindus in Australian people?

If you do, why this unjust and injudicious treatment?