

Hindu Education Foundation

<http://www.hinduEducation.org>

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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"One day my son came home from school and announced that he didn't want to be Hindu anymore,"

"Do I have to be a Hindu because you are one? I don't want to be Hindu," he said.

"Why?" I asked him.

"Because Americans hate Hindus," he replied.

"Again I asked why he thought so. He narrated several inconsistencies between what he experienced/learned at home as a Hindu as compared to what he was taught at school. Of course, when there are inconsistencies, to a child, teachers know better than parents and textbooks are correct. "If the textbook is wrong, why is it not challenged, Mom?"

That was the testimony of Mrs. Madhulika Singh, a Hindu mother volunteering for Hindu Education Foundation, narrating her experience in a public hearing of the Curriculum Commission at Sacramento on December 1, 2005.

Erik Kaeding, a Fremont Unified School District schoolteacher, at the same hearing, stated that the commission should adopt the changes suggested by Hindus. He quoted the standards on social science as "Students recognize that interpretations of history are subject to change as new information is uncovered". Hence he requested that new facts, such as evidence disproving the Aryan Migration, be added.

Mrs. Singh, Mr. Kaeding and Prof. Nalini Rao were part of a group of 40 parents, supporters and organizations' representatives led by the Hindu Education Foundation (HEF) pressing for a review of material taught to sixth graders about Hinduism and ancient Hindu history in California textbooks. The parents came from all over California representing different organizations, including the Vedic Foundation, BAPS, Samskrita Bharati, Friends of India Society International, Sindhi Association of South California, Federation of Indo-Americans, Sunnyvale Temple, HSS, Gujarati Samaj, Laxminarayan Temple, National Federation of Indian Associations, and Jain Temple and made strong appeals to the Curriculum Commission to accept the recommendations from Hindu groups.

Mrs. Anjali Patel, a parent from Cupertino and who has been coordinating this effort for almost one year, passionately requested a fair consideration of Hindu views and an impartial process.

Hindu Education Foundation (HEF) (<http://www.hindueducation.org>) has been working to correct misrepresentations about Hinduism and India in 6th grade social science and history textbooks in California. The HEF reviewed ten books by assembling a team of

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experts and academicians. The reviewers found that the treatment of Hinduism and India was biased and encouraged stereotypes.

Dr. Shrinivas Tilak, one of the reviewers, observed that while other religions in the same textbooks were covered from the believer's perspective, Hinduism was covered from the perspective of western academic critics. Most of HEF reviewers saw a deliberate attempt was made to stereotype Hinduism with emphasis on the caste system, implied lack of women's rights and many Gods (rather than one God with many forms), while the sublime principles of Hindu philosophy were totally missing. Moreover, there were many factual errors like "Hindi originated from Arabic which has 19 letters;" "Mahabharat was written before Ramayana" along with various graphical errors like Chandragupta was depicted as a Chinese looking king and Rama-Sita-Laxman were shown in Arabic medieval dress. HEF scholars also objected to the outdated, euro-centric Aryan Invasion Theory tracing the origin of Hinduism outside India and distorting the Hindu timeline and social divisions.

HEF received strong support from more than two dozen California-based organizations and temples. More than 1,000 parents petitioned to support the changes. Many superintendents of school districts as well as teachers supported the initiatives of HEF. HEF joined hands with the Vedic Foundation, a Texas-based organization, which is also involved in this process of correcting the misrepresentations, to collect signatures of more than 6,000 supporters with an online petition.

During a public hearing of the Curriculum Commission on Sept 29-30th, more than 15 Hindu parents representing different organizations supported the changes proposed by HEF. To go through the changes, the Curriculum Commission appointed an ad-hoc committee. On 31st of October 2005, the ad-hoc committee approved most of the changes after consulting with Dr. Shiva Bajpai, a noted scholar and Professor Emeritus from CSU at Northridge, CA. The approvals of ad-hoc committee were submitted to the State Board of Education's for an approval during its meeting on Nov 9th.

During the meeting of State Board on Nov 9th, once again many parents and organizations spoke for the changes proposed by Hindu organizations. However, the SBE also received a letter by a group of biased and ill-informed academicians led by Dr. Witzel. Dr. Witzel's letter did not contain any facts about proposed changes and was written without reading textbooks or reviews or even knowing the Hindu organizations that were involved in these efforts. The commission deferred the matter once again to the Curriculum Commission. The officials of CFIR, unfortunately, consulted Dr. Witzel, Dr. Wolpert and Dr. Heitzmen who were from the same group of academicians who consistently showed an anti-Hindu bias.

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After knowing about anti-Hindu campaign, more than 60 Hindu academicians from throughout the USA and about forty well-known archaeologists from India wrote to the CDE to uphold the decision of the ad-hoc committee accepting most of the changes on Hinduism. Many elected officials also wrote on behalf of Indo-American constituents of their electoral districts.

On Dec 1st 2005, more than 40 Hindus representing various organizations appealed the Curriculum Commission to accept the changes from Hindu organizations. The Curriculum Commission's meeting on Dec 2nd was originally scheduled for just two hours, but the commissioners discussed issue after issue for almost six hours. Unfortunately, the CDE had invited Dr. Heitzman from UC Davis, who had expressed anti-Hindu bias on Nov 9th meeting, as a scholar. Dr. Heitzman was associated with the group of academicians led by Dr. Witzel. Mrs. Anjali Patel referred to this as **“the accuser being the judge and the jury.”**

Khanderao Kand, another HEF coordinator, said, “What we want is a just and fair portrayal of Hinduism and Hindu history from believer's perspective just as the portrayal of all other religions in the textbooks is from a believer's perspective. We want the Commission to uphold the CDE guidelines (Code 60044 (a) and subsection (b)) which state that **“Religions and cultures of minority groups be taught in such a manner as to instill a sense of pride in every child in his or her heritage and to remain secure in any religious beliefs he/she may already have.”** Mr. Kand further noted that it was unfortunate that some academicians from reputed institutions were politicizing the issue simply based on their prejudice against Hindus.

After much deliberation, the Curriculum Commission accepted most of the changes suggested by Hindu parents and gave justice to minorities in California by upholding the principle of equality enshrined in the US Constitution. The Hindu community of California appreciates the hard work and the just decision taken by the fair-minded Commissioners. The HEF considers the current approval as a partial progress, although not a complete success.

Hindu Education Foundation appeals to Hindu parents to be vigilant to make sure that all the approved changes are implemented. HEF requests the parents to take an active role in such future efforts so that our children can grow to be proud to be Hindu-Americans and Americans of Indian heritage.

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