

Editorial Complaints Unit
BBC
Media Centre, Media Village,
201 Wood Lane
London W12 7TQ
UK

Registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt

Reference: 4648

Object: Complaint about Mr. Vinod Mehta's "A View from India" and formal demands to the BBC for immediate reparations

Dear Sir/Madam,

The response from Ms. Maria Balinska to our complaints about Mr. Vinod Mehta's "A View from India" has failed to address our concerns. Ms. Balinska side-steps the issue instead of examining the incontrovertible facts in this blatant case of false reporting and deliberate slander about a highly renowned and revered Hindu religious leader, Sri Jayendra Saraswati, the 69th Pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. Therefore, we are submitting to you herewith a complete dossier about this grave matter, demanding immediate reparations from the BBC. The dossier comprises:

- 1) The transcript of Mr. Mehta's talk together with introductory remarks by the BBC, posted on the Internet at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4225387.stm.
- 2) Copies of replies to our complaints from Ms. Balinska and Ms. Tatterstal.
- 3) A point by point examination of Mr. Mehta's talk, delivered on BBC Radio 4 on 28 and 30 of January 2005 and subsequently broadcast worldwide on the Internet BBC NEWS. It will be shown that Mr. Mehta has suppressed facts known to him and engaged in calculated slander.
- 4) An overview of the pertinent facts of the case, showing that Sri Jayendra Saraswati and the two millennia-old Institution which he heads have been victims of blatant injustice by the government and police of the State of Tamil Nadu.

- 5) A legal analysis by Sri Anusha titled “The Foremost Question and the irrefutable Answer,” clearly demonstrating that Sri Jayendra Saraswati was arrested and refused bail by Tamil Nadu courts on the basis of false evidence.
- 6) An analysis of the affair by Sri Anusha from the standpoint of the UN declaration of human rights.
- 7) A brief presentation of the social services initiated by Sri Jayendra Saraswati.
- 8) Several editorials from Indian newspapers, including *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, and *The Daily Pioneer* and the Canadian *Weekend National Post*. We also enclose letters of protest and observations from The Hindu Conference of Canada.
- 9) Articles from *Outlook Magazine*, of which Mr. Mehta is the editor, exhibiting the slanderous and tabloid nature of this publication.

As regards the role played by the BBC:

We note that your complaint processing has been, at least in this case, inordinately slow. Despite my detailed letters of 3, 18 and 24 February and 5 March, as well as letters from many other people outraged by Mr. Mehta’s calumnies, the BBC failed to examine the issue seriously. We merely received routine cut-and-paste replies. As two months later Mr. Mehta’s talk remained posted on the BBC website, I wrote Mr. Michael Grade, BBC Chairman, on 24 March and 2 April, bringing the matter to his personal attention and asking that Mr. Mehta’s talk be removed from your website during an interim period while you examined the facts. Unfortunately this was not done. But in reply on behalf of Mr. Grade, Ms. Tatterstal advised us to address our complaint to you.

Since you have maintained Mr. Mehta’s “A View from India” on your website despite our protests and insistence that you investigate the facts, we are forced to conclude that you stand by Mr. Mehta’s declarations. Hence we are left with no recourse other than to refer the matter to the courts of justice in several countries. It should be added that, to add insult to injury, BBC Radio 4 rebroadcast Mr. Mehta’s talk on Sunday, 30 January, immediately after a programme of Church services. It will be for the Courts to measure the pain thus inflicted upon thousands of devout Hindus listening to the BBC on that Sunday morning.

However, since your complaint processing comprises several levels, we are hereby appealing to you to review the matter, so that later on we are not accused of not having followed BBC complaints procedures to the letter.

If you accord due attention to the matter, you will note that the BBC has allowed itself to be party to the demonization of a Saint revered by millions. Someone at the BBC should have examined the information available at the time before allowing Mr. Mehta to go on the air and calumniate a religious leader of Sri Jayendra Saraswati's stature. The negligence is all the less excusable in view of the fact that in 1993 BBC-2 had sponsored a 50 minute documentary called "The Living God," focusing on the life and mission of Sri Jayendra Saraswati! (See <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1995/1/1995-1-04.shtml>.)

Despite your negligence, not to say disdain, we bear you no grudge or enmity. If after examining the facts you conclude that Mr. Mehta has indeed committed slander and hoodwinked the BBC as well, we solemnly request the following reparations:

- 1) A formal apology from the BBC tendered to Sri Jayendra Saraswati and the junior Pontiff, Sri Vijayendra Saraswati, as well as to the Institution of Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham.
- 2) Right to rejoinder, consisting of the same amount of time accorded to Mr. Mehta (twice 15 minutes or half an hour) on BBC World.
- 3) Removal of the slanderous article by Mr. Mehta and inclusion of the transcript of our rejoinder on the BBC NEWS website.
- 4) Maintenance of the URL to the transcript of Mr. Mehta's talk posted on the BBC website, accessing a notice informing readers that Mr. Mehta's assertions having proven false and slanderous, they have been deleted.
- 5) Notification of the deletion of the talk to dmoz Open Directory Project with a request for its immediate removal from the Open Directory Project catalogue.

In closing, we wish to say that this is not a matter which we shall allow to go unchallenged. Given your initial grave negligence and your failure to examine our complaints within a reasonable length of time, we now request a reply within a fortnight. Beyond this delay, we will consult lawyers with a view to initiating legal proceedings. If satisfaction is not obtained earlier, we shall resolutely persevere until the case reaches the International Court of Justice at The Hague and the BBC is condemned for defamation and violation of basic human rights.

This letter and the accompanying dossier have been read and approved by an international group including many who have already complained to you about this vile injustice. The initial signatories include:

FORMAL COMPLAINT ABOUT MR. VINOD MEHTA'S "A VIEW FROM INDIA"

On 28 January 2005 the BBC 4 programme called "A View from..." had invited as guest speaker Mr. Vinod Mehta, the editor of Outlook Magazine in India. The talk was rebroadcast on Sunday, 30 January, immediately after a programme of Church services. (See the enclosed transcript of the talk together with an introduction and calumnious editorial additions by the BBC available at http://www.NEWS.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4225387.stm.)

A point by point examination of Mr. Mehta's talk will expose it for what it is: a malicious mixture of little fact and much fiction. His underlying intention is to smear and slander the Shankaracharyas of Kanchipuram. And to this end the BBC, both on the radio and on the Internet, has provided him with a platform.

