

California Sixth Grade History Text Book Content Related to Ancient India

Some ideas for consideration

[Important Note: These are my personal comments/ideas. They reflect my understanding of the issues from my attendance at the meetings, newspaper reports, and personal understanding of the Indian society and Hinduism.]

Guiding principles:

- **Children should not be the victim of competing dialogues; the textbooks are meant for impressionable school children in the sixth grade. Hindu students are often ridiculed for their beliefs because of the shoddy treatment of Hinduism and ancient India in text books.**
- **Accuracy from the point of view of “experts” is important**
- **Adherence to California Ed Code**
“1. Adverse Reflection. No religious belief or practice may be held up to ridicule and no religious group may be portrayed as inferior.”
2. Indoctrination. Any explanation or description of a religious belief or practice should be present in a manner that does not encourage or discourage belief or indoctrinate the student in any particular religious belief.”
- **Fair assessment of student knowledge and ability: the presentation in the text books should be standardized so that students reading any textbook be able to answer questions correctly**
- **There is a noticeable disparity between the presentation of Hinduism vis-à-vis other religions with respect to sympathy and empathy.**

Five major issues:

Issue I: Depiction of the status of women

Issue II: Caste System

Issue III: Monotheism

Issue IV: Untouchability

Issue V: Aryan Invasion Theory

Issue VI: Pending Edits

Issue I: Depiction of the status of women

Nature of Problem

<i>VF/HEF View</i>	<i>Harvard et. al View</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Content is completely negative• Details are factually incorrect• This topic is not in standards• Gender equality was not an issue in ancient times. It is a modern concept.• Other religions do not dwell on the inferior aspect of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It an important issue• Status of women was lower in ancient times and should be described as such

Option 1: Eliminate this topic all together because it is not in the standards

Option 2: There are some text books that do reasonable justice to this issue. That text book can serve as a model for other text book authors

Option 3. Rather than focus on ‘status’ of women, deal more with the ‘role’ of women in Hindu history and religion and thus bring it at par with descriptions for other religions.

Suggested text to replace existing text would be: “Like all traditional cultures and religions, women played an important role in ancient India and in the Hindu tradition. The Vedas record the name of more than 30 women sages credited with their authorship. Sometimes women philosophers took part in public debates, or composed poetry. Some Hindu scriptures also talk about women fighting in wars, driving chariots, ruling kingdoms or acting as teachers of grammar, ritual and religion. Hinduism is one of the few major religions where Divinity is also worshipped in a feminine form. Women also often inherited property and used their wealth to construct temples, or works of public utility as recorded in several inscriptions. In their social role, the mother was considered superior to one’s father and God was often likened to one’s mother. Ancient India also had some matriarchal communities.”

Option 4. If CDE does not permit such content change as the process of edit, accept Curriculum Commission recommendation. I think they are very balanced.

Option 5: Balance current negative text with positive statements given in option 2 above.

Issue II: Caste System

Nature of Problem

<i>VF/HEF View</i>	<i>Harvard et. al View</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Text books focus on negatives, reduce Hinduism to evil caste system in a stereotypical manner rather than emphasizing that in the ancient times various castes operated like an organic whole• Negative elements of the caste system are recent phenomenon arising out of the concept of discrimination/inequality• Social ills in other religions are ignored or treated mildly• Positive and fundamental contributions of lower castes to Hindu religion, culture and history are ignored, leading to a one-sided picture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Important topic• Discrimination/inequality exists (although they do not claim specifically inequality in the ancient times)

Option 1: Add balancing positives of the caste system—some key words: caste system provided stability, proverbial tolerance of the Hindu society, generations of craftsmen/artists lead to increased sophistication in arts and crafts, interdependence, ensured livelihood etc.

Option 2: If CDE does not permit such content change as the process of edit, accept Curriculum Commission recommendation.

