

# Indian scientists slam ancient Hindu 'stem cell' claim

January 6 2019

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India is no stranger to prominent figures citing ancient Hindu myths as evidence of the country's technological prowess

The organisers of a major Indian science conference distanced themselves Sunday from speakers who used the prestigious event to

dismiss Einstein's discoveries and claim ancient Hindus invented stem cell research.

The Indian Scientific Congress Association expressed "serious concern" as the unorthodox remarks aired by prominent academics at its annual conference attracted condemnation and ridicule.

The distinguished gathering of Indian researchers and scientists hosts Nobel laureates, but in recent years has seen Hindu mythology and faith-based theories edging onto the agenda.

At this year's congress, the head of a southern Indian university cited an ancient Hindu text as proof that [stem cell research](#) was discovered on the subcontinent thousands of years ago.

"We had 100 Kauravas from one mother because of stem cell and test tube technology," said G. Nageshwar Rao, Vice Chancellor at Andhra University, referring to a story from the Hindu epic Mahabharata.

Rao, who was addressing school children and scientists at the event, also said a demon king from another centuries-old Hindu epic had two dozen aircraft and a network of landing strips in modern-day Sri Lanka.

"Hindu Lord Vishnu used guided missiles known as 'Vishnu Chakra' and chased moving targets," added the professor of inorganic chemistry.

Event organisers tried to hose down the remarks, saying it was "unfortunate" the prestigious event had been derailed by controversy.

"We don't subscribe to their views and distance ourselves from their comments. This is unfortunate," Premendu P. Mathur, general secretary of Indian Scientific Congress Association, told AFP.

"There is a serious concern about such kind of utterances by responsible people."

Another speaker, a scientist from a university in southern Tamil Nadu state, also raised eyebrows by questioning the breakthroughs of Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein.

India is no stranger to prominent figures debasing science or citing ancient Hindu texts like the Puranas and Vedas as ironclad evidence of the country's technological prowess.

India's minister for higher education Satyapal Singh last year said Darwin's theory of evolution was wrong, and vowed to change the national school curriculum to reflect that.

The minister hails from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which rules 17 of India's 29 states and territories outright or through alliances.

BJP leader and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 pointed to Hindu scriptures as proof that plastic surgery existed in ancient India.

Science minister Harsh Vardhan last year said ancient Greeks took credit from India for early mathematical principles and misquoted Stephen Hawking as praising the Vedas for discoveries greater than Einstein's theory of relativity.

The Breakthrough Science Society, an Indian-based educational charity, said it was "astounded and even horrified" at the remarks made at an academic summit.

"Puranic verses and epics are poetic, enjoyable, contain moral elements and rich in imagination but not scientifically constructed or validated

theories," the group said in a statement Sunday.

"Such a hallowed assembly of scientists has been misused to make false and chauvinistic claims about ancient India."

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Citation: Indian scientists slam ancient Hindu 'stem cell' claim (2019, January 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-01-indian-scientists-slam-ancient-hindu.html>

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