



**Hinduism Today**  
**Kauai's Hindu Monastery**

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**TO:** Ruth Green, President  
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November 27, 2005

Thomas Adams, Director  
Fax: (916) 319-0172

**RE: Hindu View on California History Social Science Adoption**

Dear President Green, Director Adams and Board Members:

*Hinduism Today*, which is the world's foremost Hindu publication, has followed the textbook issue for many years. In 1991, in an article dealing with the California books, I wrote, "Aside from one of the six California textbooks, Hinduism does not get very good treatment. It is presented as an outdated, caste-ridden, priest-dominated 3,000-year accretion of beliefs and customs. There is little mention of Hinduism's sophisticated theological systems, exquisite devotional practices or high-powered techniques of yoga to reach the spiritual heights. Christianity is given far more space and its tenets presented in a more appealing manner than any other religion. In addition there remains the powerful undercurrents of ethnocentric thinking, that somehow American and European history is more important than other history." You will note the similarity between that 14-year-old evaluation and what you are hearing in 2005.

As you can see from the letter from Prof. Michael Witzel of Harvard University, there is a vast disconnect between ordinary Hindus concerned with what children in California are taught about Hinduism and the non-Hindu scholars who study our religion and Indian history. Of the some four dozen scholars who co-signed his letter, just eight have Indian names, and an unknown number of those eight are practicing Hindus. This letter highlights the problem Hindus have faced for the last two hundred years: the scholastic community which studies our religion is almost entirely non-Hindu, and often hostile to Hinduism. We believe in the review of the Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Islamic sections of these books you are largely, if not entirely, hearing from scholars who are of the faith, and not secular outsiders.

Fortunately, you have Dr. Shiva Bajpai, who is well known to us, as a consultant. You may be interested to know that in the original e-mail sent to Dr. Witzel bringing the California text issue to his attention, Dr. Bajpai was referred to as "very religious." It was not meant as a compliment, but is an indication of hos-

tility toward Hindu religion. We understand the Board is going to bring in another consultant on the Hindu issues. We specifically recommend that this person be a practicing Hindu, and not an outsider to our faith. This will give Hinduism representational parity with the other religions.

### **The California Framework**

The texts under evaluation, of course, reflect the California Framework for World History and Geography: Ancient Civilizations, and that Framework has problematic aspects. There are some very questionable lines of advice, such as “Buddhism, a great civilizing force...” Well, that’s like saying the Protestant reformation was a great civilizing force for Europe, something Protestants would agree with and Catholics wouldn’t. The major lapse, however, is that for Judaism, the theological aspects are detailed: Old Testament, stories of creation, Noah, Psalms, Proverbs, etc., and for Christianity, stories from the New Testament so “the students will learn about those teachings of Jesus that advocate compassion, justice and love for others.” For Hinduism, there is only one text mentioned, the *Bhagavad Gita*, with no mention of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* which are the highest scriptural authority for the religion. These great works— which most certainly also advocate compassion, justice and love for others—remain unknown to the students.

The Framework allows for inclusion of our scriptures, for it states right in the chapter introduction to include “the literature produced by their finest poets, narrators and writers.” Later in the content standards, 6.5, “Sanskrit literature” is mentioned, but again, nothing specific. Since it is not spelled out, the textbook writers make no effort to include our primary scriptures and hence broader theology. The result is the students learn Christian, Jewish and, to some extent, Buddhist theology and little of Hindu theology. A better focus on our revealed scriptures will ameliorate this shortcoming.

### **The Aryan Invasion**

Then there is the one aspect of Indian history that has gotten a lot of attention in this textbook process: the Aryan Invasion. In most respects, the textbooks and even the Framework are out of date. In the recent book, *The Indo-Aryan Controversy*, edited by Edwin Bryant and Laurie Patton, Dr. Witzel himself in his chapter refers to, “The old-nineteenth-century idea of a massive invasion of outsiders... Presently we do not know how large this particular influx of ... outsiders was. It can have been relatively small...” Likely none of the scholars who signed Dr. Witzel’s letter hold that there was a violent conquest of Indus Valley by Aryan warriors, yet this concept still shows up in the text books.

