



He was a renewable energy expert!!

The new issue of Science has [a disturbing but unsurprising report on science under India's Hindu nationalist government](#):

The most widely discussed talk at the Indian Science Congress, a government-funded annual jamboree held in Jalandhar in January, wasn't about space exploration or information technology, areas in which India has made rapid progress. Instead, the talk celebrated a story in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* about a woman who gave birth to 100 children, citing it as evidence that India's ancient Hindu civilization had developed advanced reproductive technologies. Just as surprising as the claim was the distinguished pedigree of the scientist who made it: chemist G. Nageshwar Rao, vice-chancellor of Andhra University in Visakhapatnam. "Stem cell research was done in this country thousands of years ago," Rao said.

His talk was widely met with ridicule. But Rao is hardly the only Indian scientist to make such claims. In recent years, "experts" have said ancient Indians had spacecraft, the internet, and nuclear weapons—long before Western science came on the scene.

Such claims and other forms of pseudoscience rooted in Hindu nationalism have been on the rise since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. They're not just an embarrassment, some researchers say, but a threat to science

and education that stifles critical thinking and could hamper India's development. "Modi has initiated what may be called 'Project Assault on Scientific Rationality,'" says Gauhar Raza, former chief scientist at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) here, a conglomerate of almost 40 national labs. "A religio-mythical culture is being propagated in the country's scientific institutions aggressively."

It's embarrassing for India and sad for scientists: it could affect the rest of us. After all, of all the major emitters, India maintains the sharpest upward trajectory — China's emissions have recently ticked up after leveling off and even declining for a short while. Simply put, no progress on climate is possible without cooperation from India, and [the Union still relies heavily on coal](#). Besides, India has a great tradition of *real* science: Hindu nationalism is bad enough, but its demands for fake history destroy so much of the subcontinent's real and inspiring history.

That said, there is an interesting question of strategy here for climate advocates: fight back against this pseudoscience with everything they have, or go with the flow and start finding precedents in the Vedas and Upanishads for climate reductions? My own sense about such things is to emphasize the former of course: science must remain the mainstay of good policy. But hey, if you can find something that shows Lord Rama and Hanuman preferred solar and wind over coal, I'd say to go for it.

Obviously, there is a significant difference between saying that a religion's *values* favor aggressive action on climate (Judaism's clearly do), and saying that ancient heroes and gods actually *understood* the scientific dynamics of climate change. But if that is what is required to foster more aggressive action from India on climate, I wonder whether a useful political fudge might not be worthwhile. That doesn't in any way mean that scientists and advocates should compromise on scientific integrity, but politics is the art of the possible, and the more that we delay climate action, things become less and less possible.