

BEFORE THE ADJUDICATING OFFICER
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE BOARD OF INDIA
ADJUDICATION ORDER NO: Order/SBM/VS/2021-22/15295)

UNDER SECTION 15-I OF THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE BOARD OF INDIA ACT, 1992 READ WITH RULE 5 OF THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE BOARD OF INDIA (PROCEDURE FOR HOLDING INQUIRY AND IMPOSING PENALTIES) RULES, 1995.

In respect of:

ABHISHEK VEDPRAKASH AGARWAL HUF

(Karta- Mr. Abhishek Agarwal)

(PAN No.: AAKHA2281B)

47, Navyug Co-op Society,

Opp Manekbag Hall Ambawadi,

Ahmedabad, Gujarat-380015

In the matter of

Dealing in illiquid stock options at BSE

FACTS OF THE CASE

1. Securities and Exchange Board of India (hereinafter referred to as '**SEBI**') observed large scale reversal of trades in the Stock Options segment of the Bombay Stock Exchange (hereinafter referred to as '**BSE**') leading to the alleged creation of artificial volume in the stock options segment. In this regard, SEBI conducted an investigation into the trading activity in the illiquid Stock Options segment at BSE for the period April 01, 2014 to September 30, 2015 (hereinafter referred to as '**Investigation Period**').
2. It was observed during the course of investigation that a total of 2,91,643 trades comprising 81.38% of all the trades executed in the Stock Options Segment by various entities at BSE during the investigation period were trades which involved reversal of buy and sell positions by the clients and counterparties in a contract on the same day. It was also observed that the aforesaid trades resulted into alleged creation of artificial volume to the tune of 826.21 crore units or 54.68% of the total market volume in the Stock Options segment of BSE during the investigation period. In view of the large scale reversal of trades that were observed in the illiquid Stock Options segment at BSE, it is alleged that these trades were non-genuine in nature.
3. It was observed that Abhishek Vedprakash Agarwal HUF (hereinafter referred to as '**Noticee**') was one of the various entities which had indulged in the execution of the non-genuine trades in the Stock Options Segment at BSE during the above referred investigation period. It was observed that Noticee

had entered into reversal trades with its counterparties which involved squaring off transactions with significant difference in sell value and buy value of the transactions. It was therefore alleged that Noticee had executed the reversal trades, which were non-genuine in nature and have created false or misleading appearance of trading in terms of creation of artificial volume in the Stock Options segment at BSE and therefore, it is alleged that the Noticee has violated the provisions of regulations 3(a), (b), (c), (d) and regulation 4(1), 4(2) (a) of the SEBI (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices relating to Securities Markets) Regulations, 2003 (hereinafter referred to as '**PFUTP Regulations**'). In view of the above reasons, adjudication proceedings have been initiated against the Noticee under the provisions of section 15 HA of the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992 (hereinafter referred to as '**SEBI Act**').

APPOINTMENT OF ADJUDICATING OFFICER

4. The undersigned was appointed as the Adjudicating Officer (hereinafter referred to as '**AO**'), vide *communique* dated July 27, 2021 under section 19 read with section 15-I of the SEBI Act read with rule 3 of SEBI (Procedure for Holding Inquiry and Imposing Penalties) Rules, 1995 (hereinafter referred to as '**Adjudication Rules**') to inquire into and adjudge under the provisions of section 15HA of the SEBI Act the aforementioned alleged violation of the provisions of law by the Noticee.

SHOW CAUSE NOTICE, HEARING AND REPLY

5. Show Cause Notice ref. EAD1/SBM/VS/21284/2021 dated August 30, 2021 (hereinafter referred to as '**SCN**') was issued to the Noticee in terms of rule 4 of the Adjudication Rules requiring the Noticee to show cause as to why an inquiry should not be held against it and why penalty, if any, should not be imposed on the Noticee under the provisions of section 15HA of the SEBI Act. The SCN issued to the Noticee, *inter alia*, mentioned/alleged the following-
 - a. *It is further noted that said alleged non-genuine trades were not restricted to any specific contract or between any specific set of entities. It is noted that Noticee was one of the various entities which were indulged in execution of such alleged non-genuine trades in Stock Options Segment of BSE during the Investigation period. Following points deals with the dealings of Noticee during the Investigation period and allegations against it for execution of non-genuine trades.*
 - b. *For the purpose of illustration of non-genuine trades and creation of artificial volume by the Noticee, details of trading done by the Noticee in the contract viz. "TRBI15JUN280.00PE" on June 25, 2015 is given below:*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Buyer</i>	<i>Seller</i>	<i>Buy Order Time</i>	<i>Sell Order Time</i>	<i>Trade Time</i>	<i>Trade Rate (₹)</i>	<i>Trade Quantity</i>
25/06/2015	ABHISHEK VEDPRAKASH AGARWAL HUF	N M IMPEX PRIVATE LIMITED	13:17:04	13:17:05	13:17:05	35	17000
25/06/2015	N M IMPEX PRIVATE LIMITED	ABHISHEK VEDPRAKASH AGARWAL HUF	13:49:21	13:49:21	13:49:21	49.7	17000

