



June 18, 2015

Thomas Adams, Executive Director  
Instructional Quality Commission  
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street, Room 3207  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Dr. Adams and members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) would like to submit additional comments that amend and strengthen our submission from November 21, 2014, particularly as it relates to the seventh grade world history standard and California history.

We are submitting the additional comments prior to the draft revised frameworks, in part to clarify wording in our earlier submission, add valuable academically vetted context, and ensure that diversity and cultural sensitivity are incorporated into the frameworks revision. Our proposed amended comments are in the attached spreadsheet in **red**, but we take this opportunity to address some of the concerns that were brought up at the February and May IQC hearings.

For starters, HAF believes strongly that underrepresented and marginalized groups should have agency in how they are defined in California's history and social science curriculum frameworks. It is why we have partnered in California and other states with diverse religious and ethnic advocacy groups to make sure that there is a collective push for a more pluralistic approach to social studies. We want world history and California history in this frameworks revision to be inclusive and accurate, and our public comments submitted last year reflect that commitment.

Our submission is based on consensus from academics and seeks to ensure that Hinduism and the Hindu American experience is not in any way distorted or marginalized. Moreover, we also want the frameworks to be written to respect the spirit of state [Education Code sections 51501 and 60044](#), which "prohibit the State Board of Education and local school boards from adopting any instructional material for use in schools which contains any matter reflecting adversely upon persons because of their race, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, sex, handicap, or occupation." The [Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content](#) have further clarified that to avoid "adverse reflection," "No religious belief or practice may be held up to ridicule and no religious group may be portrayed as inferior."



In recent months, however, one Sikh organization and several Sikh individuals have written to the IQC and testified in person that HAF's comments were "anti-Sikh" or intended to "erase Sikh identity" and sought to misrepresent what we submitted. We had several meetings and calls with the Sikh organization that has been most active in this frameworks process, and unfortunately, they rejected our attempts at conciliatory dialogue and compromise wording.

The compromise wording we proposed to them is part of our amended comments (in specific reference to lines 949, 1196, and 2377), and seeks to acknowledge both the significant sacrifices and contributions of members of the Sikh faith, and also highlight their contributions as the earliest Indian Americans. At the same time, we hope to also note the contributions of members of other religious groups immigrating from India to California's history.

To be sure, religious and national identities, particularly for small groups like Sikhs and Hindus, are very important, which is why we believe there are constructive and respectful rights to self define within this education process. Moreover, we want to ensure that all California schoolchildren have a basic understanding of the state's diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups and their contributions without political or ideological considerations attached.

In that spirit, we want to note the following:

Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims immigrated to California from British or Pre-Partition India, and played a significant role in shaping the state. The Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society, a gurdwara that hosted Hindu and Muslim worship at a time when California was institutionally xenophobic, and the Ghadar Party, started by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, are an important part of California history and a reminder of three distinct marginalized groups working together for a stronger voice. In fact, the Ghadar party was co-founded by the Berkeley-based Hindu Association of the Pacific Coast led by Bengali activist Tarak Nath Das.

In a recent letter to the CDE, Jaideep Singh fails to mention this contribution (and seems to minimize Hindu presence in California altogether prior to 1925), though it is well chronicled in books by Seema Sohi's *Echoes of Mutiny* (Oxford Press, 2014), Maia Ramnath's *Haj to Utopia* (University of California Press, 2011), and Karen Leonard's *Making Ethnic Choices* (Temple University Press, 1994). Leonard, for example, writes:

*The most active early statewide organization was the militant anti-British Ghadar party, formed in California in 1913. Partly inspired by the American revolt against British colonialism, the party's membership included Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu Punjabis. (Leonard, 1994: 83).*

In *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (SUNY Press, 1996), Robert G. Lee notes:



