



ESHI

## Educators' Society for the Heritage of India

Date: December 1, 2005

Subject: California 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Sciences and History Textbook Adoption – 2005

**To: Members of the Curriculum Commission, California.**

ESHI has submitted a letter to the California Board of Education with more than fifty signatories who are practicing Hindu academics in the US universities and around the world. ESHI has been in communication with your department and is monitoring the developments.

We are very concerned with the events following the November 9, 2005 meeting of the Board. We are concerned that the Board has violated the state mandate for transparency in the review/adoption process. Also, we find that none of the signatories to the petition submitted by Harvard Professor Michael Witzel are experts in ancient Indian History or Hinduism, as claimed by him. A cursory check on their credentials provides enough information to disprove his claim, see Attachment A. We consider this an attempt by Prof. Witzel to dupe the CDE. The petition also mocks Hindus who had suggested textbook edits, with the term 'Hindutva' (without explaining what it is, but implying that it is a pejorative label) and takes issue with the changes in textbooks during the last decade in India. Please see the Supreme Court of India's verdict on what is 'Hindutva' and on the challenges to the textbook issues, in Attachment (B).

Further, the Board has allowed individuals who seek to undermine Board's own guidelines on matters of cultural sensitivity. The **Board's Guidelines stipulate that religions and cultures of minority groups be taught in such a manner as to instill a sense of pride in every child in his or her heritage.** This makes it imperative that the process of writing textbooks is guided by sympathetic scholars and not by biased and hostile ones. Unfortunately, the Board has allowed academics who are not experts in Indian History or Hinduism to overturn the comments of the Hindu community and academics who are experts in Indian History and Hinduism and most importantly are practicing Hindus.

We are aware that the California Department of Education (CDE) is meeting with the Publishers on Dec 14<sup>th</sup> to communicate changes and edits. Considering the time constraints, we would like to hear from the Department of Education on our concerns below:

1. Edits of other traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) were reviewed by experts who follow the tradition. However, CDE has engaged academicians who are not experts in Indian History or Hinduism, and are not practicing Hindus; on the contrary, who ridicule Hindus and Hinduism, and fail to appreciate the Hindu concepts in the absence of any personal experience or context.

Moreover, as petitioners, they are inimical to Hindu interests, and thus they have a conflict of interest in advising the CDE in this matter. CDE should have found independent, third party experts to advise it.

- a. Prof. Witzel is a professor of Sanskrit and not Indian History. His interpretations of Sanskrit texts have been found (intentionally) wrong to suit his conclusions. He has also been found to have manufactured evidence to prove his point.
  - b. Prof. Stanley Wolpert is a controversial historian; his work has been banned in the past. He is actively involved in South Asian politics, but he is not an expert on Hinduism, or Indian History.
  - c. Prof. Heitzman is not an expert in Indian history or Hinduism (He is not an expert on any thing). He has published a book and we would like to draw your attention to it. The book is available on line.
2. A large number of academicians and experts from various fields related to the subject matter have communicated with CDE but it appears that their inputs have been ignored.
  3. CDE has accepted the old “Linguistic method” of interpreting history which has been discredited by experts in the field in light of more recent advances in the “Scientific methodology” including dating technology, satellite imagery, and genetic analysis.

**ESHI does not want to see any biased representation or stereotyping of Indian heritage that will prejudice against Hindus in the minds of ALL school children.**

**With the current version of textbooks, Hindu, Jain, Sikh children are ashamed of their Indian heritage when they study the chapter on India.** Prof Witzel and his cohorts like to continue peddling Euro-centric, colonial, Imperialistic, Neo-Nazi accounts of Indian history and Hinduism in textbooks. **This will harm the intellectual development and self-esteem of children from families who follow these traditions.** They may find what is taught in the schools, through inaccurate textbooks, is at variance from the practices followed in their own homes and community. This is contrary to the Board’s Equal Opportunity guidelines “**Portray accurately and equitably**” and “**Instill a sense of pride in every child in his/her heritage**”.

**What ESHI is striving to accomplish for better education of ALL children:**

When Hindu faith, culture and traditions are taught in schools, **Hindu self-understanding should be communicated. Further, the essential elements of Hinduism such as the divinity in all human beings, other beings, and in nature, the practices of yoga and meditation** (and their scientifically proven benefits), **and the concepts of diversity, pluralism and tolerance**, as in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The whole world is One Family) must be explored.

ESHI demands that the edits and changes made after November 9, 2005 by academics inimical to the Hindu tradition should be rejected and the recommendations made before November 9 by the CRP should be followed, just as the recommendations of other experts hired for the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities have been accepted by the Board.

