

views of the majority of the specialists on Indian history as well as those of the majority of mainstream Hindus, and are mainly motivated by ill-concealed political-religious agendas.

"The agenda of these groups proposing these changes is familiar to all specialists on Indian history, who have recently won a long battle to prevent exactly these kinds of changes from finding a permanent place in history textbooks in India," said Professor Michael Witzel, Wales Professor of Sanskrit in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard University, who wrote a letter of protest to the CDE November 8 (**See Interview, Page 16**).

"That is basically mud-slinging to detract attention from what is really being put in the book," countered Suhag Shukla, Legal Counsel for the Hindu American Foundation that worked behind the scenes on bringing about the "long-pending" changes (**See Interview, Page 17**).

At the center of the controversy are an estimated 170 revisions, or edits as the CDE calls them, proposed by the Hindu groups to the Curriculum Development Commission, an advisory body to the State Education Board that looks at books every six years and takes suggestions for improvement from the members of the public.

The process started early this year and was almost nearing completion last month after an Ad-Hoc Committee – consisting of three commission members, one ex-commissioner and a CRP (Content Review Panel expert) – set up by the commission due to the large volumes of edits suggested this year approved many of the edits. The CRP for the Ad-Hoc Panel on Hinduism was Dr Shiva Vajpayee.

Just before they were supposed to be sent to the board, Witzel and co-signatories that included noted historian Stanley Wolpert sent a letter to the board saying that the nature of the revisions were prompted more by the groups' hidden agenda than historical facts. Consequently, Witzel, Wolpert and a third academic were retained by the board and the commission was asked to revisit the changes approved by

the committee.

Some of the edits on which the panel disagreed with the committee action related to women's position in ancient India. For example, the committee approved an edit that said 'men had different duties (*dharma*) as well as rights than women. Many women were among the sages to whom the Vedas were revealed' to replace the current statement in the textbooks that says 'men had many more rights than women.' The panel disapproved of the committee approval of the change and asked to retain the original.

In a dramatic turn of events last week, the commission however, decided to revert back to the original edits as approved by the committee, rejecting most of the Witzel panel amendments to the original committee edits following a vote.

'California Hindus breathed a sigh of relief after the decision as they despaired believing that the commission would accept the Witzel Panel recommendations in their entirety,' said Hindu Press International in a release.

"We are happy because we felt at the Hindu American Foundation that it was really a conflict of interest for the curriculum commission to turn around and hire the very people like Prof Witzel who objected to the changes and as such it was not providing a fair forum for Hindus," Suhag Shukla, Legal Counsel of Hindu American Foundation, told *India Abroad*. "We are happy that they reverted back to the original changes approved by the Ad-Hoc Committee," she said.

But not all agreed with this view. Many academics saw the development as most unfortunate and one that would lead to an educational scandal in California. Dr S Palaniappan, a highly educated technologist-cum Indologist, by his own admission, from Carnegie Mellon said that the positions of these "Hindu extremist groups" demonstrate a deliberate attempt to deny the Indian children as well as the rest of California children a true knowledge of India's history and society.

"I know some supporters of these religious extremists are simultaneously arguing against the implementation of affirmative program in Indian educational institutions," he said. "Whether

one agrees with affirmative action or not, the mere fact that members of these groups passionately argue about it demonstrates caste is very much a factor to be reckoned with in India. They are ashamed to admit caste system is well and alive in India and they do not want the children of California to know it."

He said the same thing goes for the inferior treatment of women. "The law book of Manu says a female should be under the control of a father when she is a child, under the control of husband when the husband is alive, and under the control of son after her husband has died. Is this just a case of women having 'different rights'?" he asked.

If the changes introduced by the Hindu groups are not corrected, he said, Indian American children will not learn the true history of India but only a sanitized version. "They will have a tough time when they come face to face with the reality of India later."

Another academic Dr. Angana Chatterji of CIIS, based in California, said she is disturbed by the attempts of diasporic Hindu nationalist organizations in the US to intervene in the rewriting of California State school textbooks. She said the revisions proposed by groups affiliated with Hindutva such as Hindu Education Foundation (HEF) and Vedic Foundation (VF) assert a nationalistic and mythic history of India as 'social fact.'

"Many of the changes proposed by HEF, VF, and the Ad Hoc committee on the basis of Professor Shiva Bajpai's recommendations dismiss the subjugation of women, dalits, *adivasis* and religious minorities under centuries of Hindu dominance in what is today India, and therefore dismiss their ongoing struggles for justice and self-determination," she told *India Abroad*.

Before the commission took the decision to revert back, over 100 Indian American academics that included Dr Arjun Appadurai, provost and professor of Anthropology, the New School University, Dr Frank Conlon, professor emeritus of history and South Asian studies at the University of Washington in Seattle and Dr Vijay Prasad, associate professor of international studies, Trinity College, wrote to the curriculum commission expressing their concern.