*[Tarak Nath] Das and [Har] Dayal organized the Ghadar Party under the auspices of the Hindu Association of the Pacific Coast and the Sikh Khalsa Diwan, the major Sikh organization in California. The party thus brought together the two streams of Indian immigrants in America, Bengali Hindus, primarily students and intellectuals, and Punjabi Sikhs, mainly agriculturalists and lumber men. They announced the publication of the party's newspaper Ghadar with Dayal as its first editor. (Lee, 1996: 269).*

The Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society (and the Hindu Association of the Pacific Coast) played an important role in cultivating the Ghadar party's activism, which was predicated upon home rule for India. In fact, leaders of the Indian freedom struggle, including the Indian independence activist Lala Lajpat Rai, visited the Ghadar party leadership and the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society to coordinate efforts to promote home rule and independence from the British. As Maritsa Poros (2013) notes, the religious identities of groups such as Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims did not interfere in their desire for an independent India during the early part of the 20th century. They saw themselves as Indians (or Hindustanis) at the time, though the politics of partition in the middle of the 20th century, the Sikh separatist movement beginning in the late 1970s, and the anti-Sikh violence in India in 1984 significantly changed that dynamic for some.

To this end, the legacy of Dalip Singh Saund, a man who was fiercely proud of his Indian and Sikh identity, should be noted as such in the framework. He was proud to be an Indian American and fought for recognition for Sikhs and Hindus. He was an Indian American, Sikh American and Asian American trailblazer, and his pride in that heritage was reflected in his books *My Mother India* (1930) and *Congressman from India* (1960). *My Mother India* was Saund's attempt to answer Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927), which Indian freedom leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi excoriated as racist. Saund, in the preface of the book, noted that "except for the few scholars of oriental history and literature, who occupied themselves diligently in exploring the hidden treasures of Hindu civilization, the name of India was an unknown thing to the rest of the American world...and if I have succeeded in bringing about a better understanding of India by the people of America, I consider myself amply repaid." (Saund, 1930). It should be noted that while Saund referred to himself as a Hindu in his autobiography, he was referring to himself in the racial sense and not the religious sense.

Our amended comments seek to embrace Saund's Indian and Sikh identities without minimizing or omitting Saund's Indian heritage - which is how he identified and has been chronicled in his biographies. Omitting his Indian identity would also add to the misconception that Indian Americans are Hindus, when in fact California's Indian American community includes Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Jews, and atheists.

We should note that the last few months of testimony should not be construed as one religious group versus another. In fact, we work with Sikh organizations on other issues, including civil rights, and support Sikh efforts to be defined as a distinct faith tradition. However, with respect to how national and religious identities have been traditionally defined, we think it is of the utmost importance that the IQC,



SBE, and CDE consistently distinguish between Asian American national identities (Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, etc.) and religious ones (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, etc.). To this end, and after further consultation with scholars, we agree that the term “South Asian” would be an improper way of identifying these earliest Indian immigrants, as they hailed from British or Pre-Partition India, and have amended our suggested rewording accordingly.

With regard to the 7th grade edits, particularly lines 1691-1693, we believe that inclusion of the Bhakti movement is imperative to understanding the dynamics of the Indian subcontinent during the middle ages. Through devotional storytelling, poetry, music, art, and literature, Bhakti saints emphasized a personal and loving relationship with God, equality of all people, universal brotherhood, and the need for purity of heart and selfless service. Our attached comments seek to show that the narrative can include the Bhakti movement and the rise of Sikhism.

We also urge the commission to adopt language that does not endorse one religion being born out of opposition to another. For example, by simply replacing the terms “authority of the Brahmin” with “established religious authority,” the point that Guru Nanak opposed the excesses of the existing religious authority can be made, without inadvertently implying that an entire religion was opposed. This would also ensure that the wording does not contravene the Education Code and Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content, as noted above.

It is our hope that the IQC reviews and strongly considers our recommendations and amended comments in the accompanying spreadsheet, which we believe will highlight the individual contributions of religious and ethnic groups without adverse reflection. We look forward to reviewing and responding to the revised narrative when it is released.

Sincerely,

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