



The Dalit Solidarity Forum In The USA, Inc.

Dr. Ruth Green, President,
California Board of Education
State Board of Education
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Dear Dr. Ruth Green:

I write to you on behalf of the Dalit Solidarity Network concerning the proposed changes by the California State Board of Education to Sixth Grade school textbooks on the subject of Indian history. We at the Dalit Solidarity Network are committed to eradicating the injustices suffered by Dalit communities in India, and are consequently dismayed by the reported attempts of sectarian groups, namely the Hindu Educational Foundation and the Vedic Foundation, to erase the history of caste-based oppression from history textbooks. Widespread discrimination against and brutal oppression of Dalits is very much a contemporary reality in India, a reality with deep roots in our history. Such facts cannot be wished away, and their deletion from any serious history of the Indian subcontinent would be an unconscionable act.

We are certain that in the writing of American and European history the Board of Education would not consider eliminating the history of the role of racism or anti-Semitism in slavery or the Nazi holocaust simply because racist or anti-Semitic organizations suggested it. Likewise, biased groups like the Hindu Educational Foundation and the Vedic Foundation must not be allowed to delete the history of caste-based discrimination in India.

To illustrate what we find objectionable in the proposed changes, let us provide one example each from the suggestions made by the Hindu Educational Foundation and the Vedic Foundation. In a school textbook published by Houghton Mifflin/McDougal Littell, on page 229 the original text states: "Indian society **divides** itself into a **complex structure** of social classes based particularly on jobs. This class structure is called the **caste system**."

The Vedic Foundation suggests the following editorial changes: "This sentence, written in the present tense in a textbook describing ancient history, is out of place. It presumes that the caste system is present in India today. According to the Indian Constitution, under the section, Fundamental Rights, the Right to Equality is guaranteed to all citizens, just as the U.S. has enacted Equal Employment Opportunity Laws to prevent discrimination."

While it is true that caste-based discrimination is illegal under the Indian Constitution, it is patently absurd to imply, as the Vedic Foundation comments do, that caste is not present, not to say widespread, in India today. Indeed, the only way that the promise of India's Constitution, of a discrimination-free India, can ever be realized is through an honest appraisal of the history of caste, not its denial.

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In a second example, in a school textbook published by Prentice Hall, on page 182, it is written: "In modern India, these people are now called Dalits, and treating someone as an untouchable is a crime against the law."

The Hindu Educational Foundation proposes that this be changed as follows: "Replace with "In modern India, treating someone as an untouchable is a crime against the law."

This is a transparent effort: to deny Dalits their rightful place in Indian society, by literally erasing their representation in the textbook's narrative. Such a deletion has no justification whatsoever.

The cases above are merely two examples, but they are representative of the objectionable campaign of the Hindu Educational Foundation and the Vedic Foundation to minimize or even eliminate the historical reality of Dalits in India. This effort cannot be condoned, and we trust that you will do your utmost to ensure a responsible and accurate portrayal of Indian history in all school textbooks

Sincerely,



Jebaraja Singh

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