Letters
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Laudable Coverage

HINDUISM TODAY'S COVERAGE OF CHRISTIANITY in India, India's Christian Muddle, (June 1999) was excellent for both Hindus and Christians at home and abroad. Once again, I bow to your lotus feet.

P. B. Mukhopadhyay
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Xena Article Unfair

YOUR ARTICLE, "KRISHNA, MEET XENA," [June, '99] was not only unbalanced and unfair in its treatment of the issue, it was also lacking in facts pertinent to the protest and full of misleading information which gave innocent readers an unclear picture both of the nature of the show itself as well as the complaints and goals of those who protested it. It was unbalanced because, although you presented the opinions of your own staff members, who enjoyed and liked the show, you failed to quote any of the protest organizers and did not allow them to express in their own words why the show was an affront to Hindu deities, Hindu scriptures and sincere practicing Hindus. From reading your article, one would get the impression that the show's producers were well-versed in Hindu scripture and Hindu practices and that the show presented them to the general public in a favorable light. This is absolutely, unequivocally not true.

The concern of the protesters was that Hindu deities, who are real beings, not be treated by the show's producers in the same way they have treated the fictional, made-up gods they have written into the plot or the mythical Greek gods whom no one worships and whom even the Greeks accept as mythical. The protesters did not and do not want the general public and the world at large to view Hindu gods as mythical or fictional beings. Rather, we want them to see Them as they are: holy beings who should be honored, respected and worshiped.

Your writer failed to mention that in an earlier episode on India, Hindus were presented as superstitious fools. You failed to mention that the "avatar" Eli's message of ahimsa failed. When he was captured by Indrajit, Indrajit challenged him to escape, to protect his disciple Gabrielle or to save himself through nonviolence, and Eli, despite his prayers and meditations, failed miserably. Indeed, it was by violence that Indrajit was defeated, and not by ahimsa.

I am most shocked to discover that the editors of Hinduism Today do not know that Indrajit was not the brother of Ravana but rather his son, nor that Indrajit was killed by Rama's brother, Sri Lakshmanji.

One of the main concerns voiced by protesters was that they did not want Hindu deities and Hindu scriptures to be reduced to the level of myths or fiction. It is very clear by the quote, "ancient legends are reworked as needed," that the author and perhaps the editorial staff does not believe that holy Hindu scriptures like Mahabharata and Ramayana are truthful narrations about real, sacred personalities, but rather feels

they are mere legends or myths--in other words, fictional stories about fictional beings.

Your statement that protestors were uninformed and had heard what you apparently assert are false reports about the program does an injustice to the sincere motives embraced by the protesters.

You state that Hanuman was "not harmed by Xena, much less beat up." In truth, Hanuman was punched by Xena several times in the face with full force. When he grabbed her arms to defend himself, she then head-butted him very severely. As a Saivite, if Lord Siva had been attacked this way on television, would you be so callous as to say that he had not been harmed?

Protesters never claimed that there was any overt lesbianism or explicit lesbian scenes in this episode. In fact, the lesbian issue was never made a focal point of the protest, though it was mentioned as a background issue in a letter that went out to Hindus around the world.

In truth and in fact, Xena did not show reverence or true respect to Krishna, as you said. In fact, the first thing she did was make a very caustic and critical remark to Him, addressing Him as a subordinate and chastising Him for not accompanying her to Lanka to fight for Gabrielle's release. One thing that was extremely distasteful to sincere Hindus in general and Ram bhaktas in particular was the fact the Hanuman was speaking words that were completely out of

character with his real personality and personal philosophy of life. So although your correspondent, Lavina Melwani, claims that the show brought Hindu ideas into the mainstream, in fact it introduced a perversion of Hindu ideas and presented exactly the opposite of mainstream Hindu beliefs.

If producers had worked hard researching Hinduism, how could they have presented silly adaptations of traditional Hindu themes? The fact is, they understood virtually nothing of Hindu values and Hindu philosophy. Rather, they viewed Hinduism as a religion with many "mythological storybooks," such as Ramayana and Mahabharata, from which they could draw characters and stories to adapt to their fictional TV program. It is also clear that Dr. Palat sees Hindu scriptures as fictional stories and sees Hindu deities, like Lord Krishna, Lord Rama, Sri Hanuman and Maha Kali, as mythical or fictional characters.

You neglected to inform your readers that more than a year and a half before the show aired, and well before it was filmed, the American Hindus Against Defamation and the World Vaishnava Association had volunteered to act as free consultants for the "Xena" program in the event they did want to have a show featuring Hindu deities. Arrogantly, the show's producers neglected these offers and instead sought out a person who rubberstamped their script and allowed them to do exactly what they wanted to do.

Hinduism Today missed the most important story of all connected with the "Xena" episode, and that is the manner in which so many Hindu leaders from so many different organizations from various sampradayas were able to put

aside their religious and philosophical differences and work hand-in-hand for a greater cause. It is further astounding that you failed to inform your readers that the protest was extremely effective; that as the protest grew larger and larger, Universal Studios and Studios USA agreed to withdraw the offending show from syndication. They also promised not to make any future episodes which presented Hindu deities in a like manner, and they apologized to the protesters.

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India's Women

MADHU KISHWAR AND S. SHARMA IN YOUR Women of Vision (Nov. 1998) and Letters (Mar. 1999) issues show how little they know of Vedic culture. Ladies have been always held in the greatest of esteem in Vedic culture. The so-called "house cleaning," if it means Western-styled "emancipation," has considerably lowered the standard of ladies' life in the Western culture: sexual harassment, rapes, over 50% divorce rates, "houses for battered women," alcoholism and others are the unfortunate results. Remember the millions of women who were burned 400-500 years ago by the Christian Church as witches? Unthinkable in the Vedic culture of ancient India.

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