Issue III: Monotheism

Nature of Problem

<i>VF/HEF View</i>	<i>Harvard et. al View</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindu concept of God is “One God; many forms.” That one God is named “Brahman” when referring to His immanent and transcendent aspects, or as “Bhagawan” when referring to His personal aspect. • The text books mostly lead one to believe that Hindus believe in many Gods, which may be true if explained properly (viz. they are aspects of forms of the same divinity. • Hinduism belief goes beyond monotheism to “Monism” (=every thing that we see and don’t see is in reality Brahman) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindus believe in many gods

Option 1: Hindu notion of Divinity is quite complex, even for some practicing Hindus. I found an excellent description of Hindu Gods and Goddesses written by Professor Gerald James Larson in the *World regions in America: An Introduction*, edited by Jacob Neusner. A copy of the pages from that book are attached. In my opinion, this material will be agreeable to both Western scholars as well as to the practitioners of the faith. This idea can easily be described in a language at the sixth grade level. This description explains well the idea of multiple forms of Divinity for worship while acknowledging the transcendent and immanent Unity underlying all these forms of worship. Typical sixth grade student cannot understand this easily and therefore use in textbooks of ‘gods’ in plural, use of ‘statues’ for icons could be misleading.

Option 2: Use God by default, except when used for ‘deities’ (who are ‘created’ according to Hindu texts). Capitalized ‘God’ should be used when the references are to Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, Devi (Durga, Kali, Parvati), Brahman, Ganesha, Murugan (or Skanda). For Agni, Vayu, Indra, Soma, Pushan, Brihaspati, Mitra, Varuna, Aryama, use the word ‘deity’. [This could be less controversial, but would create some headache for publishers].

Option 3: Accept Curriculum Commission recommendations.

Issue IV: Untouchability

Nature of Problem

<i>VF/HEF View</i>	<i>Harvard et. al View</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice of untouchability before 600 AD was marginal (see note 1 below) • Text book back project current practices-- an excessive, anachronistic and obsessive focus. • For other religions, text books gloss over their problems such as religious persecution of infidels and pagans, slavery, etc. • Want the word “Dalit” removed from text books. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want current injustices reflected in the text books

Note 1: The Untouchables (Chandalas) were a very small, marginal group (that also included degraded Brahmins) who were characterized by a lifestyle of eating unclean food and living unclean lifestyles – simply put they were people who were ostracized by the society for engaging in extreme acts contrary to the dharma. Even Brahmins if they engaged in forbidden acts were condemned as chandaalas. Chandaalas are condemned uniformly in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu scriptures. Standard works such as R S Sharma's '*Shudra in Ancient India*' (2002) argue that the Chandaalas were a small community living at the margins of settled communities due to them being ostracized for their habits. Due to their lifestyle (or what one can deduce from their descriptions in Hindu-Jain-Buddhist texts), they were considered beasts in human form. Hindu scriptures are completely silent about this practice, indicating that it is a social custom and not a religious practice. Mahatma Gandhi himself used the Hindu scriptures to fight this evil.

Option 1: Only textbook (Prentice Hall) uses the word ‘Dalit.’ Ask Prentice Hall to remove this word for consistency with other textbooks/VF edits. Remove negative pictures of scavengers etc.

Option 2: Remove all references to untouchability. Since evils associated with other religions (slavery, ill-treatment of infidels and pagans) are not taught in grade seven as religious features, there is no need to mention untouchability in grade six. What is the sixth-grade student expected to gain from this negative treatment?

Option 3 (less preferable): Balance the negative descriptions with positive sentences like: “Ancient Hindu society was somewhat unique in abolishing slavery and forced labor. Although some people were ostracized from the society as ‘untouchables’ due their following professions that were considered ‘dirty’, it was only in much later centuries that this practice actually took significant proportions. Authoritative Hindu scriptures do not advocate this practice at all, and this argument was used by Mahatma Gandhi to fight this practice in modern times. Historical records show that many people who would now be classed as ‘untouchables’ actually played a very esteemed role in the Hindu tradition. They

compiled and edited a majority of the Hindu scriptures (Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata, Ramayana) as we have them today, and also gave rise to powerful ruling dynasties that warded off foreign invasions for several centuries. Many sages such as Veda Vyasa, Matanga, Valmiki who belonged to these communities are considered the greatest Hindu saints. Rich members of this class often financed construction of massive Hindu temples.”

