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## **CALIFORNIA TEXTBOOKS CORRECTIONS RESULT OF BROAD-BASED COALITION OF HINDUS**

March 1, 2006, Sacramento, California...More than a hundred Hindu parents and community leaders and about a dozen Hindu students attended a subcommittee meeting of the California State Board of Education (SBE) in Sacramento on February 27<sup>th</sup>.

Days earlier SBE released their final recommendations on 160 edits submitted by Hindu Education Foundation (HEF) and Vedic Foundation (VF) in which many of the HEF and VF suggested changes were included. The two Hindu groups are seeking to correct the derogatory and inaccurate depiction of Hinduism in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade history books which will be used in California public schools for the next 6 years.

At the conclusion of the 4-hour meeting, the subcommittee recommended approval of a staff report accepting a number of corrections to the portrayal of Hinduism and India in the textbooks.

“This is the first time the Hindu community has participated in correcting misrepresentations in the textbooks at the state level. Hindu parents are concerned about the impact of negative stereotypes on students. The community has succeeded in getting many of the humiliating comments out of the textbooks. In fact, about 75% of changes from Hindu Education Foundation have been accepted. Many of the changes not accepted leave a distorted view of the basic tenets of Hinduism and leave a negative feeling about India and Hinduism in the textbooks. We will work further to attempt to remove all negative stereotypes.” said Khanderao Kand, coordinator for Hindu Education Foundation.

Both foundations continue to have strong reservations about process violations and the failure to consider a pending list of more than 300 errors identified by the Vedic Foundation.

“We are calling for an independent panel of scholars from within U.S. academia who are Hindu and who specialize in the topics covered in the textbooks,” said Janeshwari Devi, Director of Programs for the Austin based Vedic Foundation. “We do not feel that the edits received a fair and unbiased review,” she continued.

“The scholarly interpretation of Hinduism that is found in the textbooks does not match how Hindus understand and practice their religion,” said David Freedholm, a world religions teaching at Princeton Day School and a practicing Hindu. He is currently co-authoring a textbook about Hinduism in order to overcome some of the misconceptions about the religion.

The accepted changes would remove some derogatory and humiliating statements from the textbooks like the question following the statement that it is said that Hanuman is present whenever the Ramayana is read: “Look around. Do you see any monkeys?” thus implying that Hindus are monkeys. It will change the description of a photo of a Shivalinga that was described as a “Hindu Street Shrine”. Such changes will certainly save Hindu children from some humiliation and embarrassment in their classrooms although much more needs to be done.

The SBE decision to use Varna instead of “caste” in some textbooks that depict the Hindu society in ancient India and for branding Indo-Aryan theories as “controversial” is notable. However, a number of the recommendations in the list are inconsistent and leave factual errors unchanged.

The meeting room was packed with supporters of the foundations’ edits as well as others who believe that Hinduism is a pluralistic religion and needs to be presented more generically in the textbooks. The overflow crowd was seated in adjoining rooms where they watched the proceedings on monitors.

Many parents and students requested the SBE to confirm changes proposed by practicing Hindus. Several youth express their dissatisfaction with what they learned about Hinduism in school. Sameera Mokkarala, a high school student from Palo Alto, stated that in her 6<sup>th</sup> grade class “all that was talked about was the caste system, polytheism and sati.” Chetan Surpur, a 10th-grader in Cupertino, narrated incidents in his classroom where it was said that “Hindus worship talking monkeys and throw widows into fires,”

The public comments continued for almost three hours. Bhaavika Patel, a 10th-grader at Monta Vista High School in Cupertino, said: “Hindu kids are embarrassed about their religion because their classmates make fun of them.” She continued, “How many California students know that there is more to Hinduism than just the caste system?” she asked. “Learning from history is important. But it is the way that it is done - how it is portrayed. We only hear of the negatives, and that makes us feel inferior.”

Kartikeya Katir, a 16-year old student from Davis said that, “God is always spelled with a small ‘g’ when talking about Hinduism and God of other religions is spelled with a capital ‘G’,” and wondered why the scriptures of Hinduism were referred to as ‘myths’ and ‘legends’ while the scriptures of all other religions came from God.

During their presentations, various parents demanded that “equal treatment” or a “level playing field” be provided to Hinduism as is given to other religions. Parents also expressed concerns of out-of-context and backward projections of current social ills on the history of India and Hinduism in ancient world. One HEF spokesperson said, “We sympathize with the sufferings of untouchables and other communities, but it is inappropriate to attribute this present day social ill to Hinduism and in textbooks which teach ancient civilizations.

“Rigid caste divisions of society developed during the medieval period so it is inaccurate to cover it during the period prior to 600 A.D. which is the period covered by the 6<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks,” noted Dr. Shiva Bajpai, an expert on ancient Indian history from Cal State University.

Following the lengthy public hearing, and without any further deliberations, the subcommittee confirmed all the staff recommendations. This appeared to many attendees to be a public show to cover up the board’s previous inadequacies in keeping the approval process transparent.

“We are gravely disappointed that the SBE has once again demonstrated a lack of concern for the protocol and process provided by law,” said Suhag Shukla, legal counsel for Hindu American Foundation who became involved in the process when SBE had invited input from antagonistic scholars. “It is evident that the invitation for public comment was never intended to be considered, as the SBE had already prepared its motion to accept the Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> recommendations before the meeting took place,” she continued. “HAF is continuing to consider legal options.”

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*The Hindu Education Foundation is an educational project of concerned Indians and Hindus in the USA. The foundation, guided by scholars and concerned parents, strives to replace misconceptions about India in general and about Hinduism in particular in the general public as well as in academic settings. HEF seeks to replace misconceptions with correct representation of India and Hinduism in the textbooks used in U.S. classrooms. The Foundation’s website is located at: [www.hindueducation.org](http://www.hindueducation.org)*

*The Vedic Foundation is a non-profit educational foundation based in Austin, TX. Foundation activities include: publishing educational literature on the topics of Hinduism and Indian history; conducting seminars and study groups on various topics related to Hinduism; presenting at Hindu conferences throughout the U.S. and working with school officials to correct the inaccurate and derogatory depiction of Hinduism in K-12 textbooks. The Vedic Foundation is a volunteer based organization that is funded by public donations. The Foundation does not have any political affiliations. The Foundation’s website is located at: [www.thevedicfoundation.org](http://www.thevedicfoundation.org)*

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