Mr. Mehta has come to the BBC posing as an objective journalist reporting both a murder case and its tumultuous socio-religious aftermath - "a tabloid journalist's dream of rumors of corruption, greed, sex and sleaze," as he puts it. But if you care to check the facts, you will see that his own magazine has been at the very forefront of Indian tabloids, spreading lies and calumnies about the revered Shankaracharya of Kanchi. (As a sampling, we enclose two articles from Outlook Magazine: "Swami and Fiends" (sic) and "10 Minutes in a Life," both by one Stephen Anand. Other equally slanderous pieces by the same author and magazine are available on the Internet. See also the enclosed letter of protest against Outlook Magazine by the Hindu Conference of Canada.) Mr. Mehta speaks through two mouths at the same time. In India he indulges in rumor-mongering; on BBC Radio 4 and BBC News on the Internet, he "reports" about the rumors as if he were far above the melee.

Apart from the official charges of murder – found to be without basis prima facie by the Supreme Court of India long before the BBC *View from India* – Mr. Mehta’s talk contains nothing but rumor and slander intended to wrongly influence his uninformed British audience on the radio and world audience on the Internet.

Let us examine one after another Mr. Mehta’s purported facts about the religious leader he aims to desecrate.

“Arguably the most senior guru of Hinduism – one of India’s most revered religious leaders.” This is Mr. Mehta’s own introduction of Sri Jayendra Saraswati, the 69th Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. But as the overall evaluation of Mr. Mehta’s talk will show, it is not for the sake of fairness and objectivity that he avows Sri Jayendra Saraswati’s status as the most prominent religious leader of the Hindus; it is only to dramatize his “fall.” Had he proposed to calumniate a lesser citizen, it is doubtful that the BBC would have tendered him an invitation.

“The charges are...murder, sleaze debauchery, greed and sex,” Mr. Mehta asserts. But the towering fact is that the only official police charge against the Pontiff was conspiracy to murder - a charge which the Supreme Court of India vigorously questioned, not to say refuted. The other “charges” – “sleaze, debauchery, greed and sex” - have been leveled only by Outlook and similar tabloids in their determination to demonize Sri Jayendra Saraswati. Throughout his talk, Mr. Mehta exploits the ambiguity of the word “charge,” zigzagging back and forth between official police charges and back-alley innuendos for the sole purpose of smearing the Shankaracharya’s image.

Mr. Mehta claims to quote several “facts” from the official charge sheet. But the overwhelming fact is that on 28 and 30 January 2005, the dates of Mr. Mehta’s talk on the BBC, the charge sheet had not yet been served to the accused, nor made known to the public. For months the accused were repeatedly made to appear before the Court, humiliated, shouted at in the corridors, and told that the charge sheet would be served at a later date. By claiming to have had access to the charge sheet prior to his BBC talk, Mr. Mehta is either admitting to theft of court documents or, at the very least, committing contempt of court.

He refers to the Institution at Kanchipuram a “Brahmin monastic order.” If Mr. Mehta is at all an Indian he should know that on becoming a sannyasin (Hindu ascetic monk), members of a Hindu monastic order forsake all attachment to caste and class; in fact they die, symbolically, to their past membership in a family, caste and community, renouncing even name and personal property. Therefore to speak of Shankara Matham as a “Brahmin monastic order” is a

contradiction-in-terms. In certain quarters in India Brahmin-bashing has, for socio-political reasons, become a fashionable pastime. Mr. Mehta's purpose here is to bash by association.

Mr. Mehta calls the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham (also called Shankara Matham, after the name of the founder) a "complex of temples" and refers to "one of the mutt's temples." Both statements are false. Shankara Matham is not "a complex of temples in Kanchipuram;" it is a millennia-old institution for the propagation of Advaita Vedanta. As to the second statement, for the sake of clarity it should first be pointed out that in India "Mutt" is an everyday synonym of "Matham." But when so used in reference to the Institution at Kanchi, the word is capitalized. Mr. Mehta writes it with a small "m" with the malicious intent of subliminally associating the Institution with the derogatory denotations of the word.

He refers to the murder victim as "the manager of one of mutt's temples." Neither at the time of his murder, nor at any prior time, did the victim ever work in any capacity for Shankara Matham. (This is clearly stated in the Supreme Court decision concerning the bail application, to which we shall refer later at greater length.) This again is not an innocent error of detail. Mr. Mehta wants to bring the murder victim in close proximity with the Shankaracharya in order to develop the fictitious plot of his story.

The temple of which the victim was some sort of employee is a Vaishnavite temple, whereas the Shankara Matham belongs to the Shaivite branch of Hinduism. Neither the Shankaracharya nor the Matham can possibly own a Vaishnavite temple. (Transposed to Europe, Mr. Mehta's assertions amount to attributing, for example, the ownership of a protestant church to the Pope or the Catholic Church.) The purpose of this falsehood, too, is to bring into close relationship the two main characters of Mr. Mehta's piece of fiction.

"The holy staff" is not "the symbol of the Shankaracharya's office," as Mr. Mehta asserts. All members of the Saraswati monastic order traditionally carry it. By needlessly, gratuitously, mentioning the holy staff in connection with "murder, corruption, sex and sleaze," Mr. Mehta's intentions can only be interpreted as a wholesale attempt to sully the Hindu faith.

On one occasion Mr. Mehta makes reference to Sri Jayendra Saraswati merely as "Saraswati." This term is not the Pontiff's last name as Mr. Mehta gives his audience to believe. It is the title denoting the high level of scholarship, as well as the monk order to which his tradition belongs. (Do the English refer to the Archbishop of Canterbury as "Mr. Canterbury"?) This again is a "secularist" attempt to disdain Hindu Dharma.

Here, and in all his references to the Shankaracharya, Mr. Mehta never uses polite prefixes such as the Indian “Sri” or the customary reverential English “His Holiness.” The rudeness seems intentional, considering that the accused-turned-approver is referred to as “Mr.” Ravi Subramaniam in the same article!

Mr. Mehta asserts that “Saraswati” and his “temple manager” had “a tiff” sometime in 2001. We are curious to know where he got this information. Even if Mr. Mehta is a peeping-tom, neither he nor anyone else could have ever been a witness to such a “tiff,” for the simple reason that the victim, contrary to Mr. Mehta’s assertions, did not work for, nor frequent, the Shankara Matham. So how could there have been a “tiff” between the main characters of Mr. Mehta’s piece of fiction? (No such happening is alluded to in the charge sheet, which was served two months later.) At this point Mr. Mehta’s elaborate scenario begins to fall apart.

The same remarks apply when Mr. Mehta says the Pontiff “blew his top.” By using uncouth expressions such as this, Mr. Mehta hopes to debase the Pontiff in the eyes of his audience.