Dr. Witzel is very much involved in the Aryan Invasion issue. What he argues, with considerable expertise and largely on linguistic evidence, is that speakers of an Indo-European language entered India sometime around 1500 bce, and these people were the authors of the *Vedas*. By some means, their Indo-European language displaced whatever language was spoken in Indus Valley. This influx of a language is quite a different phenomenon from an actual conquest.

However, even this revised theory has problems. Dr. Witzel explains one problem himself in the same book—“The obvious continuity of local cultures in South Asia, as prominently seen in archeology, is another matter.” He then states that a clear-cut “Aryan” archeological site “has not yet been discovered.” In other words, despite the compelling linguistic evidence, there is no physical proof of an influx of outsiders with the culture described in the *Rig Veda*.

The second problem with the invasion scenario is genetic. In 2003 in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, a professional publication, 18 geneticists led by Dr. Toomas Kivisild of the Estonian Biocenter, reported their research on the genetics of India. They specifically investigated whether there was evidence of gene flow from central Asia into India. Their conclusion: “The Indian tribal and caste populations ... have received limited gene flow from external regions since the Holocene (8,000 years before the present to 1.2 million years before the present). In other words, they found no genetic evidence of an invasion 3,500 years ago.

In a lecture in 1999, “The Aryan Question Revisited,” Romila Thapar, whom Dr. Witzel refers to as “India’s most famous historian,” concluded, “The Aryan question is a very complex question, and I hope you are all absolutely staggered by the complexity and reeling under all the complexities that I have pointed out to you. So please, do not take one version as ‘the’ version.”

So why does this Aryan Invasion scenario matter to Hindus? Does it matter to Jews that the Exodus really happen? Does it matter to Christians that Jesus really lived? It does matter, obviously, and one book was rejected by the Board, we understand, for the reason that a historian was cited as questioning whether the Exodus ever happened. The Jews objected to doubting a central event in their history, one that is important to their theology. Hindus already have two histories of India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which traditionally are dated back thousands of years. If an Aryan Invasion occurred, or even if Sanskrit came from outside India, then these two histories have to be relegated entirely to myth. We are not suggesting these traditional histories supplant sound scientific study, but it is useful to understand how most ordinary Hindus in India look at our history. We do not want our traditional history to be dismissed as myth at the recommendation of Dr. Witzel and his supporting group of scholars. If that is to happen, then the same group can be polled for their opinion on the Exodus and the historicity of Jesus. I think you will find they also hold both to be myths. If a representative of the group attends one of your meetings, you should ask these questions.

### **Our Plea and Recommendations**


Finally, we object to the tone of Dr. Witzel’s letter, that categorizes anyone who objects to these texts as a “danger to religious freedom.” Yes, in India, there are political issues over India history, but we can assure you that the most non-political Hindu parent in this country is shocked by the presentation of Hinduism in these books. The children themselves are shocked. Edwin Bryant warns of such a tone, “I have expressed concern at what I have termed a type of Indological McCarthyism creeping into areas of Western, as well as certain

Indian, academic circles, whereby anyone reconsidering the status quo of Indo-Aryan origins is instantly and a priori dubbed a nationalist, communal or even worse, a Nazi.”

We realize the Board is only able to make relatively small changes to texts which in some cases need complete overhaul. We also realize that at this time you are not reconsidering the Framework, which is where real improvements could be made. We don't expect you to adjudicate a scholastic disagreement involving the leading scholars of the world. At the same time, we do request that our faith be treated fairly, with the same respect and comprehensiveness of other faiths. And to the extent this can be done with small changes recommended by the Hindu representatives, please, let it be done.

Yours in peace.

**HINDUISM TODAY**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arumugaswami". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small dot above the final 'i'.

Sannyasin Arumugaswami  
Managing Editor