Respectfully,



Ved P. Chaudhary, Ph.D.  
President  
Educators Society for the Heritage of India

## Correspondence and evidence provided by ESHI

1. ESHI letter dated Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 from Dr Piyush Agrawal.
2. ESHI letter dated Nov 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005, **with more than 50 co-signatories** from academia.
3. **Indian Archeological Society** letter dated Nov 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005 (via, email, fax as well as courier service). **The letter provides scientific and academic evidence.**
4. **Prof. J.S. Rajput**, Former President of National Council for Educational Research, India, detailing the procedure of textbook adoption in India,
5. **Indian Archeological Society** letter dated Nov 29th, 2005 (via, email). The letter provides excerpts from scientific/academic evidence.

## Attachment A

### Information about many of the signatories of the November 8, 2005 Petition letter sent to the CBE by Prof Michael Witzel of Harvard University.

The information on many of the signatories provided below proves that Prof. Witzel has violated ethics and has been dishonest about his statement in the letter: 'I'm writing on behalf of long list of world specialists on ancient India – reflecting mainstream academic opinion..'

The following list of signatories to his letter shows that a) majority of the signatories are NOT 'world specialists' b) Several of them are not academics at all c) A large number of them are linguists, especially Sanskrit professors and not historians, or archeologists expert in India d) Most of them belong to the same group which Prof. Witzel belongs to e) several signatories have Marxist and other political affiliation f) Many of them espouse controversial theories about South Asia.

**Michael Witzel**, Professor of Sanskrit, Harvard University (not an expert in ancient Indian History, or Hinduism).

**Steve Farmer** is a self-employed historian, and he is considered by many as an 'academic outsider'. His theories, especially about Harappan scripts have been discredited by many academics including two signatories of this letter: J. Mark Kenoyer and Asko Parpola.

<http://www.gameszoo.org/voynichmonkeys/viewmsg.php?gr=1&num=922&root=922>

**Romila Thapar**: Most controversial in India and well-known as a Marxist ideologue of the Communist Party of India. Also she has limited knowledge of Indian classical languages including Sanskrit which is a serious flaw.

<http://www.rediff.com/us/2003/apr/25us1.htm>

<http://www.indiastar.com/venkat1.html>

<http://india.indymedia.org/en/2003/05/4747.shtml>

<http://www.the-hindu.com/fline/fl1720/17200150.htm>

**Shereen Ratnagar** Former Marxist professor from JNU, Delhi.

**S Palaniappan**, An alumnus of IIT-Madras and holds a Ph.D in Engineering from the University of Pennsylvania Thesis: *"Profit-Maximizing Supply for a Scheduled Urban Transportation Carrier*. He Works for Minute Maid company in Houston; not in any university

**Homi Bhabha**: Professor of **English** and American Literature and Language

**Parimal G. Patil** Assistant Professor of the Study of Religion and of **Sanskrit** and Indian Studies in *Faculty of the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies* Harvard University

**Madhav Deshpande**: Prof. of **linguistics**, Sanskrit and Prakrit languages, U. of Michigan

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**Patricia Donegan:** Associate professor, **linguistics**, University of Hawaii

**Garrett Fagan:** Associate Professor of **Roman History**. Current or Recent Graduate Courses Public Leisure and Mass Entertainment in the Roman Empire

**Robert Goldman:** Professor of **Sanskrit**, UC Berkely

**Sally Goldman:** Professor of **Sanskrit**, UC Berkley

**Pochi Huang:** Harvard Alumnus (dept. of Sanskrit), assistant professor of **Linguistics** in the Graduate School of Religious Studies at National Chêng-Ch-ih University in Taipei, Taiwan.

**Joanna Kirkpatrick:** Professor Joanna Kirkpatrick Professor of Anthropology from Bennington College, Vermont in 1994, she has conducted fieldwork in South Asia on **medical anthropology, folk art and gender studies**.

**Agnes Korn:** 1996-98 woman employee at a dictionary project in Graz, **graduation study in comparative linguistics** in Frankfurt A. M., since May 1998 scientific woman employee and/or female assistant at Institut for comparative linguistics etc. in Frankfurt A. M.; **Web witch of the Feministi party the MRS.** ([www.feministischepartei.de](http://www.feministischepartei.de)). **Hiroshi Marui:** Professor Indian **Philosophy and Buddhist Studies**, University of Tokyo, Japan

**Hideaki Nakatani:** Profeesor, **Philosophy**, Tokyo University of foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan.

**J. Patrick Olivelle:** patrick Olivelle has been the Chair of the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin since 1994, where he is the **Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Religions**.

**Sudha R Shenoy:** Faculty of Business and Law School of Policy University of Newcastle, Australia

**Lars Martin Fosse:** Used to be a commercial translator, a **Part-time teacher** at the University of Oslo. Ph.D. (Doctor artium) in **Sanskrit**.