Mr. Mehta says the victim was “bludgeoned to death inside the temple he was praying in” by six assailants. According to the Police report submitted to the Supreme Court, the victim was killed by two individuals while sitting in his office at the Vaishnavite temple. These inexactitudes are resorted to by the Outlook Editor for the sake of dramatization.

Mr. Mehta refers to the Pontiff as the “head priest.” Sri Jayendra Saraswati is not a “priest.” Earlier on, Mr. Mehta himself stated that if the Hindus “had an equivalent of the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Pope, (Sri Jayendra Saraswati) would be a serious contender.” Do the English and the Catholics, one wonders, refer to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope as a mere “priest?” The aim here is to belittle.

By calling Sri Jayendra Saraswati “India’s first T.V. guru,” Mr. Mehta is not placing flowers at the feet of the Pontiff. Surely he must know that in Great Britain, and in the West in general, “T.V. guru” is not a compliment, to say the least.

Mr. Mehta’s lack of exactitude is nowhere innocent. Every detail is aimed at building up a negative image of Sri Jayendra Saraswati and the tradition he represents. The Shankaracharya is even described as a “diminutive 70-year-old” whereas he is of average height and corpulence. The aim once again is to belittle.

According to Mr. Mehta the charge sheet includes “false impersonation of another person.” “Impersonation” is by definition imitating, pretending and/or claiming to be another person and in itself denotes falsehood. Mr. Mehta’s obsessive need to calumniate lands him in comic redundancy.

Seemingly fair and objective, Mr. Mehta writes: “Hindus have hundreds of fake and genuine godmen, gurus and holymen; they are head priests and heads of religious orders.” But given his overall portrait of Sri Jayendra Saraswati, Mr. Mehta leaves no choice as to which category – “fake” or “genuine” – his audience can place the Pontiff in.

Carried away by his obsession, Mr. Mehta dispenses with the customary precautions of gutless journalists. He writes straight from the horse’s mouth, i.e., his own: “Since the senior seer’s arrest a number of women have come forward to testify how the head priest made passes at them which were not of a very subtle nature. In fact, there were so many complaints from women that the police had to constitute an all-woman team to look into the charges.”

The fact is that till date not a single complaint has been lodged or registered with the Police in this connection. As our accompanying overview of the crucial facts in this murder case shows, the Tamil Nadu Government and Police have been desperately trying to find other charges against the Pontiff in order to keep him in jail for a minimum of one year under the so-called Goondas Act. (See “Crucial Facts of the Kanchi Case.”) Mr. Mehta’s allegations of sexual harassment are sheer slander. Had they contained an iota of truth, we can be sure that the authorities would have seized it, instead of “fishing” for other charges, as one judge accused the Investigating Officers. Such wild “fishing expeditions” have resulted in several charges which the Courts have rejected as “unfounded” and “foisted.” (See “Crucial Facts of the Kanchi Case.”)

It is true that in the early stages of the affair the Police spread innuendos of sexual misconduct which were immediately amplified by the tabloid press and visual media. One particular story received particular publicity, because in addition to sexual promiscuity, the Police held that the lady in question was wanted as a key member of the gang that had leagued to slay Sankararaman. For 48 hours two T.V. stations and the tabloids out-did one another in spreading rumors about this affair. Finally the truth came out: Usha was a 53-year-old advanced cancer patient who had undergone some 130 chemotherapy sessions paid for by one of the Shankara Matham charity organizations. Even the Police was obliged to admit the truth. But Mr. Mehta, for reasons of his own, has preferred to suppress these known facts so as to leave more room for outrageous lies.

Another accusation cited by Mr. Mehta is child molestation. The following incident was the starting point of these vicious and baseless stories. The Shankaracharyas of Kanchipuram are ever on the move, ministering to the population in every corner of India. They bless the crowds in temples, factories, farms, and other places where gatherings can be held. In 1998 Sri Jayendra Saraswati had undertaken a tour of Andhra Pradesh. Among other places he had held a prayer meeting at a cotton spinning mill. Considerably earlier two teenage female workers had been found dead under mysterious circumstances on the mill premises. It is said that the police had not shown any zeal in investigating the case for the past four years.

Incited by the mediatic defamation of the Shankaracharya, some guild recently filed a “Public Interest Petition” asking that the case be at last investigated. In the writ petition before the Andhra High court, there was a paragraph emphasizing that the Shankaracharya of Kanchi had performed religious rites at the mill, the insinuation being that this was in some way connected with the murder. Here is what Justice L. Narasimha Reddy wrote in his observations about the case:

“This court is compelled to observe that the only provocation for the petitioner to file this writ petition appears to be the recent unfortunate happenings in relation to a Seer (the Shankaracharya of Kanchi) of an ancient, prestigious...institution with almost 2500 years of history. The petitioner made no secret of this and...tendered unconditional apology and sought to delete the paragraph.”

Justice Reddy continued: “It is rather sad and sorrowful that an institution of such glory, that withstood foreign invasions, and social revolutions from time to time spread over past 25 centuries, is virtually targeted and persecuted in an organized manner, in an independent country. Not only individuals but also a section of institutions, such as the State and Press, appear to be determined to belittle and besmirch the Peetham. The perfidy caused to it has shocked almost everybody in the society, cutting across the religions and borders of the country...Proponents of human rights, fair play and dignity to individuals and institutions have maintained stoic silence. The role of the courts, though indirect, is by no means insignificant. A powerful section is either celebrating it or is watching it, with indifference...The amount of disrepute and sacrilege inflicted upon Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, as of now, is so enormous, that it hardly has any comparables. Harshlest possible words and expressions were used either directly or in innuendo...The freedom of speech and expression which is the bedrock of journalism is subjected to gross misuse...” (For the full transcript of this verdict please see “Kanchi Digest 1,” at: <http://www.kanchi-sathya.org>.)

Contrary to Mr. Mehta's claims, nowhere does the charge sheet contain accusations of impersonation, sexual harassment and child molestation. Therefore, all this must be attributed to the Outlook Editor's morbid imagination or hateful intentions. (The official charge sheet is now available at: <http://www.hinduonline.net>.)

Mr. Mehta's vicious presentation is evident not only from his tedious repetition of unfounded charges but also from his very choice of words. No elaborate or subtle linguistic analysis is needed to show that his speech is biasedly replete with such loaded terms as: abuse, obscene, vile, slanderous, greed, shattered, tabloid, sex, sleaze, controversial, corruption, murder, mystery, intoxicating, debauchery, shameful, tricky, hate, heady, humiliation, mastermind, crime, fake, false information, impersonation, embezzlement, sexual harassment, molestation, bizarre, licentious, conspiracy-ridden, shenanigans, dirty business, decrepitude, misappropriation, fraud, killing, etc. The ratio of such slanted terms to the total number of words in the text is simply phenomenal.

