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DEFAMATION

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Defending Lord Ganesha, one highly motivated Hindu woman wins a war with Disneyland

It took more than a year to get Disney to understand our sentiments and do the right thing," explains Southern California housewife Jayashree Krishnan. "Fired up by the article I read in Hinduism Today [Ganesha Lives in Disneyland, November, 1996] which described the display of Lord Ganesha in a most derogatory manner, I could not stay passive. I visited Disneyland in November of 1996 and was appalled and deeply hurt to see Ganesha thrown among janitorial supplies in the queue area of the Indiana Jones Adventure ride. My heart sank hearing the giggles of the passers-by and, even worse, the indifference and passivity of Indians."

Krishnan tried to rally the local Hindus to rescue Ganesha from His hapless plight, but the response was discouraging. "I felt helpless and vulnerable," she recalls. "And I wondered whether mighty Disney would even care if I voiced my opinion. So, I approached the big Hindu organizations. I elicited my husband's help to write to the VHP and American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD) through the Internet. There was no response from the VHP." The AHAD was eager to take up the matter, but they were engaged in a skirmish with Sony over

the defamation of Lord Krishna [Hindu Protest Forces Sony to Remake CD, July 1997]. A "higher official" at a famous Hindu Temple in the Los Angeles area told her, "Lady, you can do what you want. My one phone call to Disney will take care of this problem."

Apparently it did not. After seeing no change during a visit to Disney in the spring of '97, Krishnan concluded it was up to her alone. She collected signatures from friends at the Chinmaya Kasi center in Anaheim, California. Bramachari Someshwar, the resident acharya, spoke to the congregation to rally support. She distributed pictures and the mailing addresses of the officials at Disney whom she had already written to.

Much of her ordeal was simply waiting. Six months later, a letter from Disney stated that they were looking into the matter. Fearing that her appeal was drowning in red tape, Krishnan renewed her effort to get people to write to Disney. Finally, in late July she received a cordial letter from Christine Goosman, a senior show writer in Show Writing and Concept Development: "I apologize for the delay. I waited to write this letter until the situation had been resolved and I could bring you a positive response. Following in-house discussions with our designers and management, the statue of Ganesha has been removed from the queue area and is no longer in public view. We are sorry that the inclusion of the figure caused offense, but want to assure you that the situation has been corrected. Thank you for taking the time to write us with your concerns and for your patience in awaiting a response. Your input was of great value to us."

Triumphant and relieved, Krishnan exults, "One of the most satisfying moments of my life was receiving that letter. Without the article in Hinduism Today, I would not have become aware of such an insult to Lord Ganesha by an American icon."

Another Ganesha still sits contentedly in the adjacent Jungle Cruise ride. His surroundings are natural, not derogatory, so His placement was never found offensive.

CONTACT: DAVE FISHER, DISNEY, POST OFFICE BOX 25020, GLENDALE,
CALIFORNIA 92112 USA