**Muneo Tokunaga:** Prof. Indology, University of Kyoto, Japan. Specialty, **Indian Epics**

**Kalpana Desai:** Director of the museum. PRINCE OF WALES MUSEUM OF WESTERN INDIA. Specialty Arts.

**Wim van Binsbergen** **African History professor** (nothing to do with India) university of leiden

**Shingo Einoo:** University of Tokyo Prof of Indian Studies, University of Tokyo , Japan, Specialty – **Hindu Rituals**

**Sheldon Pollock** Professor of Sanskrit and South Asian Studies at Columbia Univ., formerly George V. Bobrinsky Distinguished Service Professor of **Sanskrit** and Indic Studies at the University of Chicago.

**Georg von Simson** Prof. University of Oslo Department of East European and Oriental Studies The classical culture of Ancient India; **Sanskrit literature, esp. the popular epics** (Mahabharata) and Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts from Central Asia, Sanskrit language and literature.

**Frank Southworth university of Pennsylvania** Frank Southworth Emeritus Prof. UPenn, **South Asia Language Resource Center. Research: Hindi, Marathi, Nepali**

**David Stampe** University of Hawaii David Stampe Associate **Professor, Linguistics** , University of Hawai‘

**Alexander Vovin** university of Hawaii Alexander Vovin Prof. Dept. of **East Asian languages and literature**, Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa Field: **Central Asian Linguistics in general, Japanese, Korean**

**Claus Peter Zoller, Prof. Hindi Section**, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, Univ. of Oslo, Norway. Richard Meadow Harvard

**Don Ringe** Prof. Linguistics, UPenn **Historical linguistics; Indo-European linguistics** (Greek, Tocharian, Germanic).

**Prof. Rajesh Kochhar** Received his M.Sc. (Physics) in 1967 and Ph.D. (Astrophysics) in 1973, both from Panjab University, Chandigarh, where he also served as a lecturer for a brief period. The next 25 years (1974-1999) he spent at Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bangalore, becoming a professor in 1991. He was the Director of NISTADS from 1999 to 2005.

**Dwijendra Narayan Jha, Professor of History at Delhi University – his controversial book ‘Holy Cow: Beef in Indian Dietary Traditions’** caused lot of turmoil in India for his insensitivity towards the sentiments of the Hindus and Jains who considers beef eating as a sin. The Jain Seva Samiti in Hyderabad petitioned the city civil court, pleading that the book be banned for causing injury to the religious sentiments of their community. On August 7, an injunction was issued restraining the author and the publisher from the printing, sale and distribution of the book. By then a number of copies were in the market. Ghuman Mal Lodha, former Member of Parliament and now chairman of the Animal Welfare Board, called for administrative action against the book and its author.

**Dominik Wujastyk** Senior Research Fellow, Wellcome Trust Centre for the **History of Medicine** at University College of London, Honorary Lecturer in the Department of **Anatomy and Developmental Biology** Research Associate in the Department of South Asian Languages and Cultures at the School of Oriental and African Studies

**Hartmut Scharfe**, Prof. Emer., Vedic and Indo-European Studies, UCLA Author: Education in ancient India; **Professor of Sanskrit** (emeritus) at the University of California, Los Angeles.

**Harry Falk: Philosophy** Prof., Freie Universitaet Berlin Institut fuer Indische Philologie und Kunstgeschichte Berlin

**Boris Oguibenine** university of Strasbourg France Essays on Vedic and Indo-European Culture. Autohor of a series in **Linguistics**.

**Phyllis Herman:** Phyllis Herman is assistant professor of religious studies at California State University, Northridge

**Dr Arlo Griffiths:** Dr Arlo Griffiths (formerly Department of Indology, Leiden University, now at the Faculty of Religious Studies, University of Groningen)

**Jonathan Mark Kenoyer:** Dr. J.M. Kenoyer is A Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin Madison

**Asko Parpola:** Professor of Indology / South Asian Studies, Institute for Asian and African Studies, University of Helsinki

**Maurizio Tosi**, Prof. of Archaeology, Univ. of Bologna, Italy

**Special note:** Madhav Deshpande (Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor), Harry Falk (Freie Universitaet Berlin), Boris Oguibénine (University of Strasbourg) and Asko Parpola (University of Helsinki) are members of the editorial board of EJVS journal of which Michael Witzel is Editor.-in-Chief. <http://users.primushost.com/~india/ejvs/>

## Appendix B

### 1. Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India in a judgment delivered by Justice J.S. Varma - about the term 'Hindutva':

"These Constitution Bench decisions, after a detailed discussion, indicate that no precise meaning can be ascribed to the terms 'Hindu', 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduism'; and no meaning in the abstract can confine it to the narrow limits of religion alone, excluding the content of Indian culture and heritage. It is difficult to appreciate how in the face of these decisions, the term 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduism' per se, in the abstract, can be assumed to mean and be equated with narrow fundamentalist Hindu religious bigotry, or be construed to fall within the prohibition in subsections (3) and/or (3A) of section 123 of the Representation of the People Act...

