

The profit oriented sponsors/advertisers and pharmaceutical companies that manufacture steroids have little in the way of a real commitment to the athlete's well-being. For the athletes who have laboured, pushing the cognitive and physical boundaries of existence within the idiom of sports, performance enhancers are simply a part of the process of manufacturing a "world champion". Those who criticize the athlete who is prone to use steroids, have failed to grasp the larger idiom of modern sports.

The Sri Lankan female sprinters have arrived within the margins of the world class arena and the pressure to excel is escalated by the

possible economic gain and accumulation of symbolic capital. More importantly, unlike cricket, there are no ready (local or multinational) sponsors, and the life span in the elite arena, particularly for the female athlete, is in a Hobsonian way solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Given the heightened commercialism in sports, it is unlikely that the use of performance enhancers will be reduced with better policing. It is more important to explore the real social structures of modern sports that have normalized reckless experimentation with steroids. This calls for an analysis that contextualizes sports within the commodity culture and unravels the puritan "spirit of competition" mystification of sports. ■

FAITH AND MILK MIRACLE

Seema Mustafa

Faith can move mountains, they told us when we were children and we believed this old time-worn cliché, implicitly. Faith, for them, was synonymous with religion and was not to be confused with faith in oneself, faith in one's country, faith in humanity. It was faith in God only that had the miraculous power to make Madonnas weep and gods drink milk. And to move mountains for the asking.

They were right. Faith has tremendous powers. It can blind people, it can make ears hear voices in the night, it can make eyes see the impossible, it can make the brain impervious to pressures of reason and rationality. It has nothing to do with poverty, with illiteracy as some would like to believe. Indeed the poor are more sceptical and as queues offering milk to the gods in Delhi showed, faith had moved the middle class and the upper middle class more than it had the poor living in *jhuggis*. The poorest of the poor looked askance at the milk flowing down the drains of Delhi, while the middle class lined up with lotas and buckets to pour milk down the mouths of willing gods. For the word went around that the gods were drinking milk happily except that being offered by sinners. So each and every man and woman in the queue insisted that his offering had been accepted and it was only the bold exception who could declare in the presence of all that his spoonful of milk had been churlishly rejected by the deity. In fact one noticed reports in some newspapers where even the reporters seemed to have lost control of their reasoning facilities and were "moved" enough to insist that the gods were actually drinking milk.

It was a miracle. And how one wishes it was, for a miracle would be far more welcome than the sinister implications of the above. As people poured out of homes and offices to line up outside the nearest temples and an almost fanatical frenzy gripped the city, one was reminded of similar episodes in the past. The only difference being that these were not sustained by faith and hence could not be described as a miracle and were openly menacing in their effect.

There is a rumour machinery that exists, one cannot say it has been created because of reports by those who witnessed partition and recall the role played by rumours in generating riots and bloodshed. This rumour machinery, grapevine is too mild a word to describe it, is used to perfection by fanatic forces like the RSS and the Jamaate-Islami. The large majority of communal riots in this country are preceded by days of wild rumours that are believed by the populace and which increase tension to such a pitch that finally, any little move can trigger off a riot. In Aligarh a few years ago Hindu and Muslim *mohallas* were gripped with insecurity following rumours of a Muslim boy being killed, a Hindu girl being kidnapped, a body being found, etc. The tension was palpable in the areas and finally an altercation between a *biryani* selling vendor and a customer sparked off the riot that led to curfew and real deaths. In Assam massacres of the worst kind were perpetuated by armed hordes who attacked villages like Nellie to kill all, the bloody incidents being based entirely on rumours that the other village was going to attack them. The result was that in a large number of cases in the State people were motivated through this rumour machinery to come out to defend themselves, in the process becoming the aggressors instead.

