



California Curriculum Body Acknowledges Reality of Caste System; Hindu American Foundation concedes on word “Dalit”

Powerful testimonies from diverse interfaith coalition members carry the day on caste and Sikhism; Coalition vows to continue the struggle against Islamophobia, and for recognition of all South Asian identities.

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SACRAMENTO -- South Asian Histories for All (SAHFA), an interfaith and inter-caste coalition of 24 organizations across California and the U.S., thanked California’s Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) for its efforts to ensure a fair and inclusive history and social science framework. In particular, the SAHFA coalition commended the IQC for voting to retain many of the edits to the California curriculum framework that reflected rigorous historical scholarship from the South Asia Faculty Group (SAFG).

The curriculum frameworks for California students are deliberated upon in public by the IQC, the advisory body to the State Board of Education, allowing for comments from any interested individual or group. The IQC during its May 19 public hearing, listened to **powerful testimonies from the 100-strong SAHFA coalition, urging the commissioners to ensure that Hindu nationalist revisionism does not extend to California textbooks.**

Edits pertaining to Dalits and caste: Edits proposed by the Hindu American Foundation-led alliance—including the Uberoi Foundation, a funder—not only sanitized the history of caste, but also erased the name of the Dalit community. During the hearing, **the IQC affirmed that the caste system is rooted in Hinduism, that caste is based on birth, and that caste groups or ‘jatis’ are not “self-governing” in a way that implies self-determination and social mobility across caste lines.** “There is no way that one would self-govern yourself into oppression,” said Thenmozhi Soundararajan during the public comment portion of

the meeting. Testimonies from six Shri Guru Ravidass Sabhas helped tip the debate, with speakers affirming the violence of caste, and challenging the Hindu groups' attempts to co-opt Dalit guru Ravidass as Hindu, the tradition against which he fought. After powerful Dalit American testimonies, many inspired by the scholarship of the Dalit Bahujan Faculty group, **the Hindu American Foundation was forced to publicly concede on their suggested edit 1354, which had deleted the term "Dalit" from the curriculum framework.**

Edits pertaining to renaming the Indus Valley Civilization "Saraswati": SAHFA expressed satisfaction that every reference to the Indus Valley Civilization using the term "Saraswati" was removed from the framework. In line with other edits suggested by the Uberoi Foundation, renaming the ancient pre-Hindu civilization after a mythical Hindu river is part of a broader Hindu nationalist political project aimed at portraying Hindus as the original inhabitants of India. This erases the Adivasis (indigenous/first peoples), and positions Christians and Muslims as foreign invaders not belonging to the Indian nation-state.

Unfair approval process: The SAHFA coalition was deeply troubled by the IQC's reliance on the Hindu nationalist Uberoi Foundation's edit recommendations as a decision-making tool during the hearing. Uberoi has not been a neutral party in the process, and their edits have focused on glorifying Indian Hinduism at the expense of other religions and communities. The IQC's sole reliance on a Hindu nationalist group's guidelines bring into question their adherence to fairness guidelines. **SAHFA would have preferred a discussion of each suggestion on its own merit, with equal time for submissions by other groups, including scholars of ancient and medieval South Asia.**

Edits pertaining to India vs. South Asia: By ignoring the rigorous scholarship of the SAFG, the IQC allowed a series of geographical errors to creep into California's textbook framework. The Faculty Group had agreed with the use of "India" about 69 times, and flagged 24 instances where words like "South Asia" better reflects geographic reality. The IQC decided to change most geographical references to "India" (with a single sentence explaining that this may refer to several modern nation-states). Using only "India" in these 24 cases not only ignores geography, but actively erases the origins of California students from nations like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Edits pertaining to Sikhism: The coalition welcomed the continued support for curriculum content highlighting the Sikh religion's resistance to caste and the Hindu social order at the time of its founding. The IQC also affirmed its previous discussion to retain the Sikh identity of the first Asian American member of Congress, Dalip

Singh Saund, against the Uberoi Foundation's recommendation to label him solely as an "immigrant of Indian origin."

Edits pertaining to Islam: The Uberoi Foundation's Islamophobic edits drew comment from IQC members. Members rejected a suggested edit that would add an out-of-context reference to Islam and slavery in the Middle East. Another Uberoi Foundation edit was accepted, even though it confused IQC members; the text described trade relations "between" the Islamic world and "India", ignoring the large Muslim population in India dating back to the 7th century.

Representatives of the Council on American–Islamic Relations and the Indian American Muslim Council agreed with IQC members' concerns about the Uberoi Foundation's biased edits. "It's inappropriate for our 6th and 7th grade textbooks to exclude the hundreds of millions of Muslims from South Asia," said CAIR Sacramento Valley Civil Rights Attorney Saad Sweilem. "Changes to curriculum should be informed by academic experts with relevant expertise."

Community support: SAHFA's positions received substantial support from across California and beyond. 4,500 people signed a public petition standing with SAHFA. Over 200 California parents signed on to a letter of support. More than 75 California K-12 school educators signed a letter from educators. Students from 30 California universities signed on to a student letter. Scholars from 80 universities signed on to a letter in support of the SAFG.

Next steps: The IQC's recommendations will now go before the State Board of Education for final approval later this year, after which the framework will be published. The SAHFA coalition looks forward to the approval of this framework, and the creation of fair, balanced, and inclusive textbooks for California students.

South Asian Histories For All (SAHFA) is a diverse coalition of teachers, students, parents, and community members, including Buddhists, Christians, Dalits, Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs, Ravidassias, and atheists. Comprising 24 organizations, the group has also submitted its own set of recommendations in support of the South Asia Faculty Group and Dalit Bahujan Faculty group edits.

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