



ESHI

## Educators' Society for the Heritage of India

Date: November 19, 2005

Ms. Ruth Green, President  
California State Board of Education  
1430 N Street, Room 5111  
Sacramento, CA 95814 Fax: (916) 319-0172  
Subject: Concerns of Hindu parents about Social Sciences and History Textbooks

Dear Ms. Green, Members of the Board, and Members of the Curriculum Commission:

We, the signatories of this memorandum, are educators/teachers in American universities/ schools and/or have published research and books related to Indic culture and civilization. Many of us are practicing Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists who have learned our religious and cultural traditions (Dharmic traditions) from our families and communities in India, or US, and have studied Dharmic traditions all our lives. We consider it our duty to impart our traditions and cultural heritage to the new and future generations of children growing up in the United States and to assure that the information contained in school textbooks about India, Indians, and Indic traditions, i.e., our religious, cultural and civilizational heritage, is correct and consistent with the beliefs and practices of our community.

We compliment the California Board of Education (SBE) for the transparency and fairness with which the adoption process has been carried out with respect to Indian heritage, particularly Hindu civilization. In general, we support the recommendations of the Content Review Panel (CRP) as presented in pages 77-102 on the California Department of Education website: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/yr05/documents/bluenov05item05.doc>

It is a matter of grave concern to us that some members of a (yahoo) group called IER (Indo-Eurasian Research) have sought to intervene in the deliberations of the Board at the last minute. They had not reviewed any of the textbooks under consideration, or the comments /suggestions submitted by the Indian-American and Hindu groups, and parents. The blanket condemnation of all Indian/Hindu-American groups, without first reviewing the textbooks, or the comments of the Hindu community, is prejudicial. We, therefore, offer our services to the California Board of Education and the Curriculum Commission to help resolve the issues.

We understand that knowledge in the arts and humanities is open to challenges, and that there will always be differences of opinion among historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and other such scholars about both large and small details in their disciplines. What can best be presented to the school children should, however, be a compassionate account of the history and religious/cultural practices of the people at various points in their civilization, including the latest evidence. In these times of cultural, social, and religious conflict in the world, we should exercise great care in what we present to our children about the history of their communities and their social and cultural practices.

On two particularly contentious issues – as related to “caste” and “Aryan invasion/migration theories”, -- it would be inappropriate, simplistic, and dangerous to stereotype and paint Hindu society within a “caste, cows and curry” triptych, and led by invading Aryans. Such stereotyping of Hindu society would be akin to stereotyping American or Western/Christian civilization with slavery, holocaust, colonialism, and the subjugation of Native Americans.

The word “caste” is derived from the Portuguese word “casta”. It does not correctly describe the original ideas about class and hierarchy in the Hindu society. Nor should we forget that this foreign concept itself has shaped new dynamics in Indian society, and the economic and political relationships of people. The social framework of the caste system spans all religious communities in India (including Christianity and Islam) even if their teachings differ from the original “varna” and “jati” concepts. Varna system was based on aptitude and skill, not on race, or by birth.

The word “Arya” in Hindu scriptures has a cultural, not racial, connotation. It denotes character. Some Western scholars cling to the colonialist view of the Aryan Invasion Theory; others have accepted new evidence against it. We will be happy to present to you the cumulative research and its implications in understanding Indic civilization. To understand why this theory is no longer accepted and the dangers of teaching this theory, please look at the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/history/history5.shtml>

When Hinduism and Hindu institutions are taught in schools, Hindu self-understanding should be communicated. Likewise, when teaching Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, the self understanding of those who believe in these traditions should be shared with the student community. Further the essential elements of Hinduism and other Dharmic Traditions on themes such as the divinity in human beings, other beings, and in nature, the practices of yoga and meditation (and their scientifically proven benefits), and the concepts of diversity, pluralism, and tolerance, as in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The whole world is like one family) must be explored.

Any inaccurate or biased representation or stereo-typing of composite Indian heritage, starting with that of the Hindu civilization and extending into the other Indic faith traditions, will have an adverse effect on the intellectual development and self-esteem of Indian children. They may find what is taught in the schools, through inaccurate textbooks, is at variance from the practices followed in their homes and community. This would be contrary to the Board’s Equal Opportunity guidelines which state “Portray accurately and equitably” and “Instill a sense of pride in every child in his/her heritage”.

We would, therefore, urge you to continue with your deliberations in a fair and transparent manner, without regard to the polemics and political pressures from some academicians. We express our appreciation for the exercise of fair ground rules adopted by the Board.

Educators’ Society for the Heritage of India (ESHI), a non-profit organization, was registered in 2003 with a mandate to create accurate and balanced content on Indic traditions and values for textbooks and other publications and to advise school districts, state boards and publishers in this regard. The State of California and The Educators’ Society for the Heritage of India have the same common goal: How best to provide up-to-date and correct information that is essential for building a well-informed society. We would like to join hands in your endeavor to provide students the best available information.

Sincerely,

ESHI is a not for profit, Educational Organization.  
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**The signatories: Names of 64 Scholars deleted to protect them from calumny and harassment by opponents of HEF/VF edits.**

Copy to:

Mr. Thomas Adams [email: [tadams@cde.ca.gov](mailto:tadams@cde.ca.gov) ]

Executive Director to the Curriculum Commission and

Director of the Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIR)

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