

# MEDIA RELEASE



Act Now for Harmony And Democracy

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Dr. David Mulford  
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Dear Dr. Mulford:

We are scholars and educators in India, who wish to express concern at the proposed changes to the curriculum on ancient India in sixth grade social studies textbooks currently under consideration by the California State Board of Education. The curriculum contains historical inaccuracies, is poorly developed, and presents a biased perspective on ancient India that is unmediated by rigorous scholarship. The California Curriculum Commission accepted inputs and edits from two organisations – the Vedic Foundation and the Hindu Education Foundation. Both of these organizations claim, on spurious grounds, that they represent the Hindu community in the US. In reality, both these organisations are affiliated to the Hindu extremist movement that is also operative in the US. It is shocking that an official body such as the California Curriculum Commission, which is responsible for recommending appropriate curriculum to the State Board of Education, chose to consider suggestions advanced by community organisations that not only have no expertise in history or pedagogy, but worse, represent a dangerous and divisive political agenda. We are also concerned that the changes were approved by an Ad Hoc Committee that included Shiva Bajpai, a Professor Emeritus, History Department, California State University, Northridge, who is a member of the Steering Committee of World Association for Vedic Studies (WAVES), also a Hindu nationalist organization.

As you are perhaps aware, in 2000, secular parties, organisations and educators in India confronted a similar situation in which social studies textbooks were extensively revised to introduce a Hindu nationalist version of Indian history and culture. When the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in New Delhi in 1998, educators sympathetic to the Hindu nationalist agenda were appointed to the National Council for Education and Research Training (NCERT), the apex body that provides national curriculum guidelines. NCERT then introduced changes to the textbooks that presented a distorted version of both ancient and modern India and denied the secular, pluralist and multi-religious character

of India. In addition, they denied the pluralism within Hinduism itself, projecting it instead as a monotheistic religion. Further, the textbooks underplayed sensitive topics such as the caste system and the role and status of women in Indian society, choosing instead to present the problematic aspects of Hinduism in a positive light.

The textbooks were extremely controversial and were out-rightly rejected by eminent historians, educators and secular state governments in the country. The International Religious Freedom reports of 2002, 2003 and 2004 produced by the US Department of State stated that these attempts constituted threats to religious freedom. A similar biased and distorted version of the history of ancient India is under consideration for use in the California district schools. We are alarmed that curriculum that was decided as “toxic” for Indian students and has been rejected by the newly elected secular government in 2005 is under consideration by the California State Board of Education.

Developing curriculum on sensitive topics such as history and religion is indeed a delicate matter and we appreciate the difficult task that the California State Board of Education has before it. We therefore endorse the letter signed by over 130 South Asia faculty members from US universities and colleges that calls for greater transparency in the selection of expert consultants by textbook publishers and the Curriculum Commission, and the involvement of recognised and respected historians of India in the curriculum development and review process. While we respect your right to determine the curriculum for US schools, we want to reiterate our resolve to represent India's past in the proper perspective. It would be indeed very tragic if the efforts to promote multiculturalism in US schools were hijacked by these divisive and sectarian forces.

We respectfully urge you to convey our deep concern to the California State Board of Education, and take necessary steps to ensure that extreme right-wing Hindu organisations do not succeed in influencing the curriculum in US schools.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely

Abha Bhaiya- Social Activist, **Jagori**, Delhi

Aditi Desai-Social Activist, Delhi

Admiral L Ramdas -Retd. Naval Chief, Member, **National Integration Council**

Ali Asghar- Social Activist, **Confederation of Voluntary Associations**

Amit Sengupta- Editor, Commentary & Analysis, **Tehelka**, Delhi

Amitabh Behar-Executive Director, **National Centre for Advocacy Studies**, Delhi

Anand Patwardhan-Filmmaker, Mumbai

Anand Pradhan-Professor, **Indian Institute of Mass Communications**, Delhi

Aneesh Pradhan- Renowned Classical Musician

Anil K.Chaudhary-Social Activist

Anjum Rajabali-Writer

Anurag Chaturvedi-Journalist

Anwar Jamal-Professor, **Jamia Milia Islamia University**, Delhi  
Aparna Sen-Filmmaker, Calcutta  
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A.R. Vasavi, Associate Professor of Education, **National Institute of Advanced Studies**, Bangalore  
Aruna Roy, Member, **National Advisory Council to the Central Cabinet**  
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Digant Oza-Journalist, Gujarat  
Dr John Dayal, Chairman, Board of Governors, Rajdhani College, **University of Delhi**, President, **All India Catholic Union**  
Farha Naqvi-Lawyer  
Farooq Shaikh- Actor  
Ganesh Devy-Social Activist  
Githa Hariharan - Writer  
Harsh Dhobhal-Editor, **Combat Law**  
Harsh Mander-Social Activist  
Harsha Hegde- Physician & Social Activist  
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Priti Verma- Lawyer, **Human Rights Law Network**, Delhi  
Prof. Anu Chenoy-Professor, **Jawahar Lal Nehru University**  
Prof.Arjun Dev- Professor, NCERT (Retd).  
Prof. Kamla Mitra Chenoy-Professor, **Jawahar Lal Nehru University**  
Prof. KN Panikar- Historian  
Rahul Roy-Filmmaker  
Ram Puniyani –Director, **All India Secular Forum**  
Rohit Prajapati-**People’s Union for Civil Liberties**  
Ruchira Gupta-Executive Director, **Apneap Women Worldwide**, Calcutta  
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Shubha Mudgal-Renowned Singer and Artist  
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Sohail Hashmi-Activist, Filmmaker  
Trupti Shah-Social Activist