In Delhi, in 1984, the Capital was swept with rumours of water being poisoned by Sikhs and middle-class homes desperately telephoned each other, warning friends and relatives not to consume the 'poisoned' water. The big bad men were the hapless Sikhs who were the victims of organised violence, although it was the non-Sikhs who were made to feel that they were the victims. The rumour that trains from Punjab were coming with corpses of Hindus led irate mobs to stop trains just outside Delhi and to butcher Sikhs and the trains rolled into Delhi railway stations carrying bodies of Sikhs, not Hindus.

In Bombay, in 1992, rumours that terrorists with armed guns were moving around in a white Maruti car had crowds stopping Maruti cars in their localities and killing those inside. And what is more,

residents of posh buildings living opposite the sea came out with kitchen arms and searchlights on to the beaches, following rumours that shiploads of Muslim terrorists were about to descend on Bombay! One has seen this over and over again, careful, precise use of rumours to generate hatred, insecurity followed by heinous violence. Violence which is justified as reaction, defence, protection.

In the most recent case, the effort is not to generate hatred but to consolidate a constituency through faith. No political party will be able to support the miraculous event that has taken place, not even the Congress openly. The only exception to this will be the RSS/BJP and VHP which have already endorsed the miracle. BJP leader L.K. Advani while trying to keep one foot on the scientific side in an effort to appear rational, could not ignore political pressures and admitted that his "doubts" about the phenomenon had disappeared by noon of the fateful day. The RSS is an organisation which works in the dark, in that its right hand does know what the left hand is doing. The RSS hardcore are faceless entities who work for the cause and not to acclaim. It is a disciplined body which works to its own momentum and is following a set game-plan to capture power. Despite talk of corruption, criminalisation of politics as other issues it is clear that Faith and Religion alone can be the plank that will make its political wing, the BJP, grow. And all that RSS strategy is based around this one point programme. The BJP and VHP, despite Advani's insistence that the milk miracle had nothing to do with them, will have to make their hand open as public memory diminishes and the sceptics gain an upper hand. The BJP which has never hesitated from sounding retrogressive and primitive will now have to come out to defend the Faith, using Ganesh and Shiva as the rallying idols.

The VHP has already started reacting. A woman lawyer of the Patna High Court, Ms Kumari Jyoti, has earned their ire by feeding the gods with liquor instead of milk. According to her account, the gods preferred alcohol to milk. She carried out the experiment before several other lawyers to prove that the 'event' had a scientific explanation but the VHP has threatened her with the same fate as that of Taslima Nasreen of Bangladesh. She has been accused of indulging in 'blasphemy' and of slighting the faith of 80 crore Hindus. Her clarification that she was not showing any disrespect to the Hindu religion but was only keen to counter the mass hysteria generated by the rumour that the gods were guzzling milk was ignored. This is not confined to the Hindus alone, the Christian fanatics, the Muslim obscurantists are as primitive and absurd when it comes to their religion. But the primitive behaviour assumes far more dangerous dimensions when political parties enter the arena and begin using religion for political ends.

It is precisely because of this that the Ganesh-milk episode assumes dimensions that should not be dismissed as a joke' by the cynics. It is anything but that. It is a careful exploitation of faith by those who have used the rumour machinery before to gauge the reach of their power, to size up the possible constituency and to use this episode for fine-tuning their future strategy. The gullibility of the rich and educated, the hysteria, the absurd over-reaction where all reason and rationality was discarded in the face of this supposed 'miracle' makes the future scenario frightening. The RSS and its ilk have correctly gauged that other political parties will find it difficult to challenge the miracle in the face of this widespread belief, leaving them relatively free to inextricably intertwine their politics with the large constituency thus created. This is all the more reason why their game-plan must be exposed and reason made to reassert itself as otherwise the consequences can be disastrous for secular India.

One should not kill, nor get other to kill. Nor should one approve of it when others kill.

(Sn 394, in a compact "householders' code": gahattha-vatta).

As I am, so are these people. As they are, so am I. Considering= that one is an example (of what others are), let one neither kill, nor cause them kill.

(Sn 705)