

# Dalit Freedom Network



In association with OM India/A.I.C.C./SC-ST Federations

Dear Ms. Green and Members of the Board,

December 30, 2005

We are writing on behalf of more than 250 million Dalits and more than 400 million Other Backward Caste people in India to protest the proposed changes to California textbooks by the Vedic Foundation and the Hindu American Foundation. These changes reflect a Hindutva view of Indian history that softens references to the violent truth of caste-based discrimination in India.

The caste system has ruled social interaction in India for more than 3,500 years. The lowest caste, the Dalits, have faced persistent violence at the hands of upper caste people throughout this time, including constant beatings, murder with repercussions, rape, and slavery. The Dalits are manual scavengers, bonded laborers, and wage slaves. For thousands of years, many Dalits were forcibly employed as sweepers, men and women who cleaned latrines by hand. Dalits had to announce their presence as they traveled through a town or village for fear that they might brush against a higher caste person and face a beating or even death. All of this information is well documented by British and Indian writers and historians. Additionally, Dr. Raj, Dr. Ilaiah, and Dr. D'souza testified on this history before the United States House Subcommittee on Human Rights on October 6, 2005.

Caste is at the center of Indian politics and has been a force throughout India's history. Concern for the human rights and economic welfare of Dalits was a cause of major discussions during India's formative years immediately following independence. The issue of a separate Dalit electorate caused Gandhi to "fast unto death" to keep a united India. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, one of a handful of western-educated Dalits (M.A., Ph.D. Columbia University), is a national hero for millions of Dalits and wrote the Indian constitution. Caste politics continue to dominate state and national elections year after year, as Dalits and OBCs make up the wide majority of India's poor.

Ms. Green, the caste system cannot be ignored or whitewashed. The United States has faced its own internal battles over its dark marks in history: slavery, Jim Crow, and the Trail of Tears. In each of these battles, the spirit of equality and democracy that dominates America's educational system has prevailed and the truth has been taught. Do not allow politically-minded revisionists to change Indian history in American textbooks as they have done in India. Allowing Hindutva advocates to rewrite caste history is akin to allowing white supremacists to rewrite the history of slavery in America. If anything, the California Board of Education should lead the world in reporting the truth of caste and its effects and should highlight the work of Dr. Ambedkar, who is barely known outside of India's borders.

As religious and political leaders, we have fought the lasting effects of caste for most of our careers. If the State Board of Education allows this whitewashing of history, it will be yet another blow to the backs of the hundreds of millions of Dalits and OBCs. Please do not allow this to happen.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph D'souza  
President, Dalit Freedom Network

Dr. Udit Raj  
Chairman, All India  
Confederation of Scheduled  
Castes/ Scheduled Tribes

Prof. Kancha Ilaiah  
Political Sciences  
Osmania University