Some may be inclined to reply that Mr. Mehta's choice of words is dictated by the nature of his subject. There are two answers to such a view.

The first has already been made: apart from the alleged murder charge, Mr. Mehta's account is a fiction of his own making.

The second answer brings us to the heart of the matter: There are many relevant and verifiable facts that Mr. Mehta has deliberately chosen to ignore. Had he talked about them, his choice of words would have, per force, been quite different. But this would have defeated his purpose.

Mr. Mehta makes a cynical reference to "the gentleman now out on bail." This shows that when he wrote his speech he had knowledge of the Supreme Court's bail decision stating that there is not the least *prima facie* evidence against Sri Jayendra Saraswati, no material proof, nor any evidence of motive to commit murder. (The full Supreme Court ruling is available at: <http://www.kanchi-sathya.org> under Kanchi Digest 1.)

Prior to preparing his BBC talk, Mr. Mehta must have taken cognizance of the Supreme Court's ruling, which very clearly spelt out interalia that:

- a) The deceased was not an employee of the Matham or any temple belonging to or under the supervision of the Matham and he had no connections whatsoever to the Matham.
- b) The deceased was murdered not while praying but while seated in his office.

- c) There was no “tiff” between the Shankaracharya and the deceased and in fact there is no evidence whatsoever that the Shankaracharya even expressed his resentment against the deceased’s allegations at any time.
- d) The Shankaracharya had remained unperturbed throughout the three years when the allegations were made. Therefore, it does not stand to reason that he should now, after so many years, engage in such a conspiracy.
- e) There is no direct or prima facie evidence to link the Shankaracharya to the murder.
- f) There is no evidence that the Shankaracharya paid money to the mercenary gang.

In fact, from the Supreme Court’s observations it transpires that none of the evidence brought forth by the Police stands to scrutiny. In other words, unless the Police produce evidence hitherto not submitted to the Courts, the conclusion would be that the Shankaracharya of Kanchi was arrested arbitrarily and accused under false charges.

But let us for the time being return to our inventory of Mr. Mehta’s evil propaganda.

Referring to the Junior Pontiff of Shankara Matham, Sri Vijayendra Saraswati, Mr. Mehta says it now appears “that the junior seer, Vijayendra Saraswati, is as involved in all the dirty business as the senior seer.” The facts concerning the Junior Pontiff are as follows:

Until 10 January 2005 (day on which the Supreme Court granted bail to the Senior Pontiff, obliging the Tamil Nadu authorities to free him), the Police had never included the Junior Pontiff as an accused... In fact, they had declared that there were no charges against him. But barely within three hours after Sri Jayendra Saraswati was granted bail by the Supreme Court, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister flew to Kanchipuram. Minutes later a police contingent, variously estimated between 70 and 250 men, raided Shankara Matham with loaded guns and arrested the Junior Pontiff, Sri Vijayendra Saraswati, while he was performing the Puja (Prayers). The charges were exactly the same as those which only a few hours earlier the Supreme Court had declared invalid to justify the detention of the Senior Pontiff!

Instead of bringing these facts to the attention of the public, Mr. Mehta and his ilk set about smearing the image of the Junior Shankaracharya as well. After a month of imprisonment, Sri Vijayendra Saraswati was accorded bail by the High Court of Madras, which judged that there was no prima facie evidence to prove that Sri Vijayendra Saraswati was a conspirator in this murder case. (The High Court judgment is available under “Kanchi Digest 1” at:

<http://www.kanchi-sathya.org>.)

Mr. Mehta talks of “Saraswati, who runs 120 cash-rich trusts.” (Please note the connotations of “cash-rich.” “Rich” would have sufficed; “cash” is added for insinuation.) But he omits to say that Sri Jayendra Saraswati set up these trusts to cater to the underprivileged sections of society, that Sri Jayendra Saraswati has spent the greater part of his life building and administrating a string of hospitals, dispensaries, homes for the aged, orphanages, child care centers, over 50 schools, several colleges and universities, research centers, etc. The services in these institutions benefit large sectors of society throughout India. They are offered free of charge or at nominal fees. The Shankaracharya has also initiated charitable trusts for poor families as well as food donation centers. (See the enclosed summary presentation of the social and welfare services initiated by Sri Jayendra Saraswati.)

Had Mr. Mehta wanted to, he could have pointed out that Sri Jayendra Saraswati has ceaselessly labored to maintain communal peace and harmony. The proof of this is that the Muslim and Christian clergy were among the first to condemn his shocking arrest.

Mr. Mehta could have also alluded to the fact that the Shankaracharya of Kanchi has always held a clear ecological stand and defended the ecosystem. Long before there was the least talk of animal rights in the West, the philosophy which the Shankaracharyas of Kanchi propagate taught men to abstain from harming any living being.

But all this would have run counter to Mr. Mehta’s deliberate character assassination campaign.

Mr. Mehta shows disdain for the Kanchi Shankara Matham. Does he really not know that this institution was founded by Adi Shankara himself, widely regarded both in India and abroad as the greatest philosopher and spiritual preceptor of India? Does he not know that for centuries the vocation of the Shankara Matham has been to uphold Advaita Vedanta? Does he not know that several millennia before human rights were elaborated in Europe, the same - and far more humane - principles were solidly enshrined in the teachings of Advaita Vedanta as propounded by Adi Shankara?

Does Mr. Mehta ignore the fact that for decades Sri Jayendra Saraswati has held out a helping hand to the Dalits (the Untouchables) and other downtrodden sections of society, sparing no effort to integrate them socially, professionally and religiously? I am inclined to think that Mr. Mehta knows all this and much more. I would surmise that he knows that, among other reasons, it is because of

his social services that Sri Jayendra Saraswati is being framed for murder. It is a matter of public record that these services have depleted the vote-banks of the two political parties in Tamil Nadu, which Mr. Mehta describes as atheistic. Hence this vile attack against a most revered Hindu Saint.

Sri Jayendra Saraswati is not only the revered leader of millions of Hindus; he is a benefactor of all sectors of Indian society, regardless of denominations of caste, creed or religion.

