

The California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Room 5111
Sacramento, California 95814
E-mail: SBE@cde.ca.gov
Phone Number: 916-319-0827
FAX number: 916-319-0175

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Dear Members of the California State Board of Education (SBE),

We are scholars of South Asian history, social science, and related disciplines. Many of us hold long-standing positions in the University of California system and in other reputed universities across North America.

We write to you today with deep concern about the many factual errors and ideologically-infused content in the history and social science textbooks under SBE review this November.

We are particularly concerned with the way in which Hindu nationalist frames of reference appear to have influenced the content of history that California students will read. History and social science textbooks should be evidence-based in chapter content, and inclusive in the scope of suggested discussion topics. A few examples:

- “Class” has been erroneously substituted for “caste” as a social category. □
- The textbook content implies that caste-based discrimination is irrelevant for our times. Caste is a complex social and religious category that has altered its form and function over the past two centuries, but its discriminatory and violent effects have by no means disappeared with the development of modern technological and economic forms of life. “Caste” should continue to be analyzed as part of South Asian and Indian histories. □
- Actual errors and an inflammatory tone have entered text around the history of Islam in the South Asian sub-continent, and the histories of other religions and sects in South Asia. Non-Hindu populations, including Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs are sometimes barely mentioned, treated as external invaders, or had key aspects erased. South Asian religious histories should be taught in their full, diverse complexity, with no imposition of “insider” and “outside” categories. □
- Mythological terms substitute for historical ones, for example the “Indus Valley Civilization” (a fact-based, geographic term) appears to be replaced with a religiously-motivated and ideologically charged term, “Indus-Saraswati/Sarasvati Civilization”. The Saraswati is a mythical river. While mythical, religious, beliefs can be

referenced as part of a spectrum of South Asian practices, geographical terms should be used for fact-based place markers. □

There are many other points we would like to submit, as the State Board of Education prepares to meet again. In lieu of a full response before the November 2017 meeting of the SBE, we would like to endorse the submission of the South Asian Histories for All (SAHFA) community coalition, as well as to reiterate the 2015 letter from the South Asia Faculty Group (SAFG).

In 2015, a detailed letter from the South Asia Faculty Group (SAFG) - an independent body of California scholars that included many of us and our colleagues - laid out its concerns with the draft framework at the time. While some of the SAFG's scholarly advice was considered and incorporated in previous rounds, we find that many of its suggestions have been rejected and reversed in the current substance of the textbooks. In this move, the Instructional Quality Commission appears to be giving equal weight to faculty advice from fields like engineering and computer science, whose sole claim to expertise seems to be based on their status as practitioners of a particular faith, rather than their training in critical and inclusive history, anthropology, and social scientific pedagogy.

In contrast to practitioners' belief-based interventions in the California textbook revision process, an inclusive community coalition, South Asian Histories for All (SAHFA) - comprising communities from diverse castes, faiths and ethnicities across South Asia - have laid out their concerns with the current texts, and have offered detailed changes.

We continue to endorse the substance of the 2015 South Asia Faculty Group letter as it pertains to the current textbooks, and newly endorse the suggestions made by SAHFA in 2016 and 2017. We attach SAHFA's 2017 list of proposed changes, and the original 2015 letter from the SAFG.

The histories of South Asia are complex and varied. Just as the history of California or the United States can not be limited to mono-cultural narratives constructed by those historically in power, neither can the histories of South Asia and its peoples. To do so would be undermining historical record and pedagogical rigor. We have dedicated our lives and careers to scholarly rigor and academic excellence through the use of complex, multi-faceted methodologies and analyses. Our joint expertise should not be discounted based on the preferences of religious practitioners. Practitioners' deeply-felt beliefs about their faith must be respected and celebrated, but faith should not displace historical fact in California textbooks. Allowing California's textbooks to represent particular religious or cultural nationalisms, at a time of dangerous polarizations around the world, would be a deep disservice to our students and communities in California.

We urge you to reconsider and revise the factual errors and partisan articulations in California texts, and to draw on the valuable work provided by the most inclusive and democratic coalition

of South Asians we have in California, the South Asian Histories for All coalition, whose detailed textual edits and comments we endorse.

Sincerely,

Daud Ali, Associate Professor of South Asian Studies and History, Ancient and Medieval Indian History, University of Pennsylvania

Joseph S. Alter, Professor of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh

Sareeta Amrute, Associate Professor, Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle

Anjali Arondekar, Associate Professor, Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz

Paola Bacchetta, Professor, Gender and Women's Studies, ISAS, University of California, Berkeley

Sarada Balagopalan, Associate Professor of Childhood Studies, Rutgers University, Camden

Amrita Basu, Paino Professor of Political Science and Sexuality, Women's and Gender Studies, Amherst College

Catherine Becker, Associate Professor, Department of Art History, University of Illinois at Chicago

Purnima Bose, Associate Professor, English and International Studies; Chair, International Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington

Paula Chakravartty, Associate Professor, Department of Media, Culture and Communication and Gallatin School, Faculty Affiliate at South Asia @ NYU, New York University

Indrani Chatterjee, Professor of History, University of Texas at Austin, Texas.