- c. It is observed from the table above that the trades entered by the Noticee in the contract of “TRBI15JUN280.00PE” on June 25, 2015, with its counterparty viz. N M IMPEX PRIVATE LIMITED were reversed between the Noticee and the same counterparty on the same day resulting in reversal of trades which are, *prima facie*, considered to be as non-genuine. Therefore, in the process artificial volume in the stock option contract at BSE has been generated by the Noticee through such non-genuine trades. From the table above, it is observed that the artificial volume created as no. of units reversed in non-genuine trades is 34,000 units comprising both volume of initial trade and volume of reversal trade, while not considering the volume which is not reversed. In the process, it is observed that the Noticee had made a profit of ₹2,49,900/-.
- d. It is further observed from the trade data of the Noticee that it has allegedly entered into non-genuine trades in 3 contracts wherein it executed a total of 7 trades all of which were, *prima facie*, non-genuine trades. In view of this, it is alleged that such fraudulent trades of the Noticee had resulted into creation of artificial volume of total 2,78,000 units.
- e. In this regard, details of all the alleged non-genuine trades of the Noticee in Stock Option Segment of BSE during relevant period are attached as **Annexure-B**. From the perusal of the trade data of the alleged non-genuine trades of the Noticee, it is observed that Noticee has allegedly executed non-genuine trades in 3 contracts. The total volume of 2,78,000 units generated by the Noticee in these 3 contracts due to its alleged non-genuine trades was artificial volume generated by the Noticee in the stock option segment of BSE. These alleged non-genuine trades, executed by Noticee in above contracts, had significant differential in buy rates and sell rates considering that the trades were reversed on same day.
- f. Further, summary of dealings of Noticee in 3 Stock Options contracts in which it had allegedly executed non genuine trades during the relevant period is enclosed as **Annexure-C**.
- g. In view of the foregoing, it is alleged that the Noticee, by indulging in execution of reversal trades in the Stock Options with same entities on the same day, which were non-genuine in nature, has created a false or misleading appearance of trading in the aforementioned contracts traded in the option segment of BSE. In view of the fact that these options contracts were illiquid in nature, having very small volume in trading, the Noticee allegedly created artificial volumes in the stock options which was manipulative and deceptive in nature. Therefore, in view of above, it is alleged that the Noticee has violated the provisions of Regulation 3(a), (b), (c), (d), 4(1) and 4(2)(a) of PFUTP Regulations, 2003.