Mr. Mehta begins by saying that the subject of his talk is so controversial that thousands of Indians believe the charges against the Shankaracharyas are “totally without foundation.” Journalism’s code of ethics demands that, when the subject is of a controversial nature, both sides of the story be presented. Mr. Mehta has not only suppressed all the facts arguing in favor of the Shankaracharyas; he has indulged in reprehensible lies against them.

Before any court of justice, Mr. Mehta’s talk can be exposed for what it is: deliberate defamation, systematic character assassination, demonization, and inflicting of psychological and emotional pain to millions of followers of a major international religious leader and a most noble institution. It must by now be clear to you that Mr. Mehta has suppressed facts to engage in slander. He has used the BBC as a forum for his calculated calumny for reasons best known to him. If you have unknowingly been a party to it, you can still make reparations. (See our accompanying letter.) Otherwise, the presumption would be that the BBC has knowingly leagued with Mr. Mehta in this calumny.

The BBC has further aggravated matters on the Internet version of Mr. Mehta’s talk by calumnious editorial additions.

(All the facts of the Kanchi Case mentioned above have been reported in various Indian newspapers and magazines. The relevant articles are available under “Archives” at: <http://www.kanchi-sathya.org>.)

THE CRUCIAL FACTS OF THE KANCHI CASE

The Background

On 3 September 2004 a man called Sankararaman was murdered in the city of Kanchipuram (also called Kanchi) in Tamil Nadu, South India. He was an employee at a local temple.

On 11 November 2004 Sri Jayendra Saraswati was arrested in Andhra Pradesh and accused of having conspired to have Sankararaman murdered.

Sri Jayendra Saraswati – “Sri” is a term of respect used for everyone, “Jayendra” is his monk name, and “Saraswati” designates the order to which he belongs – is the senior Pontiff of Shankara Matham, a millennia-old monastic order. Today the Institution is also one of India’s largest and most prestigious charity organizations. Soon after the Pontiff’s arrest, all of Shankara Matham’s bank accounts were frozen and the charity works came to a halt.

The Institution, variously called Kanchi Shankara Matham, Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, and Kanchi Mutt, was founded many centuries ago by Adi Shankara. Also known as Shankaracharya (“acharya” means teacher, hence Shankara the Teacher), Adi Shankara is widely recognized as the profoundest philosopher and spiritual teacher of the Indian tradition. He established several monastic orders, one of them in Kanchipuram. The 70 Shankaracharyas who have followed the founder in unbroken succession in Kanchipuram have striven to uphold the ancient teachings of Advaita Vedanta. If viewed as a religion in the Western sense of the word, Advaita can be said to be radically more monotheistic than any other tradition or doctrine. It upholds that there is nothing but Brahman (the Absolute) and all beings are one with Brahman. Therefore, to those who have not attained this ultimate truth, Advaita Vedanta enjoins love and reverence for all living beings and the entire universe.

Besides the perpetuation of Adi Shankara’s philosophical and spiritual teachings, Shankara Matham has always been engaged in welfare. Now under the present senior Shankaracharya, Sri Jayendra Saraswati, its social activities have vastly increased. He has opened over 50 schools and a large number of hospitals, child-care centers, charitable trusts for aiding poor families, old-age homes, food donation projects, rural development trusts, research projects, professional colleges and universities throughout India. The services in these institutions are free of charge or provided at nominal fees. Everything is subsidized by donations from devotees of the Shankara Matham in India and throughout the world. (See the enclosed list of these services.)

Sri Jayendra Saraswati is also singularly known for three other initiatives:
1) He has combated untouchability and endeavored to integrate the Dalits (“untouchables”) religiously, socially and professionally; 2) He has opposed

wholesale conversion of poor Dalits, agreed to by a handful of their leaders at the instigation of Western and Arab proselytizers. The Hindu faith, it must be said, has always been averse to conversion. Hindus believe that God in his infinite wisdom has given different religions to different peoples according to their needs. And so they feel that to take a person away from his/her religion by persuasion or by force is a sin against God. In India it is invariably the poor who are targeted by proselytizers. Mahatma Gandhi used to call such destitute converts “rice Christians.”); 3) In the explosive Ayodhya dispute between Hindus and Muslims over a temple/mosque site, Sri Jayendra Saraswati has tried to keep vote-greedy politicians out of the picture and find a solution acceptable to both parties. Though the issue remains unsettled, and the Shankaracharya naturally champions the Hindu cause, his efforts have earned him the respect of many Muslims, among them the distinguished columnist Saeed Naqvi. Sri Jayendra Saraswati has also expressed concern for the environment, taking a clear ecological stand in issues such as the devastation of sandalwood forests.

However, his social and political initiatives created enemies as well as friends. As he and the Matham grew in national stature, they became the targets of political, financial and sometimes even religious jealousies. Nevertheless, Sri Jayendra Saraswati remained a highly respected and revered national figure until last November 11th. On that day, which happened to be Deepavali, the most sacred day of the Hindu calendar, he was performing puja (religious rites) in the neighboring State of Andhra Pradesh. Suddenly air-borne armed commandos sent by the government of Tamil Nadu scooped down and arrested him. The shocking manner of the arrest of one of the most sacred icons of the Hindus was justified on the grounds that he was going to abscond to Nepal, over a thousand miles away, in a helicopter! The 71-year-old diabetic was directly thrown into prison on charges of murder and subsequently refused bail by the courts in the State of Tamil Nadu.

The initial presumptions of guilt were based partly on letters written by the murdered Sankararaman. Off and on for some years, he had sent threatening letters to Shankara Matham, accusing Sri Jayendra Saraswati of mismanagement of funds and other alleged misdeeds. In one letter he threatened to take Sri Jayendra Saraswati to court because the Pontiff, who had been invited to China, planned to fly there. Sankararaman said the Pontiff could walk to China if he wanted to but not fly there; he argued that Sri Jayendra Saraswati was a sannyasin and, as such, was forbidden by ancient tradition to travel by plane. In one of the last letters attributed to him by the police, besides financial malfeasance, he accused the Shankaracharya of having the evil eye: after his visit to Nepal the entire royal family was wiped out, Sankararaman said; after his pilgrimage to Kumbakonam, there was a huge fire and many lives were lost; his visit to a third locality caused the Kaveri river to dry up. Had the unfortunate

Sankararaman been alive today, he would no doubt have added the tsunami to the list.

In other letters written to prominent people and political parties, he had warned that if he were killed, the Shankaracharya would be behind the crime. Given the advance notice, any reasonable person would make two fairly reasonable assumptions. First, that it was all the less likely that the Shankaracharya would take any such risk, knowing that he had been publicly designated as number one suspect by the victim himself before the crime; second, that Sankararaman's declaration was a great opportunity for whoever wanted to frame the Shankaracharya and get away with it. But that is not the way the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalitha, and the Police Superintendent, Mr. Premkumar, have viewed the matter.

