

[Of Milk and Media](#)

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Those who heard about the Milk Miracle first hand were told in wonder and astonishment how Lord Ganesha was actually consuming milk offered by devotees. But those who had the misfortune to first read about it in an India newspaper were in for a rude shock. Instead of discovering details of a rare worldwide religious event, they were bombarded with headlines such as, "People Go Berserk at 'Milk Miracle,'" "Scientists Scoff at Mass Hysteria," or "Thousands Taken in by 'Miracle.'" The Indian Press obviously did not react with awe as did most Hindus.

From the beginning, the press portrayed the milk miracle as an astounding demonstration of mass ignorance, something to be mocked and even condemned. Perhaps it is because reporters and editors are among those who prefer to see their glass half empty rather than half full. Former US President Lyndon Johnson remarked about the Washington DC press corps, "If I walked across the Potomac River, the headlines the next day would say, 'The President Can't Swim.'"

Fortunately for Hindus, Lord Ganesha also performed His miracle outside India, even near Washington DC. Reporters of top newspapers in the UK, Denmark, USA, Germany and Canada were not predisposed to mock the milk miracle, nor to accept the snap conclusions of scientists. The reporters for the prestigious Washington Post, for example, did not reject as

illusion what they had personally witnessed at a Maryland temple. Similarly, UK reporter Rebecca Maer wrote in the Daily Express, after her visit to a Hindu temple in Southall, "It's difficult to dismiss something you have seen for yourself." A poll published by Princeton University in September, 1995, showed that 79% of American people believe in miracles. Granted that the percentage of reporters who so believe may be less, US newspapers are not inclined to offend three-quarters of their readers by presupposing miracles impossible.

Mainstream and ethnic newspapers outside India ended up with two kinds of reports: highly skeptical stories from reporters (Indian and foreign) inside India and impartial first-hand stories from reporters (Indian and otherwise) in London, Los Angeles, New York, Denmark, Germany, etc.

What are Hindus to make of this situation? Why did the Indian press try from the moment the miracle happened to tear it down? Hinduism Today reviewed approximately 160 milk miracle newspaper and wire service reports from all over the world. We present here a few of our observations

The Initial Reporting

Normal journalistic standards of investigation, logic and impartiality seemed to have been set aside. In India it was immediately concluded by nearly every paper that there was no "miracle." This conclusion was based almost solely on the statements of scientists and so-called "rationalists," made within hours of the event. Scientists are known to spend years studying the simplest of phenomenon before making a conclusion. How was it they were able to reach one so fast in this case? Reporters in India apparently made no effort to collect eye-witness reports of the miracle to determine whether the explanations hurriedly offered by scientists fit the

facts. Many Deities that took milk stood in trays with no drain, or even on the dashboard of a car (as reported to us by a leading barrister in Malaysia). There was no place for the milk to hide. Indian reporters were not the only ones guilty of this breach of journalistic ethic; a New York Times reporter in Calcutta filed a report highly abusive of the miracle and Hinduism in general. It was based almost entirely on the statements of one "rationalist."

The next few days of reports continued to mock the miracle. Articles appeared with headlines such as "Ganesh Hysteria Peters Out," "Have the Gods had Their Fill?" and "Temples Deserted, Rationalists Prove Capillary Action Works Always." The impression created over a few days for the Indian public was that the scientists had conclusively proved there was no miracle--when they had proved no such thing. Even those who had seen the miracle started to doubt themselves.

There came at this point a certain backlash against the newspapers. Letters to the editor from Hindu scientists and engineers who witnessed the miracle complained that the theories being presented did not explain what they saw. The result of this was a new editorial tack seen both inside and outside India. Now it was all a matter of "belief." If one chooses to believe in the miracle, fine, if not fine. The unspoken thought behind this tack is: "There was no miracle. But if it makes you happy, go ahead and believe in it."

The Editorial Response

It was clear that the Indian press thought there was something really wrong in having a Hindu miracle. There were complaints on editorial pages about waste of milk and loss of work time. The Indian Express went a bit further and said that while religion itself was not necessarily a problem, "it is necessary to distinguish between the expressions of private belief, even

through modest gatherings, and the kind of mass upsurge, bordering on unhealthy hysteria, which virtually brought many parts of the country to a standstill. The willing suspension of disbelief which affected such a large number of people suggests an absence of a scientific temper, a failure of the education system."

Malini Parthasarathy, writing in Chicago's India Tribune, got to the heart of the matter. She complained bluntly that the miracle represents "the resurgence of superstition and credulity, four decades after these proclivities were scornfully and emphatically declared anachronisms incompatible with the vision of a secular and scientifically oriented India." The miracle, she went on to say, would undermine the vision of India's founders that "a scientifically oriented ethos would help pry the country from the grip of various retrograde beliefs, hangovers from a feudal past, and make it possible for India to move ahead in a fast-changing environment." A miracle-inspired Hindu renaissance, by this line of thinking, signaled nothing but massive retrogression to a dark age of superstition and ignorance.

Singling Out Hinduism

There is remarkable disrespect shown to Hinduism and Hindu Gods in many articles from India. The Indian Express, for one example, on September 21st reported there was "a free-of-cost show now on at thousands of temples all over the country. 'Gullible fools, disciples taken for a ride en masse,' are a few of the epithets men of science have hurled at those too busy with pleasing Lord Ganesha to look into their children's science textbooks."

Such negative comments might be understandable if all religions were treated the same. Western "rationalists" spare no faith in their attacks. But in India, "rationalist" criticism of

other religions never appears in the mainstream press. The Catholic pope is fawned over when he visits India. No mention is made that he is himself a staunch believer in miracles. For example, just two weeks before the milk miracle he pilgrimaged to the Holy House of the Virgin Mary in Loretto, Italy. It is official Catholic doctrine that this 350-square-foot stone house was carried by angels from its original Middle East location in Nazareth to Italy.

It is an accepted principal in most of the world that the press should be fair and respectful toward all religions. Indeed, in India, which has taught mankind so much about religious tolerance, it is a surprise to see such an anti-Hindu bias. Years of British "divide and rule" policy, Christian missionary attacks and Marxist influence has created this atmosphere of bias. Lord Ganesha, Guardian of Dharma and Remover of Obstacles has now revealed this anomalous situation to the entire world.

Sidebar:

Is there a Bias in the Indian Press?

India's newspapers gave positive coverage to the pope's 1986 visit to India and again in 1994. Surprisingly his announced beatification of an Indian priest and nun [right] did not attract criticism from the Indian Rationalist's Association, despite the requirement that saints must be credited with at least two bonafide miracles.