6. The Noticee, vide its reply dated September 14, 2021, *inter alia*, submitted the following:
- a. *The Noticee submitted that the trades executed by it were in the stock option segment of the BSE Ltd. were genuine and were executed on the platform provided by the stock exchange.*
 - b. *It is extremely absurd on the part of SEBI to suddenly label these transaction as artificial and non-genuine after a period of 6 to 7 year from the date of transaction on completely untenable grounds and unjustified reasons.*
 - c. *The alleged trades have all traits of being genuine and therefore cannot be categorised as non-genuine. These trades were executed on the anonymous platform of the Exchange, without any knowledge of counter party, at price ranges that were permitted by the Exchange and SEBI and the obligation arising out of it have been settled through the clearing mechanism of the Exchange.*
 - d. *The SCN does not provide an iota of evidence as to how it was related or connected to the counterparties. Therefore, without the theory of collusion or meeting of minds between two parties being established, the allegation in the SCN do not hold good. In this regards reliance was placed on decision of the Hon'ble Securities Appellate Tribunal (hereinafter referred to as 'Hon'ble SAT') in following orders:*
 - i. *Jagruti Securities vs. SEBI [2008 SCC Online SAT 1848 : 2008SAT 184]*
 - ii. *S.P.J. Stock Brokers Pvt. Ltd. vs SEBI [2013 SCC Online SAT 67 : 920130 SAT 17]*
 - iii. *HB Stockholdings Limited vs. SEBI [2013 SCC Online SAT 56 : 920130 SAT 44]*
 - iv. *R.K. Global vs. SEBI [Appeal No. 158 of 2008, Date of Decision 16th September, 2010]*
 - e. *With regard to the impositions of penalty lesser than the minimum prescribed penalty reliance was placed on following Adjudicating Orders of AOs:*
 - i. *AO order added 26th February, 2021 in the matter of Octant Interactive Technologies Limited wherein a penalty of ₹2,00,000/- was imposed on the Noticee under section 15HA.*
 - ii. *AO order dated 29th March, 2019, in the matter of Sangam Advisors Ltd., wherein a penalty of ₹1,00,000/- was imposed on the Noticee under section 15A(b)*
7. In the interest of natural justice and in terms of the Adjudication Rules, the Noticee was provided with an opportunity of personal hearing in the matter on October 12, 2021, through the online webex platform. Mr. Ravi Ramaiya appeared as the Authorized Representative ('AR') on behalf of the Noticee on the stipulated date of hearing. During the course of hearing, the AR reiterated the submissions made by the Noticee in its reply dated September 14, 2021.

CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES AND FINDINGS

8. I have taken into consideration the facts and circumstances of the case, the material available on record and the reply submitted by the Noticee. It is alleged that the Noticee had executed reversal trades,

which were non-genuine trades and the same has resulted in the generation of artificial volume in the Stock Option contracts at BSE. In view of the same, it is alleged that Noticee has violated the provisions of Regulations 3(a), (b), (c), (d) and Regulation 4(1), 4(2)(a) of PFUTP Regulations and, therefore, it is alleged that Noticee is liable for penalty under the provisions of section 15HA of the SEBI Act.

9. The Noticee has contended that, there was delay in the issuance of SCN in the current proceedings and therefore requested to drop the proceedings. With regard to the argument of the Noticee regarding delay in the proceedings, I note that pursuant to a preliminary examination conducted in the Illiquid Stock Options matter, Interim order was passed by SEBI on August 20, 2015 which was confirmed vide Orders dated July 30, 2016 and August 22, 2016. Meanwhile, SEBI initiated a detailed investigation relating to stock options segment of BSE which was completed in the year 2018. The investigation revealed that 14,720 entities were involved in executing non-genuine trades in BSE's stock option segment during the investigation period. The proceedings initiated vide the aforementioned Interim Order were disposed of vide Final Order dated April 05, 2018 and appropriate action was initiated against the said 14, 720 entities in a phased manner.
10. During the course of hearing in the case of *R. S. Ispat Ltd Vs SEBI*, the Hon'ble Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT), vide its Order dated October 14, 2019, *inter alia* observed that "*SEBI may consider holding a Lok Adalat or adopting any other alternative dispute resolution process with regard to the Illiquid Stock Options*".
11. In this regard, a Settlement Scheme was framed under the SEBI (Settlement Proceedings) Regulations, 2018, which provided a one-time opportunity for settlement of proceedings in the Illiquid Stock Options matter. The said scheme was kept open from August 01, 2020 till December 31, 2020. Adjudication proceedings were initiated against those entities who had not availed of the opportunity of the settlement scheme.
12. As can be seen from the narration of facts in the foregoing paragraphs, pursuant to the appointment of AO in the instant matter, SCN was issued to the Noticee on August 30, 2021. In compliance with the principles of natural justice, after receipt of reply, an opportunity of personal hearing was also provided to the Noticee on October 12, 2021.
13. I find that the fact of delay in completion of investigation and / or initiation or completion of enforcement proceedings, in itself, cannot be a ground for dropping the proceedings. Only in cases where a Noticee is adversely affected, can such a submission be considered. In this context, I find it

relevant to refer to the order passed by Hon'ble SAT in the case of *Metex Marketing Pvt. Ltd. vs. SEBI* (order dated June 4, 2019) wherein Hon'ble SAT held that: "...This Tribunal has consistently held that in the absence of any specific provision in the SEBI Act or in the Takeover Regulations, the fact that there was a delay on the part of SEBI in initiating proceedings for violation of any provision of the Act cannot be a ground to quash the penalty imposed for such violation...". Similarly, PFUTP Regulations also does not have any specific provisions w.r.t., timeline /limitation etc., and therefore, a parallel can be drawn and the fact of delay in completion of investigation and initiation or completion of enforcement proceedings, in itself, cannot be a ground for dropping the proceedings.