"It is a fallacy and an error of law to proceed on the assumption that any reference to Hindutva or Hinduism in a speech makes it automatically a speech based on Hindu religion as opposed to other religions or that the use of the word Hindutva or Hinduism per se depicts an attitude hostile to all persons practising any religion other than the Hindu religion... and it may well be that these words are used in a speech to emphasise the way of life of the Indian people and the Indian cultural ethos...There is no such presumption permissible in law contrary of the several Constitution Bench decisions."

### 2. Prof. Witzel also alleged that textbooks were doctored by the right wing Hindu Government in India. The Communist party of India went to the Supreme Court of India to challenge the changes in the textbooks. Here is the judgment of the Supreme Court of India.

#### Details of the Supreme Court of India judgment on alleged 'Saffronization' of history Textbooks in India

The matter was heard by the Bench consisting of Mr. Justice M. B. Shah, Mr. Justice D. M. Dharmadhikari and Mr. Justice H.K. Sema. **The Bench dismissed the Writ Petition** (Civil) No.98 of 2002 and in the Judgment delivered on September 12, 2002 all the three Honorable Judges are largely unanimous in their findings although they have given separate judgments with minor divergence in approach. The findings and observations on the major contentions of the petitioner are given below:

#### 1. **On non-consultation with Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) on NCFSE-2002**, Mr. Justice Shah held:

*"The contention of learned Senior Counsel for the petitioner that as CABE is not consulted on it and its approval was not sought by Govt. before framing the NCFSE-2000, the said policy requires to be set aside, cannot be accepted."*

#### 2. **On the allegation that National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) and the value-based syllabus framed there under, which prescribes religious education, violates the Article 28 of the Indian Constitution and its secular character:** While dismissing the petition, Justice Shah observed:

*"This National Curriculum is prepared on the basis of report submitted to the Parliament on 22nd Jan., 1999 by the S. B. Chavan Committee which was appointed by the Parliament in 1996. The Report of the Committee is based on earlier reports submitted by various Committees, namely, the Radha Krishanan Commission (1948-49), Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy of Education (1986), Ramamurthi Commission (1990), CAGE Committee on Policy (1992), Planning Commission Core Group on Value Orientation of Education on (1992), which have highlighted the urgent need for making the educational system value-based."*

*He further held:*

*"It appears to be wrong presumption and contention that knowledge of different religions would bring disharmony in the society. On the contrary, knowledge of various religious philosophies is material for bringing communal harmony as ignorance breeds hatred, because of wrong notions, assumption preaching and propaganda by misguided interested persons. "*

*He further held:*

*"In our view, the word 'religion' should not be misunderstood, nor contention could be raised that as it is in the national policy of education, secularism would be at peril."*

3. **On the contention that Sanskrit language is imposed in an unjustified manner,** the judgment held that the allegation was wholly wrong. It was observed that:

*"We entertain no doubt in our mind that teaching of Sanskrit alone as an elective subject can in no way be regarded as against secularism."*

*It was further held:*

*"We, therefore, conclude by saying that in view of importance of Sanskrit for nurturing our cultural heritage, because of which even the educational policy has high lighted the need of study of Sanskrit; making alone, as an elective subject, while not conceding this status to Arabic or Persian would not in any way militate against the basic tenet of secularism. There is thus not merit in the objection...."*

4. **The contention regarding inclusion of Vedic Astrology in NCFSE was found to be baseless.** There was no mention of Vedic Astrology in the Curriculum Framework. The submissions in this regard by the Petitioners were summarily dismissed by the Honorable Court.
5. **The allegation regarding imposition of Vedic Mathematics is equally wild and baseless:** The 128 page NCFSE document mentions just one line about Vedic Mathematics:

*"The students may, be encouraged to enhance their computational skill by the use of Vedic Mathematics".*

It CDEs not in any way suggest imposition of Vedic Mathematics.

6. **It had been contended by the Petitioners that Hindu Festivals have been treated as National Festival.** But the Court found it to be a distortion "*as the curriculum book nowhere says so.*"
7. **The petitioners also contended that there is also distortion of version of history** by using the words "*Mughals invaded the country*" as against "*Britishers conquered the country.*" This argument was so frivolous that the Honorable Court just did not consider it. It held that:

*"The aforesaid submission CDEs not deserve any consideration hence rejected."*