

Date: _____

To,

Thomas Adams, Executive Director

Instructional Quality Commission

Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)

California Department of Education

1430 N Street, Room 3207

Sacramento, CA 95814

Email: hssframework@cde.ca.gov

Cc: hpvoc@yahoo.com

Sub: Treatment of India and Hinduism not in line with the Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content.

Dear Dr. Thomas Adams,

We are writing as Hindu residents of California. We are concerned that the existing account of Hinduism in all the current California approved social science text-books is wanting in accuracy, authenticity and sensitivity. With regard to India, this draft Framework prepared by your predecessors does not reflect the input of experts on India or Hinduism, nor of the community itself.

The core problem we face is both curricular and pedagogical. The treatment of India and Hinduism in California schools is a case study in essentialism, the reduction of a complex historical narrative to a single, supposedly defining aspect—caste. Neither the Standards nor the Narrative offers specifics to address the multifaceted Hindu understanding of God, Gods and worship. Each leaves those details to the textbook writers to address or not. Without proper guidelines for discussing the religion, the one topic of caste dominates the texts, distorts the presentation of Hindu philosophy and leaves no room for any substantive description of the religion itself. The California textbooks do not present Hinduism as a living faith in a historically accurate manner. The result is that our children leave the sixth grade social studies classes on Hinduism ashamed of their religion and Indian heritage, bullied and taunted by some of their classmates and insecure about their own faith and identity. The fact that there is virtually zero opportunity to talk about Hinduism or India after 6th grade (or before that) reinforces this sense of insecurity through rest of the school experience.

Edward Said defined Orientalism as the colonialist presumption that Europeans are the experts and the peoples they colonized are not qualified to define themselves. The 19th century Orientalist construct of India is this: Invading Aryans subjugated the native population, and Aryan brahmin priests imposed their language, religion and the caste system upon them. These curricular issues are hardly limited to India alone. We find the textbooks perpetuate stereotypical and Oriental perceptions of Asians in general as rather strange and exotic. It is a problem when Schools are used as an apparatus to shape young students' minds with colonial perspectives. In many California communities Asians and Hindus of Indian heritage form a significant part of the community. These practices hurt the self-esteem and emotional well-being of our young Californians.

In order for the textbooks to meet the California state standards for evaluating instructional materials for social content, and the *Education Code* Sections 51501, 60040(b), and 60044(a) and (b) for ethnic and cultural groups and Religion, investigating how the differences between Asia and the Europe/US are constructed in textbooks is necessary. What kind of perceptions and positions American readers are encouraged to take up with regard to India? The textbooks should not represent Hindu India to inscribe, maintain, and reinforce colonial messages, through how they present and also through the rather ominous omissions of significant contributions and achievements of Hindu-India in world history.

Sincerely,

(Parent's Name)

(City of Residence / School District)

(e-mail / Phone number)