Issue V: Aryan Invasion Theory

Nature of Problem

<i>VF/HEF View</i>	<i>Harvard et. al View</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No scientific evidence available so far from archaeology, genetics, archaeo-metallurgy, astronomical references, skeletal anthropology, literature etc, that substantiates either theory. • Various Aryan theories have a link to dangerous hate ideologies and are totally unattested in the Hindu tradition. • Latest Books even contest linguistic evidence and call it inconclusive (e.g., Laurrie Patton and Edwin Bryant, The Indo-Aryan Controversy, Routledge, 2005) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Base the theory on linguistic evidence

Option 1: Accept all Hindu edits with additions by CC that replace Invasion with Migration and also add that the latter is also just a theory.

Origin of Hinduism should be delinked to Aryan theories. Current textbooks overemphasize on Vedas which annoys some people from South India. Therefore a neutral description should be used:

“The Vedic traditions fused with other spiritual traditions of the Indian subcontinent to give rise to the colorful mosaic of Hinduism. Hinduism also absorbed some external influences. This is why there is such a great variety of beliefs, practices and customs. And two thousand years ago, this religion also started spreading to other parts of the world such as Indonesia, where we still find Hindu communities as on the island of Bali. Hinduism does not have a historical founder, it did not develop a centralized hierarchy of priests and its origin is lost in great antiquity. Most Hindus have always been Hindu, and have never converted from any other religion. Therefore, Hindus believe that their religion should be called ‘Sanatana Dharma’ or the ‘eternal’ faith which is a gift from God to human beings. Hinduism has two sacred languages- Sanskrit and Tamil, and its sacred texts are written in numerous regional languages.” [The last sentence will satisfy South Indians and many academics who allege north Indian bias in these textbooks].

Option 2: Textbooks should say the following: “The Aryan Invasion Theory has been given up due to lack of evidence from archaeology or literature. In its place, the Aryan Migration theory has been proposed by historians. But now latest evidence from genetics and skeletal anthropology disputes that there was any large scale migration from Central Asia into India. Therefore, even though the parent of Sanskrit may be linked to languages in Europe and Central Asia, it remains uncertain as to when and in which direction the borrowals occurred. The Vedas contain references to the Saraswati river which nourished a flourishing culture. But it appears that this river dried out in the course of time and the north western part of India was abandoned by many people. The center of gravity of Indian civilization then moved eastwards to the plains of Ganges, which became a holy river. When this happened is uncertain, but most scientists say that this may have happened 4000 years ago at a time when the Indus Civilization was also collapsing.” [This will satisfy linguists like Michael Witzel, and also HEF/VF]. Again, delink the

origin of Hinduism to this theory due to lack of evidence and contradictory statements
recent scholarship.

ISSUE VI: PENDING EDITS

Nature of Problem: About 25 pending edits of HEF and more than 250 pending edits of VF were dismissed by CDE though they were submitted on time, due to the negative impact of Michael Witzel's letter. All these edits are merely concurring edits, and the organizations are adamant on pursuing these.

Option: Since these are merely pending edits and there is no procedural or academic reason for rejecting them, CDE/SBE should just include them into the final draft of edits. No one is objecting to the inclusion of these edits.

Major recommendations

I. SBE should be give specific directions to publishers about:

1. Adherence to Education Code 6044 sections a. and b.
2. Accuracy criteria on the issues of
 - (a) Aryan Invasion Theory
 - (b) Role of women
 - (c) Caste system
 - (d) Hinduism and Monotheism
 - (e) Untouchability was a marginal practice in ancient India

II. Pending edits should be considered by SBE.

III. The integrity of the role of the curriculum commission must not be compromised.

Their opinion must be given due importance in case there is a conflict of opinion between the other two contending parties.

IV. In future, care should be taken that the books considered for adoption by CDE do not privilege other traditions over Indic and Hindu traditions.