As soon as Sri Jayendra Saraswati was declared to be behind the crime, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister granted, out of public funds, a solatium of 500,000 rupees to Sankararaman's family – a curiously unprecedented gesture anywhere in India. Perhaps it was a propitiation of the Gods: the very next day his widow identified the assailants during a parade organized by the Police. Concurrently the mainstream media began projecting a very favorable image of Sankararaman: upright, hard-working, stalwart defender of tradition. Since then, however, several journalists have described the man as a notorious blackmailer. Mr. Cho Ramaswamy, the south Indian political analyst and Member of Parliament, has said that Sankararaman's threats against the Shankaracharya could have earned him a two-year imprisonment, had the Pontiff deigned to take him to court.

The revered Shankaracharya did not fare as well as his critic with the media. Immediately upon his surprise arrest – even the judiciary had not been notified - there was launched a vast defamation campaign, orchestrated by the Tamil Nadu Police authorities investigating the affair. The campaign was so swift, systematic and overpowering that, with the benefit of hindsight, one wonders how it could have been carried out without elaborate preparation and cooperation from other quarters.

The character assassination campaign was widely and wildly relayed throughout India by the mainstream media, avid to cash in on the scandal and at the same time serve obvious as well as opaque political interests. There was such media-madness that all semblance of independent journalistic investigation was thrown overboard. No questions were asked when, right off the bat - before even presenting an iota of feasible evidence - the Prosecuting Attorney declared: "Jayandra Saraswati is the most undeserving criminal." Nor did anyone raise an eyebrow when the Chief Minister herself informed the Legislative Assembly

that there was “clinching evidence” designating the Shankaracharya as the chief conspirator behind the crime. Overnight the Pontiff’s profile was totally reversed: from a loving and lovable defender of the poor and downtrodden, he was now made out to be a thug-wielding, power-hungry tycoon. The shift was so sudden and swift that one wonders why the media were not taken to task. If the Shankaracharya had been such a blatantly evil man, why hadn’t they unmasked him sooner?

Besides the alleged hiring of killers to bump off Sankararaman, Sri Jayandra Saraswati was savagely defamed by publicized accusations of sexual misconduct and misappropriation of funds. In this derelict and depressing atmosphere, where all except his most ardent devotees distanced themselves from him, and the central government remained mute, the courts in Tamil Nadu could comfortably reject the Shankaracharya’s repeated bail applications without fearing a public outcry. The aging Pontiff was locked up for two months in a prison for ordinary criminals - something unheard of in a country where the powerful do their time not in prison but in comfortable hospitals or other posh accommodations.

Police Charges and Court Judgments

To justify the arrest of the Shankaracharya, the Tamil Nadu police claimed to have the following evidence:

- 1) Sankararaman’s 39 letters and his “dying declaration,” which according to the Police established the motive behind the crime.
- 2) Money drawn from Shankara Matham’s ICICI Bank account and paid to the hired gang of assailants.
- 3) Records of cell phone conversations between the Shankaracharya and the assailants.
- 4) Confessional statements from several members of the gang.

On the basis of the above, the Magistrate’s Court and the High Court of Tamil Nadu rejected the Shankaracharya’s bail application, apparently without demanding any evidence from the Police. After two months of imprisonment the bail appeal was examined by the Supreme Court in Delhi on 6th January 2005 and the verdict was given on 10th January 2005.

Concerning the motive, the Supreme Court rejected both Sankararaman’s letters and his supposed “dying declaration” as proof. (Copies of the letters had

been allegedly found in the victim's home. The Court held that: 1) It was not certain that Sankararaman had posted all the letters; 2) Any letters which had reached the Matham may not have been brought to the attention of the Pontiff; 3) Prominent public figures frequently receive such letters, without resorting to murder. As to the "dying declaration," it was allegedly made during a telephone conversation with a third party whose statement could not be taken as proof.) The Court also stated that the Police had failed to produce evidence of telephone conversations between the Pontiff and the assailants.

Concerning payment for the crime, on 3 January 2005 the Supreme Court asked the Prosecution to produce evidence of withdrawals of money from the Matham's ICICI bank account. (The lower courts had apparently satisfied themselves simply with the word of the Police about all money transactions.) It transpired that the Matham had no account at the ICICI bank at all! The prosecution then claimed that the money had come from the sale of a piece of land belonging to the Matham. The Police claimed that Sri Jayendra Saraswati had kept the money in his room and later given it to the assassins. Investigation showed that the Matham had indeed sold a piece of land but that the money had been placed in the Indian Bank account of the Matham and was still there in full. On January 10th the Supreme Court concluded that the Prosecution had failed to produce evidence of any financial transaction between the Shankaracharya and the alleged assailants.

Regarding confessions by the co-accused, two persons told the Court that their statements had been obtained under torture. One exhibited a broken arm and the other smashed teeth. They said the police had forced them to sign empty sheets of paper. There remained the confession of one Ravi Subramaniam who, before turning approver, had been designated by the Police as accused N^o 2, i.e., second only to the senior Shankaracharya. But the Supreme Court held that the Prosecution had to first produce *prima facie* evidence that Mr. Ravi Subramaniam was a party to the conspiracy before his acts or statements could be used against his co-conspirators. As the Police failed to produce any such evidence, the Supreme Court would not take into account Mr. Subramaniam's confession. (In all fairness to the latter, it should be stated that it is not clear whether he had been "turned" approver by the police or had made the decision himself. The fact is that after his arrest he abandoned, or was made to abandon, his initial lawyer and has been kept in solitary confinement ever since. On several occasions he has been rushed to hospital for various pains. Some who know him say that photographs taken on his court appearances show a ravaged Ravi Subramaniam.)

Thus, the highest court in India concluded that there is not the least *prima facie* evidence against Sri Jayendra Saraswati, no material proof, or any

evidence of motive to commit murder. (The full Supreme Court ruling is available at: <http://www.kanchi-sathya.org> under Kanchi Digest 1.) In fact, from the Supreme Court's observations it is clear that none of the evidence brought forth by the Police stands to scrutiny. In other words, unless the Police can produce entirely new and valid evidence, the conclusion would be that the Shankaracharya of Kanchi was accused, arrested and imprisoned under untenable charges. (For a detailed discussion of the charges submitted by the Tamil Nadu authorities to the Supreme Court, and the latter's verdict, see enclosed "The Foremost Question and the irrefutable Answer" by Sri Anucha.)

