

When TV journalist misuses quotes



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Nellie, a sleepy village in Assam witnessed a heinous massacre in 1983 snatching the lives of thousands of Muslims. It was the time, when the Assam agitation led by All Assam Students Union reached peak and New Delhi imposed an election in Assam against the will of the indigenous people. The memory of Nellie massacre still haunts the Assamese psyche. The media revisited the Nellie story recently when former Express reporter Hemendra Narayan recently released a booklet on Nellie and its coverage 25 years ago.

And it also became the occasion for some unabashed rehashing by a journalist. A story on NDTV's portal following the release was an example of this. Nitin A Gokhale, who visited Nellie three years back, produced a column using all his old information. In fact the Senior Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs of NDTV has copied and pasted almost 80 per cent of an article used by Tehelka three years back. His column titled 'Nellie revisited: 25 years on' uploaded on Saturday (March 1), refers to a recent visit, and describes the consequences of the carnage and its implication on today's changing demographic pattern in the state. But except for the first few paragraphs the write up on NDTV is a rehash of an earlier article written for Tehelka. In a journalistic time frame can a three years back visit be described as 'recent'? And is the closing sentence, "that's the ground reality today," therefore valid?

Moreover, the journalist used a quote (Nuruddin, who was 'then a 20-year-old having just completed his schooling in Arabic' and later 'began taking active interest in politics') and said, "Today he is the member of the Anchalik Parishad and a leader of the community." The old article (uploaded in July 2005) also described Nuruddin as the member of the Anchalik Parishad (a part of Panchyati Raj system in India). So he must have been re-elected in the Panchayat polls of Assam that took place during December and January 2007. But there is no mention about it. It simply implies that Nitin does not care about the authenticity of a quote in his column.

The NDTV editor (Nitin A Gokhale) was communicated with his personal e-mail address as well as the official feedback format, but no response came from him till date.

Now the pertinent question that arises, whether a journalist is allowed to manufacture quotes for his write-ups those might reveal biased information? Moreover, is anyone permitted to copy and paste most of the parts of his own write up, even though the situation had been changed in three long years? Are these not a clear case of unpardonable offence by the NDTV editor, which could definitely hurt the moral and ethical values of journalism? Finally why does Northeast receive such treatment from those so-called mainland Indians all the time?

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BY NAVA THAKURIA

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