14. In the context of delay in initiating the proceeding, Hon'ble SAT in *Mr. Rakesh Kathotia & Ors. vs SEBI* vide order dated May 27, 2019 has held the following:

"...23. It is no doubt true that no period of limitation is prescribed in the Act or the Regulations for issuance of a show cause notice or for completion of the adjudication proceedings. The Supreme Court in Government of India vs, Citedal Fine Pharmaceuticals, Madras and Others, [AIR (1989) SC 1771] held that in the absence of any period of limitation, the authority is required to exercise its powers within a reasonable period. What would be the reasonable period would depend on the facts of each case and that no hard and fast rule can be laid down in this regard as the determination of this question would depend on the facts of each case..."

In view of the above, the contention of the Noticee citing delay in initiating the proceedings is baseless and without any merit.

15. Before moving forward, the relevant provisions of law allegedly violated by the Noticee and as mentioned in the SCN are reproduced below:

PFUTP Regulations

3. Prohibition of certain dealings in securities No person shall directly or indirectly-

(a) buy, sell or otherwise deal in securities in a fraudulent manner;

(b) use or employ, in connection with issue, purchase or sale of any security listed or proposed to be listed in a recognized stock exchange, any manipulative or deceptive device or contrivance in contravention of the provisions of the Act or the rules or the regulations made there under;

(c) employ any device, scheme or artifice to defraud in connection with dealing in or issue of securities which are listed or proposed to be listed on a recognized stock exchange;

(d) engage in any act, practice, course of business which operates or would operate as fraud or deceit upon any person in connection with any dealing in or issue of securities which are listed or proposed to be listed on a recognized stock exchange in contravention of the provisions of the Act or the rules and the regulations made there under.

4. Prohibition of manipulative, fraudulent and unfair trade practices

(1) Without prejudice to the provisions of regulation 3, no person shall indulge in a fraudulent or an unfair trade practice in securities.

(2) Dealing in securities shall be deemed to be a fraudulent or an unfair trade practice if it involves fraud and may include all or any of the following, namely:—

(a) indulging in an act which creates false or misleading appearance of trading in the securities market;

16. Reversal trades are considered as those trades in which an entity reverse its buy or sell positions in a contract with subsequent sell or buy positions with the same counterparty during the same day. The reversal trades are alleged to be non-genuine trades as they are not executed in the normal course of trading, lack basic trading rationale, and allegedly lead to false or misleading appearance of trading in terms of generation of artificial volumes, hence these trades are deceptive and manipulative. From the facts/material made available on record, I find that the reversal trades executed by the Noticee, which were observed in the present case, were undertaken by the Noticee with its counterparties with a predetermined arrangement to book profit or losses respectively, and therefore, the parties to the trades were not trading in the normal sense and ordinary course of business. Therefore, it is alleged that the Noticee by indulging in such reversal trades with its counterparties in the illiquid stock option segment at BSE has managed to generate artificial volume in the Stock Options segment at BSE during the investigation period.

17. In this regard, it is observed from the trade log of the Noticee that it had traded in 3 non-genuine unique contracts in the Stock Options segment of BSE during the above mentioned investigation period. The examination of the Trade log of the Noticee during the relevant period revealed that Noticee had executed 7 non-genuine trades in respect of the 3 contracts in the Stock Options segment of BSE. I note that the abovementioned trades of the Noticee had resulted in the creation of artificial volume of a total of 2,78,000 units in the given 3 contracts. Further, it is observed that the trades executed by the Noticee were squared up within a short span of time with the same counterparty i.e. trades were reversed within seconds/minutes on same day. Thus, it is observed that Noticee had indulged in reversal trades with its counterparties in the stock option segment of BSE and these trades were non-genuine trades.

