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Administrators do not also take much interest in the specific problems of women. Of course, over the years a number of schemes specifically for the benefit of women have been devised, but administrators have been giving only lip-service to them. Since the elected women representatives would not immediately be in a position to grasp the significance of the schemes, administrators would have ample opportunity

to by-pass them completely. Very often there is no transparency about the decisions. Further, there are not many women officials available nor are all women officers sensitive to the women's problems. Many women officers think that having attained a certain status, they belong to a superior category and can deride village women. Widespread red tapism robs the schemes of their dynamism. For all these reasons, women should be made aware of the deficiencies of the bureaucracy and the bureaucrats should be made more sensitive to the needs of women. In sum, it seems that women have to cross many hurdles before becoming effective partners in the decision-making process.

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\* By the time we finished writing this article, the news regarding dissolution of Local Bodies in Orissa was published. The government has resorted to Article 243N for dissolving the panchayats and municipalities under which it is not obliged to hold the election within six months of the dissolution. It is a fatal blow to the political empowerment of women.

## A 'Miracle' Really, but Not Divine

Mina Swaminathan

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It can now safely be stated that miracles, like other marketing strategies, succeed on the basis of meticulous planning and organisation, some executive ability and the support of a disciplined workforce. From this point of view, the recent 'milk miracle' should give us cause to reflect on the underlying hidden elements which contributed to its remarkable success. Most media attention has been focused on the scientific explanations. And these were not hard to locate, many indeed having been aired even on the day of the miracle itself. Beside clarifying the scientific principles behind the phenomenon, some discussion has centred around themes like the gullibility of the public, the tendencies to mass hysteria and mass hypnotism, and the power of rumour. The Indian public, specially its educated middle-class sector, has been soundly berated for the ease with which it falls victim to such miracles'. Some sociologists have also analysed the reasons why the public is so pitifully prone to such rumours. There has hardly been any attempt to study the organisational miracle' itself.

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One can begin with the outstanding fact that at about the same time on a particular day, and without any prior notice, approximately the same story was launched, in the same manner, in several cities and urban centres in India, as well as in some centres of Indian population abroad. Does this not straightaway imply some organisation? Can it all be only attributed to the well known axiom that news travels fast, and rumours still faster?

But this alone is not enough. Communications theory indicates that the casual spread of rumour alone cannot achieve this kind of coherence. First, the story moves like ripples from a pebble thrown into water, slowing down and petering out gradually, the natural limits being related to the size of the community, within which such communication normally travels – the family, the work place, the neighbourhood, etc – unless reinforced of course at regular intervals. Second, as illustrated by the well known party game, 'Chinese whispers' the

message gets distorted as it moves. So that after a few dozen steps it is no longer recognisable as the original message – again unless repeated, of course, at regularly spaced intervals. These two basic trends are sufficient to establish that the same message was deliberately planted in several places at the same time – in other words, several pebbles were thrown into the water at the same time at well planned intervals. Third, the pattern of travel, starting from the north and west of India, travelling to specific centres, more marked in certain locations is suggestive. In Madras, for instance, the phenomenon was confined to certain localities, and within localities to certain idols – the locations of the co-ordinators? message givers? – gaining strength only after Doordarshan's 1 pm telecast: while abroad, specific centres of Indian populations known to be in regular telephonic contact with relatives/business partners in India were the foci – geographical distribution of the cadre? Thus the plan was obviously tailored to take full advantage of the natural rhythms of rumour, based on a clear understanding of communications theory.

The latter is true, specially in a predominantly oral culture like India which has its own traditional means of communication. During the freedom struggle, for example, when AIR, then in its infancy, was controlled by the government and the reach and power of the press was far from what it is today, news about the various movements, struggles, satyagrahas and fasts, and even Gandhiji's daily marches and activities spread very fast around the country. Even a century ago, during the 1857 war, strategies like the 'chapathi and onions' were used to convey messages rapidly through the remote countryside. But these messages were not casual or unconnected ones – the stories were carefully selected and planted.

This leads to the question – in this case, who was sending the message, to whom and why? Which organisation, in today's world, would have the capability, in terms of a large, well spread out and disciplined cadre, to undertake such an exercise? Why and how did it all start at the same time? Why did it last only for a day, if it was not a demonstration? While it is not possible to definitely establish, without further evidence, who was behind it, certainly a study of the 'how' would be most revealing and may even lead directly to the 'who'. This can be done by examining some similar well-orchestrated communication events that have taken place in the recent past.

The most outstanding parallel in recent memory is a curious incident which took place in Delhi in September 1976, during the dark days of the Emergency, when Sanjay Gandhi's coercive campaign for family planning was at its height, and while the resentment of the people had no legitimate forms of expression, and the political parties and leaders who could have led protest were

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