Three hours after the Supreme Court ordered the release of Sri Jayendra Saraswati, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister flew to Kanchipuram. A few minutes later the junior Pontiff, Sri Vijayandra Saraswati, was arrested and thrust in prison. He was classified as second accused. Grotesquely enough, he was imprisoned under the very same charges as those which the Supreme Court had judged invalid for maintaining in prison the Senior Pontiff, the first accused. The Junior Shankaracharya's bail application was rejected by the lower courts in Tamil Nadu. He appealed to the Madras High Court and after a month in prison, the Court judged that prima facie he could not be considered a conspirator, that there was no new evidence, and therefore ordered his release. (High Court Judgment of 10/02/05 available in Kanchi Digest 1 at <http://www.kanchi-sathya.org>.)

Determined to get the two Shankaracharyas out of the way and seize control of the Matham, the Tamil Nadu authorities tried a different strategy. Under the so-called Goondas Act, a person who has already been charged with three crimes can be detained for a year without eligibility for bail. Overstretching this law for their own purposes, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and Police have dug up two older cases of assault and battery and are trying to foist them upon Sri Jayendra Saraswati. During the bail hearings the judge's reaction was as follows:

In the first case (Radhakrishnan accuses Jayendra Saraswati and alleged co-assailants of assault with intention to kill two years ago), this is what Justice M. Thanikachalam of the High Court in Madras had to say to the Prosecuting Attorney: "Why wasn't the investigation conducted for the past two years? What are the intentions of the Government?...What have you been doing the last two years?...Does your case diary show the investigation was not pursued because of want of materials?" The Prosecutor admitted "some slacking off" and said that thanks to the recent murder case (in which the Shankaracharyas are the accused!), the police had at last found the weapon (a knife) used against Mr. Radhakrishnan two years earlier. The judge snapped back: "You found the

weapon after two years – the Court should believe this? Where is your forensic report?”

In the second case (complaint registered on 13th November 2004 by a certain Mr. Madhavan, accusing Sri Jayendra Saraswati and alleged co-assailants of having conspired the assault on his person which allegedly took place on 8th August 2004), the same judge wrote: “Considering the facts of the case, as well as the inordinate delay (of more than three months) in preferring the complaint, and considering the towering fact that at the earliest opportunity, the complainant reported that he sustained injuries only in a road accident, I am of the undoubted view that this case must be a foisted one.” (Madras High Court Judgment of 28/01/05 available in Kanchi Digest 1 at <http://www.kanchi-sathya.org>.)

When Sri Jayendra Saraswati was in prison and applied for bail before the Tamil Nadu courts, the police apparently knew they did not have any convincing evidence against him. In order to bolster the case for rejection of bail, they videotaped the Pontiff without his knowledge, “edited” the tape and announced that he had confessed to the crime. He immediately denied any such confession. Since the videotaping was illegal, when the case went up before the Supreme Court the prosecution made no mention of his alleged confession. The bail granted by the Supreme Court (openly dismissing the prosecution theory of motive, plan, conduct and conspiracy) proved to be a slap in the face of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and Police. People began to express doubts regarding the whole affair. Panicked, the police gave - or sold - portions of the videotapes to T.V. channels to distract the public’s attention. Viewers could see a groggy-eyed Sri Jayendra stretched out on the floor as if he had been drugged. Oddly enough, instead of confessing Sri Jayendra Saraswati was heard claiming his total innocence. These leaks were once again an illegal act by the “guardians of the law” containing, moreover, doctored passages whose contents were promptly disavowed by the Shankaracharya.

The National Human Rights Commission of India, a governmental body, suo moto commenced an enquiry against the Police both for the videotaping of Sri Jayendra Saraswati and the manner of arrest of Sri Vijayandra Saraswati. To justify the police action, the Investigating Officer summed up the matter before the Court thus: “The investigation is an area where the Police has got unfettered powers without interference even from the Judiciary, leave alone an organization like the Human Rights Commission.” The enquiry by the National Human Rights Commission has been stayed by the High Court at the behest of the Police. (See Newsindpress.com, 13/01/05 and *The Hindu*, 27/01/05.)

Two women lawyers, connected with the Defense, were accused by the Police of not only attempting to bribe but also threatening to kill Ravi Subramaniam, accused allegedly turned approver, to get him to change his version. How they managed to have a tête-à-tête with him is a mystery, since he is in the hands of the police and under constant surveillance in solitary confinement. The scenario, spoon-fed by the Police to the media, is indeed convoluted: two women outsmart the guards within the prison and enter the cell where a man is held who, according to the Police, was the second mastermind behind this case of murder and later turned approver and the two women try to bribe him into changing his version again and he refuses and they threaten him with death! When the authorities registered FIRs against the two lawyers, the Kanchipuram Bar Association immediately denounced this machination and boycotted the courts for weeks. Finally the High Court declared that the charges against the two women lawyers were unfounded. (See ChennaiOnline.com, 21/02/05 and *The Hindu*, 04/03/05)

The Kanchipuram police filed a case against the nationally noted columnist, Mr. S. Gurumurthy, on charges of attempting “to deviate the investigation in the Sankararaman murder case, by giving wrong information” in his articles. Anyone arrested under this charge is susceptible to imprisonment up to seven years. (See *The Hindu*, 12/02/05 and Newsindpress.com, 22/02/05)

Such treatment of lawyers and journalists is an obvious attempt to intimidate both professions and deny freedom of speech and expression, enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

India is a secular state and her constitution forbids the government from meddling with religious affairs and institutions. Nevertheless, as soon as the Supreme Court granted bail to Sri Jayendra Saraswati, the Tamil Nadu authorities blocked Shankara Matham’s 183 bank accounts through which it conducts its social service activities. Once again the Matham had to appeal to the High Court, which declared the action of freezing the accounts “ultra vires, illegal and liable to be set aside.” (High Court Judgment of 01/02/05 available in Kanchi Digest 1 at kanchi-sathya.org)

Out of the 24 accused, nearly half have been refused bail under the Goondas Act, although many of them had never committed a single crime in the past. Among them there are Sri Sundaresa Iyer, the elderly Matham Manager and Sri Raghu, the younger brother of the Junior Shankaracharya. After months in jail, their appeal reached the Madras high Court, which declared their detention under the Goondas Act illegal. However, they have not yet been freed. (See Newsindpress.com, 05/05/05.)