18. Further, it is observed that most of these trades were squared up by the Noticee with its counterparties with a significant price difference. The non-genuineness of these transactions executed by the Noticee

is evident from the fact that there was no commercial basis to suddenly, within a matter of few seconds, reverse the position with its counterparties with significant price difference when the value of the underlying had not undergone any significant change. The frequent trade reversals in the said case points out to the fact that the parties to the transactions, including the Noticee, did not intend to transfer the beneficial ownership and through these orchestrated transactions, the intention of which was not regular trading, other investors have been excluded from participating in these trades/contracts. As already mentioned above, there was very little time gap between the buy and sell orders placed by the Noticee with its counterparties in different trades. The time gap between both the trades ranged from few seconds to minutes, but always on the same day. Given the fact that the Stock Option contracts were illiquid in nature at BSE and also in view of the observations made above, I am convinced that Noticee has entered into reversal/non-genuine trades with its counterparties and in the process also generated artificial volume in the otherwise illiquid stock option contracts at BSE.

19. To illustrate, it is observed that the Noticee had executed a total of 2 trades during the Investigation period in the contract “IRBI15JUN280.00PE”. All the aforesaid trades were done by the Noticee on June 25, 2015 wherein Noticee bought 17,000 units from N M Impex Pvt. Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as “**Impex**”) at 13:17:05 at the rate of ₹35/- per unit and sold 17,000 units to Impex at 13:49:21 at the rate of ₹49.7/- per unit. Thus, in the above manner, the Noticee executed a total of 2 trades in the contract “IRBI15JUN280.00PE” and generated artificial volume of 34,000 units in the above said contract through such non-genuine and reversal trades. It is also observed that out of 7 trades done through 3 unique contracts, the Noticee was instrumental in contributing significantly towards the total volume recorded on BSE in the said 3 unique contracts and in one of the contract, the volume contribution of the Noticee was 100% of the total volume recorded at BSE.
20. The Noticee has contended that the anonymous trading system of the stock exchange does not allow a transacting party to know the details of the counterparties to the trade. I note that in the screen based trading, which is virtually anonymous, it is not possible for anyone to enter into such reversal trades. However, considering the precision at which the reversal transactions had taken place, the quantity, price and time and sale, parties being persistent in a large number of such trade transactions with huge price variations, I am of the view that it will be too naïve to hold that these transactions are through screen-based trading and hence anonymous. Such conclusion would be over-looking the prior meeting of minds involving synchronization of buy and sell order w.r.t the transactions entered into by the Noticee with its counterparties and such synchronized trading is clearly violative of the transparent norms of trading in the securities market. In view of the above observations, I hold that all the 7

transactions executed by the Noticee in the 3 Stock Option Contracts were synchronized trades, which were reversed within a small time gap and with prior meeting of mind between the parties to the trade. Needless to mention the fact that these transactions were manipulative/deceptive device with a view to create a desired loss and/or profit in the books of the parties to the transactions and in the process, artificial volumes were also generated through such contracts. As per the material made available, the Noticee made a profit of ₹2,00,500/- as result of these trades.

21. At this juncture, it is pertinent to refer to the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the matter of *Securities and Exchange Board of India vs. Rakhi Trading Private Limited* (Civil Appeal Nos. 1969, 3174-3177 and 3180 of 2011 dated February 08, 2018) wherein, the Hon'ble Supreme Court while cumulatively analyzing the reversal transactions held that, *"...From the facts before us, it is clear that the traders in question did not intend to transfer beneficial ownership and therefore these trades are non-genuine. Rather than allowing the market forces to operate in their natural course, the traders repeatedly carried out the impugned transactions which deprived other market players from full participation. The repeated reversals and predetermined arrangement to book profits and losses respectively, made it clear that the parties were not trading in the normal sense and ordinary course. Resultantly, there has clearly been a restriction on the free and fair operation of the market forces in the instant case..."*

22. In the same matter, Hon'ble Supreme Court had further held that-

"...quantity, time and significant variation of prices, without major variation in the underlying price of the securities clearly indicate that Respondent's trades are not genuine and had only misleading appearance of trading in the securities market..."

"35.... Contextually and in simple words, it means a practice which does not conform to the fair and transparent principles of trades in the stock market. In the instant case, one party booked gains and the other party booked a loss. Nobody intentionally trades for a loss. An intentional trading for loss per se, is not a genuine dealing in securities. The plat form of the stock exchange has been used for a non-genuine trade. Trading is always with the aim to make profits. But if one party consistently makes losses and that too in a preplanned manner and rapid trades, it is not genuine..."