Piya Chatterjee, Backstrand Chair and Professor, Feminist Gender and Sexualities Studies, Scripps College, The Claremont Consortium

Swati Chattopadhyay, Professor, History of Art and Architecture, University of California, Santa Barbara

Christopher Chekuri, Associate Professor of History, San Francisco State University

Rohit Chopra, Associate Professor, Department of Communication, Santa Clara University

Francis Cody, Associate Professor, Anthropology and Asian Institute, University of Toronto

Lawrence Cohen, Professor of Anthropology and of South and Southeast Asian Studies, and Co-Director, Medical Anthropology Program, University of California, Berkeley

Huma Dar, Independent Scholar, South Asian Studies, Gender & Women's Studies, Film Studies, Ethnic Studies

Jigna Desai, Professor of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, University of Minnesota

Mayanthi Fernando, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz

Michele Friedner, Assistant Professor of Comparative Human Development, University of Chicago

Vinay Gidwani, Professor of Geography and Global Studies, University of Minnesota

Will Glover, Associate Professor of History, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor

Inderpal Grewal, Program in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Yale University

Akhil Gupta, Director, Center for India and South Asia, UCLA

Thomas Blom Hansen, Reliance-Dhirubhai Ambani Professor of Anthropology, Stanford University

John Stratton Hawley, Claire Tow Professor of Religion, Barnard College, Columbia University

Matthew Hull, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

Sunila Kale, Associate Professor, International Studies, University of Washington

Suvir Kaul, A. M. Rosenthal Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

Abhishek Kaicker, Assistant Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley

Lamia Karim, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Oregon

Aishwary Kumar, Assistant Professor of History, Stanford University

Ruby Lal, Professor of South Asian History, Emory University

Jean M Langford, Professor, Anthropology, University of Minnesota

Mark Liechty, Professor of Anthropology and History, University of Illinois at Chicago

Ania Loomba, Catherine Bryson Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

Ritty Lukose, Associate Professor, Anthropology, The Gallatin School, New York University

Sunaina Maira, Professor, Asian American Studies; Affiliated Faculty Member, Middle East/South Asia Studies; UC Davis

Karuna Mantena, Associate Professor, Political Science, Yale University

Rama Mantena, Associate Professor, History and Global Asian Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago

Biju Mathew, Associate Professor of Business and American Studies, Rider University, New Jersey

William Mazarella, Professor of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Rachel Fell McDermott, Professor, Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures, Barnard College, Columbia University

Monika Mehta, Associate Professor, English and Comparative Literature, Binghamton University

Jisha Menon, Associate Professor, Theatre and Performance Studies, Stanford University

Kalyani Devaki Menon, Associate Professor, Religious Studies, DePaul University

Raza Mir, Professor of Management, William Paterson University, New Jersey

Megan Moodie, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz

Projit Bihari Mukharji, Associate Professor, History & Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania

Madhavi Murty, Assistant Professor, Feminist Studies, UC Santa Cruz

Richa Nagar, Professor of the College, College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Vijaya Nagarajan, Associate Professor, Religious Studies, University of San Francisco

Tahir H. Naqvi, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Trinity University

Martha C. Nussbaum, Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics, The University of Chicago

Gyan Pandey, Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor, Emory University

Geeta Patel, Director UVA in India, Associate Professor, Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures

Kavita Philip, Associate Professor of History, University of California, Irvine

Sheldon Pollock, Professor of Sanskrit and South Asian Studies, Columbia University

Gyan Prakash, Dayton-Stockton Professor of History, Princeton University

Gautam Premnath, Independent Scholar, English Literature

Priti Ramamurthy, Professor, Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies & South Asian Studies, University of Washington, Seattle

M. V. Ramana, Professor, School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Lucinda Ramberg, Anthropology and Feminist, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, Cornell University

Anupama Rao, TOW Associate Professor, History, Barnard College, Columbia University

Pallavi Rastogi, Associate Professor, Department of English, Louisiana State University

Ramnarayan S. Rawat, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Delaware

Raka Ray, Professor, Sociology and South Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley

Gayatri Reddy, Associate Professor, Gender and Women's Studies and Anthropology, University of Illinois at Chicago

Parama Roy, Professor of English, University of California, Davis

Sharmila Rudrappa, Professor of Sociology, Director, Center for Asian American Studies, University of Texas at Austin

Poulomi Saha, Assistant Professor, English, University of California, Berkeley

G.S. Sahota, Associate Professor of Literature, University of California, Santa Cruz

Priya Satia, Professor, Department of History, Stanford University

Martha Ann Selby, Ralph B. Thomas Regents Professor of Asian Studies and Chair,
Department of Asian Studies, The University of Texas at Austin

Sudipta Sen, Professor of History, University of California, Davis

Vanita Seth, Associate Professor of Politics, University of California, Santa Cruz

Juned Shaikh, Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of California Santa Cruz

S. Shankar, Professor, English, University of Hawai'i

Shubhra Sharma, Ph.D., Independent Scholar and Entrepreneur

Ajay Skaria, Professor of History and Global Studies, University of Minnesota

Mytheli Sreenivas, Associate Professor of History and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies,
The Ohio State University

Nidhi Srinivas, Associate Professor Management, The New School, New York City

Smriti Srinivas, Professor of Anthropology and Director, Middle East/South Asia Studies
Program, University of California, Davis

Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, Assistant Professor of English, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Rachel Sturman, Associate Professor of History and Asian Studies, Bowdoin College

Ajantha Subramanian, Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies, Harvard University

Kaushik Sunder Rajan, Professor of Anthropology and Co-Director, Chicago Center for
Contemporary Theory, University of Chicago

Abha Sur, Lecturer, Program in Women's and Gender Studies, M.I.T.

Raja Swamy, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Tennessee

Clare Talwalker, Lecturer, International and Area Studies Program, UC Berkeley

Sharika Thiranagama, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Stanford University

Bharat Venkat, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Oregon

Archana Venkatesan, Associate Professor, Departments of Comparative Literature and Religious Studies, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Davis

Michael Witzel, Wales Prof. of Sanskrit, Harvard University