Milk Miracle Does a Boy Good
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YOUTH

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This US teen had to struggle just to be a Hindu...until Lord Ganesha made it easy

It was September 21, 1995, when in a temple in New Delhi Lord Ganesha quietly asked devotees, "Got milk?" The ensuing Milk Miracle rocked the world as it swept the globe [see HT, Publisher's Desk, Sept. '99]. Yet in the aftermath, even the believers struggled with questions: Why? What did the elephant-faced God intend to accomplish? No one denies that the miracle strengthened the faith of millions--and that would be reason enough--but what would come as a result? The story of Vasant Garg, a 15-year-old student in Houston, may offer one reason for Ganesha's supernatural exploits.

Vasant is a first-generation US-born Hindu. His parents, Ashok and Prabha Nath Garg, moved to Texas from New Delhi thirty-two years ago. Vasant's brother Sumeet is twenty one. Both parents run Allied Exports, Inc., which markets clothing. "I was not raised with a strong religious background," Vasant told Hinduism Today. In February, 1999, in a term paper proposal written to a school teacher, Vasant admitted, "To tell the truth, I know close to nothing of what my religion is based on."

Vasant told us his story: "I have never been very knowledgeable about Hinduism, but I have attempted to gain knowledge and continue that effort now. After attending a predominantly Christian school from grades 5?8, I realized that I knew more about Christianity than Hinduism. Knowing that it is custom to follow the religion of your parents, I decided to remain a Hindu. But since my parents never required me to attend a Hindu temple, I remained innocent and ignorant. Though I understand Hindi, the sermons held at the temple were long and spoken too quickly for me to comprehend. I felt that there was no point for me to go if I couldn't get the message being given out. I felt ashamed that I did not know enough about my religion."

"In school, I was the only Indian and non-Christian, and I felt rather alone." Although most of his peers were friendly, Vasant did not fully escape prejudice. He still remembers a youth coming up to him in the sixth grade and shouting, "Buddha, Buddha..." in his face. His friends consoled him, but it stung. All this while, Vasant had been barely hanging on to his Hinduness. Without intervention, he may not have held on forever.

Vasant continues, "The sign that kept my candle lit was when Lord Ganesh drank milk. My mom told me that a phenomenon was occurring around the world. She also heard that a house close to us had a shrine where Ganesha was drinking milk. I held up milk to His trunk, and He did drink it. The rest of my family also saw it happen. To this day, that event has kept my faith strong and convinced me to reach a higher level of understanding. It is sad to say, however, that not everyone was able to accept His message, but the incident had given me

a foundation for my belief in Hinduism."

Five years later, the tides have turned. Vasant has joined the Chinmaya Mission of Houston, where he attends classes on the Gita and participates in youth group activities. For school papers, he now focuses on Hindu subjects. "Previously during school projects, I gained information on topics that had no effect on me," he explains. "Now I increase my knowledge of India and Hinduism by working on projects that related to those topics. Slowly, I have begun to see how Hinduism plays a major part in my life."

Vasant recently spoke at the annual Agrawal Sammelan to 300 members of the Texas Agrawal community. In his speech he advised, "Although people may torment you for your beliefs, you must stay strong and hold to what you think is the truth. This is the way to your divine 'hero's heart.' Hinduism has answers for the simple to the most controversial questions. Maybe that is why it is becoming so popular. I still need to learn the lessons of the Hindu texts, but I have at least started the process of learning, and finally I am not foundering anymore."

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