23. In this context, I also find it relevant to refer to the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the matter of *Securities and Exchange Board of India vs. Kishore R Ajmera* {(2016)} 6 SCC 368 : AIR 2016 SC 1079} wherein, the Hon'ble Supreme Court has held that , *"... According to us, knowledge of who the 2ndparty/ client or the broker is, is not relevant at all. While the screen based trading system keeps the identity of the parties anonymous it will be too naïve to rest the final conclusions on the said basis which overlooks a meeting of minds elsewhere. Direct proof of such meeting of minds elsewhere would rarely be forthcoming. The test, in our considered view, is one of*

preponderance of probabilities so far as adjudication of civil liability arising out of violation of the Act or the provisions of the Regulations framed thereunder is concerned...”

24. The Hon’ble Supreme Court, has further held that, “*...In the absence of direct proof of meeting of minds elsewhere in synchronized transactions, the test should be one of preponderance of probabilities as far as adjudication of civil liability arising out of the violation of the Act or provision of the Regulations is concerned. The conclusion has to be gathered from various circumstances like that volume of trade effected; the period of persistence in trading in a particular scrip; the particulars of buy and sell orders, namely the volume thereof; the proximity of time between the two and such relevant factors...*”
25. The observations made in the aforesaid judgments of Hon’ble Supreme Court apply with full force to the facts and circumstances of the present case. Therefore, applying the ratio of the above judgments, I am convinced that the execution of trades by the Noticee in the illiquid options segment with such precision in terms of order placement, time, price, quantity etc. and also the fact that the transactions were reversed consistently with the same counterparties clearly indicates a prior meeting of mind with a view to execute the reversal trades at a pre-determined price. It is observed that in respect of these trades executed in the illiquid stock options contracts, the strike price was far away from the price of the underlying. The only reason for the wide variation in prices of the same contract, within seconds/minutes was a clear indication that there was pre-determination in the prices by both the counterparties when executing the trades. Thus, the nature of trading, as brought out above, clearly indicates an element of prior meeting of mind and therefore, a collusion of the Noticee with its counterparties to carry out the trades at pre-determined prices. It is not possible to comprehend the reason for which the Noticee would enter into an option contract with a strike price very far away from the current market price of the underlying except for the fact that it wanted to execute non-genuine trades.
26. Rather than allowing the market forces to operate in their natural course, the Noticee repeatedly carried out the impugned transactions with its counterparties which deprived other market players from full participation. The repeated reversals and predetermined arrangement to book profits and losses respectively, made it clear that the parties were not trading in the normal sense and ordinary course. Resultantly, there has clearly been a restriction on the free and fair operation of market forces in the instant case.

27. Such trading also involves an act amounting to manipulation of the price of the security in the sense that the price has been artificially and apparently prefixed. The price does not at all reflect the value of the underlying asset. It is also a transaction without any intention of performing it and without any intention of effecting a change of ownership of such securities, ownership being understood in the limited sense of the rights in the contract. By synchronization and repeated reversal trades, as has been carried out by the Noticee in the instant case, the price discovery system has been affected. Except the parties who have pre-fixed the price, nobody is in the position to participate in the trade. It also has an adverse impact on the fairness, integrity and transparency of the stock market.

28. Therefore, from the foregoing paragraphs and the observations/findings contained therein, I conclude that the Noticee has violated the provisions of regulations 3(a), 4(1) and 4(2)(a) of the PFUTP Regulations.

29. In view of the above, the Noticee is liable for monetary penalty under the provisions of section 15HA of the SEBI Act, which reads as under:

Penalty for fraudulent and unfair trade practices.

15HA. If any person indulges in fraudulent and unfair trade practices relating to securities, he shall be liable to a penalty which shall not be less than five lakh rupees but which may extend to twenty-five crore rupees or three times the amount of profits made out of such practices, whichever is higher.

30. In this regard, the provisions of Section 15J of the SEBI Act and rule 5 of the Adjudication Rules require that while adjudging the quantum of penalty, the adjudicating officer shall have due regard to the following factors namely :-

(a) the amount of disproportionate gain or unfair advantage, wherever quantifiable, made as a result of the default;

(b) the amount of loss caused to an investor or group of investors as a result of the default;

(c) the repetitive nature of the default.

