



# The Gandhi Foundation of USA

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*Promoting the Philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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February 21, 2006

Ms. Glee Johnson, President  
State Board of Education  
1430 N Street, Room 5111  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Ms. Glee Johnson and Members of the State Board of Education,

The Gandhi Foundation of USA is a non-profit national organization that promotes the philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Our goals are to create a public awareness of the huge impact Gandhi had on American Society through his influence on Dr. King. Our main work involves the promotion of non-violence, community service and social justice. We are promoters of tolerance, and for this reason we are writing about the recent text book edits suggested by the Vedic Foundation and the Hindu Educational Foundation. Our concerns here are twofold: To maintain the integrity of the California School System and to prevent the spread of intolerance in the education of children.

As Executive Director of the Gandhi Foundation of the USA, I am writing to express our support of the original recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee and Content Review Panel Expert, Dr. Shiv Bajpai and the efforts of both the Vedic Foundation and the Hindu American Foundation to ensure a fair and open process. The Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations correct many of the inaccuracies and biases prevalent in the textbooks up for adoption by the State of California and are necessary to present a balanced portrayal of Hinduism.

Hinduism and some aspects of Sikhism and Indian history are portrayed in these textbooks negatively. Needless to say, these misrepresentations are the source of great confusion for Hindu youth and have a devastating effect on their self-esteem. For many non-Hindu students, these glimpses into Hinduism may be their first and last. In reading the textbooks as they are now, students will fail to gain insight into the real contributions that Indian, especially Hindu civilization has made in this world and Hinduism's message of tolerance and pluralism that inspired Mahatma Gandhi, Will Durant, "Boston Brahmins" Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., among many others. These people lauded the greatest of Indian civilization.

I also am writing as a concerned California taxpayer who graduated from the University of California, Berkeley. I came to this country in 1946 from India. My wife Carolina was born in Paso Robles, California and was a teacher and retired from the California School System. My children were schooled in

Ms. Glee Johnson and Members of the State Board of Education, Continued

***Promoting Non-Violence, Community Service and Social Justice***

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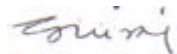
California. I was a Hindu born in India and my wife was a Catholic. We raised our two boys to be Catholics, but to respect all religions. I retired as a Senior Scientist after 32 years of service to the Coca-Cola Company. I was commissioned by the Coca-Cola Company to present the culture of India to several elementary to high school groups. I worked with Church and other groups in California and in Georgia to present valid information on India, its culture and religions.

When I served with the Inter-Faith Coalition of the Georgia Human Relations Commission, we were of the opinion that undercutting the culture, practices or religion of any group in school textbooks amounts to intolerance and should not be allowed. To limit the description of Hinduism to caste, cow and widow burning is certainly not in keeping with California Education Code. We join the Indian American Community along with thousands of Hindu parents, several academic professors and other organizations who are simply requesting you to present an accurate version of India's religious history, traditions, and culture. Those who have opposed the minor edits do not represent Hinduism or Indians in any way. Harvard linguist Michael Witzel, who is the leader of this opposition, has painted all Hindu parents, children, professors, activists, and organizations involved in this curriculum revision process as "Hindu Fundamentalists." This reflects the academic hubris, desperation and bigoted mindset on the part of these "self-proclaimed" experts on Hinduism. This linguist professor seeks only to perpetuate his distorted theories on Hinduism in order to protect his "academic empire" rather than admit that the euro-centric theories he created during his academic career are based on false 19<sup>th</sup> century assumptions.

We ask only that in reviewing these textbooks and recommended edits, the California Education Code (Sections 60040(b) and 60044(a)) on Ethnic and Cultural Groups be followed. These sections are clear and unambiguous: "The standards project the cultural diversity of society; instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage; develop a feeling of self-worth related to equality of opportunity; eradicate the roots of prejudice; and thereby encourage the optimal individual development of each student." We believe that the history and religions of India should be taught in the classrooms with the same standards used for the children of other ethnic groups. To present other religions in a good light and single out any others and present them in a decidedly negative light is a form of intolerance being practiced on our children. To maintain what is obviously a religious discrimination against an entire culture just to preserve the reputation and careers of a few ivory tower Harvard professors would not only be intolerance, but would amount to a psychological violence against our children.

As elaborated above, the current textbooks do nothing more than perpetuate stereotypes and foster prejudice against Hindu Americans. Given the age group of the students involved, this is most particularly relevant. As such, I urge the SBE to approve the accepted revisions and edits of Vedic Foundation and the Hindu Education Foundation, which will vastly improve the current textbooks making them far more accurate. We kindly request my letter to be delivered to all Board members. Thank you for your cooperation and consideration.

Respectfully,



Giriraj Rao  
Executive Director  
Gandhi Foundation of USA

Cc: Subash Razdan, Acting Chair, Gandhi Foundation of USA