The Tamil Nadu authorities are still determined to maintain in prison Sri Sundaresa Iyer, the Matham Manager and Sri Raghu, the Junior Shankaracharya's younger brother. If they succeed they can extend the same charges against the Shankaracharyas and imprison them once again. So the Police have resorted to another stratagem. Narcotics crimes being non-bailable in the State, they are trying to slap narcotics-connected charges against Sri Sundaresa Iyer and Sri Raghu. The scenario is bizarre. The Police claim to have arrested a man in possession of narcotics at a bus stop after he had just finished a term in the same prison as Sri Sundaresa Iyer and Sri Raghu. These two had allegedly arranged to give the man 20,000 rupees to kill off Ravi Suramaniam, the accused-turned-approver. Once out of prison, the man had spent half of the money to purchase narcotics, according to the Police. So they have filed a FIR against Sri Sundaresa Iyer and Sri Raghu – not only for conspiring to commit murder but also for dealing in narcotics! Here is what Justice Thanikachalam of the Madras High Court had to say on examining the case: “Looking at the FIR, it appears to be a foisted case. It is not clear what prosecution is trying to convey in the FIR.” See <http://www.dinakaran.com/daily/2005/Apr/30/others/topstory2.html> and ChennaiOnline.com, 28/04/05)

Since the murder charges are without foundation, the Shankaracharyas and the Matham employees are being accused of other crimes. To help to meet the legal expenses for their defense, Dr. Bhaskaran, a prominent Madras cardiologist, launched a fund-raising campaign. He was summoned for interrogation by the Police. On hearing the petition that Dr. Bhaskaran had filed to quash the summons, Justice K.P. Sivasubramaniam of the Madras High Court reprimanded the Kanchipuram SIT (special investigating team in charge of the Sankararaman murder case) for “fishing expedition tactics.” The Judge threatened to recuse himself from all cases relating to the Shankara Matham. “All the cases relating to the Shankara Mutt are coming before me and I may be blamed later for not passing any orders in favor of the Government,” Justice Sivasubramaniam complained. (Newsindpress.com, 10/03/05)

From the above summary of the various Police actions and legal proceedings connected with the affair, it is evident that time and again the actions of the Tamil Nadu Government and Police have been illegal, without any evidence and have been duly condemned by the Courts. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and Police are desperate to find subsidiary charges against Sri Jayendra Saraswati to imprison him again. If there was the smallest truth behind the vicious rumors spread through the media about sexual misconduct, child molestation, etc., we can be certain that the authorities would have pounced on the opportunity. An examination of the official charge sheet, served at last on 31

March 2005 after months of postponement, shows that it contains no such charges.

Concluding Observations

As pointed out by many observers, the Shankaracharyas of Kanchi were victimized by an orchestrated trial by media even before the least evidence was presented to the Courts. But as we have seen, the arguments for their arrest were rejected by the Supreme Court. Given the “interest” that Chief Minister Ms. Jayalalitha has shown for the affair, Sri Jayendra Saraswati has appealed to the Supreme Court to have the trial transferred to another state in India. His appeal is being examined by the Supreme Court.

Most jurists who have examined the charge sheet say it is empty despite its inordinate length and vast number of witnesses. It is to fill this embarrassing vacuum that the Chief Minister and Police of Tamil Nadu have repeatedly embarked on “fishing expeditions” and introduced other charges against the Shankaracharyas and Matham employees. Many political analysts feel that the entire case is a frame-up job. The real conspiracy, they say, is against the Shankaracharyas and the Matham.

It is not our aim here to analyze the socio-politico-religious ramifications of the affair (some of which are said to extend beyond the borders of India) and point fingers at “the real conspirators.” Our sole objective has been to present the verifiable facts of the case. Despite all the zeal deployed by the Police, not a single piece of evidence has been accepted by the courts as proof of guilt of the Shankaracharyas and Matham employees. On the hand, given the bizarre undertakings of the Tamil Nadu Government and Police, and the number of times they have been rebutted by the Courts in various cases connected with this affair, one can but agree with Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr who, on 12 January 2005, wrote in *The Times of India*:

“The motives of the guardians of the law are always to be questioned, especially in India where the police and prosecution are the minions of the political executive. In far too many cases, this has been borne out and it would be a travesty of truth to argue that the police and the prosecution have no ulterior motive (in the Kanchi case), and that they are merely carrying out their duties.

“In the last decade, the Tamil Nadu police and prosecution had no option but to go after the “political opponent” (of the ruling party)...If this is the reputation of the Tamil Nadu police and prosecution, what credibility do they

carry in the first place? They have none whatsoever, and it is indeed incumbent upon them that they should be much more meticulous if they have to clean up their act. But there is nothing of the sorts in the works...What is amazing is the credulity displayed by the media merlins, who accepted the police version as gospel truth, and they did not for once try to get at the game being played out. They did not do so because in modern, secular India, the religious man is a greater suspect than the police who violate law with impunity, in some instances at the behest of their political masters, and in others due to their own arrogance arising out of brutal power...

“What accounts for the passivity of the media in this case? It is mere cowardice. It is an unwillingness to stand up for an unpopular but right issue. The basic proposition is that Jayendra Saraswathi is a good man. There is need to make this moral judgment beforehand, and then try to disprove it through hard evidence. The media is adopting the slothful *way* of suspecting the man, and demanding that he prove his innocence.” (See enclosed editorial in *The Times of India* by Parsa Venkateshwar Rao, Jr.)

In the English language press in India, Outlook Magazine has outdone all in misinformation. It has not just displayed credulity and passivity but has actively campaigned in the demonization of Sri Jayendra Saraswati. (See enclosed articles from *Outlook*.) Moreover, under the guise of impartial reporting, *Outlook*'s editor has used the BBC to spread slander worldwide. He has deliberately suppressed the significant facts of the case and trumpeted innuendos and calumny.

Finally the “National Post,” a major Canadian daily has published an article by Cleo Paskal in the weekend section, raising doubts about the political motives of the State and Federal governments in the whole case.

We sincerely hope that the BBC is basically innocent in this affair and will, after examination of the facts, make due reparations for the harm to which it has unknowingly been a party. This is all the more urgent since the target of this vicious mediatic attack is a selfless benefactor of humanity. For half a century Sri Jayendra Saraswati has served his fellow-men no less than Mother Teresa or the Dalai Lama. It is no concern of ours that some should be honored with Nobel Prizes and others not. That is the way of the world and politics. But the least that an honorable institution like the BBC can do is to redress the injustice to which it has been a party.

(All the facts of the Kanchi Case mentioned above have been reported in various Indian newspapers and magazines. The relevant articles are available under “Archives” at: <http://www.kanchi-sathya.org>.)