31. Clearly, from the above observations, the Noticee was instrumental in the creation of artificial volume in the illiquid stock option contracts at BSE during the investigation period by executing reversal / non-genuine transactions in the illiquid stock options segment at BSE. The Noticee has entered into 7 non-genuine transactions in 3 stock option contracts with its counterparties, which demonstrates the repetitive nature of the default on its part. It is not possible from the material available on record to quantify the amount of loss caused to genuine investors as a result of the reversal trades/ non-genuine trades executed by the Noticee with its counterparties. From the manner in which Noticee executed

the above mentioned transactions, the Noticee has violated the statutory provisions of law. It is on record that Noticee had indulged in 3 contracts resulting in 7 trades and thereby instrumental in creating artificial volume at BSE in the option contract. In this context, reliance is placed upon the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the matter of *Chairman, SEBI Vs Shriram Mutual Fund* {[2006]5 SCC 361} –wherein the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India held that “...*In our considered opinion, penalty is attracted as soon as the contravention of the statutory obligation as contemplated by the Act and the Regulations is established and hence the intention of the parties committing such violation becomes wholly irrelevant...*”

32. I note that the Noticee has placed reliance on Adjudication orders dated February 26, 2021 and March 29, 2019 and contended that a penalty lesser than the minimum prescribed should be imposed on the Noticee. In this regard, I note that the impugned transaction in the instant matter pertaining to the Noticee are after the notification of the Securities Law (Amendment) Act, 2014, which was notified w.e.f. September 08, 2014. The said amendment has clearly prescribed the minimum penalty to be imposed for such violations. Therefore, the contention of the Noticee is not tenable.
33. The Noticee has also cited various orders passed by Hon'ble SAT in support of its arguments, viz, collusion between buyer and seller, connection of the counter parties, synchronization of trades, etc. Upon perusal of these orders, I find that the orders passed by the Hon'ble SAT which have been cited by the Noticee are different from the facts and circumstances of the present matter. In the instant matter, it is on record that Noticee has indulged in reversal trades with its counterparties with a significant price difference and has undertaken these trades with its counterparties with a predetermined arrangement to book profit. Therefore, it is clear that the Noticee along with its counterparties were not trading in the option contract in the normal sense and ordinary course.

ORDER

34. Having considered all the facts and circumstances of the case, the material available on record and the factors mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, I, in exercise of the powers conferred upon me under Section 15-I of the SEBI Act read with rule 5 of the Adjudication Rules, hereby impose a penalty of ₹5,00,000/- (Rupees Five Lakh only) on the Noticee viz. Abhishek Vedprakash Agarwal HUF under the provisions of section 15HA of the SEBI Act for the violation of regulations 3(a), 4(1) and 4(2) (a) of the PFUTP Regulations. I am of the view that the said penalty is commensurate with the default committed by the Noticee.
35. The Noticee shall remit / pay the said amount of penalty within 45 (forty five) days of the receipt of this order either by way of Demand Draft (DD) in favour of “SEBI -Penalties Remittable to

Government of India”, payable at Mumbai and the said DD should be forwarded to the Division Chief, Enforcement Department -I (EFD), Division of Regulatory Action -I [EFD1-DRA-1] SEBI Bhavan, Plot No.C4-A, ‘ G’ Block, Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC), Bandra (East), Mumbai –400 051 and also send an email to tad@sebi.gov.in with the following detail

1	Case Name	
2	Name of the Payee	
3	Date of Payment	
4	Amount Paid	
5	Transaction No.	
6	Bank Details in which payment is made	
7	Payment is made for (like penalties/disgorgement / recovery/ settlement amount and legal charges along with order details)	

36. Payment can also be made online by following the below path at SEBI website www.sebi.gov.in
ENFORCEMENT → Orders → Orders of AO → Click on PAY NOW or at
<https://siportal.sebi.gov.in/intermediary/AOPaymentGateway.html>.

37. In the event of failure to pay the said amount of penalty within 45 days of the receipt of this Order, recovery proceedings may be initiated under section 28A of the SEBI Act, 1992 for realization of the said amount of penalty along with interest thereon, *inter alia*, by attachment and sale of movable and immovable properties.

38. In terms of rule 6 of the Adjudication Rules, a copy of this order is sent to the Noticee viz. Abhishek Vedprakash Agarwal HUF and also to Securities and Exchange Board of India.

Date: February 28, 2022
Place: Mumbai

SURESH B MENON
ADJUDICATING OFFICER