

Review of  
McGraw Hill California Social Studies Textbook Drafts

Hindu Education Foundation USA (HEF)

July, 2017

## 1. Orientalism - A Brief

By Orientalism, scholars refer to patronizing depictions of cultures and people that were part of an imagined geographical entity called the 'Orient' an area including India, China, the Middle East and the South East Asia. Dr. Edward Said, a founder of the academic field of postcolonial studies, defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident."" It is based on an underlying assumption that there is an "absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior."<sup>1</sup>

Said writes that since antiquity, the 'Orient' has had a special place in European Western experience, as a place of "romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes". Orientalism started off as "a way of coming to terms" with these strange and mysterious people. With many European nations becoming colonisers of these places, asymmetric power equations ensured that this way of understanding the colonized and their cultures, became the only legitimate way of understanding and creating knowledge about these people. As Said points out, Orientalist biases are not just manifested in many genuine works of Western scholarship but that "racial ideas too came from the same impulse." Needless to say, that the narratives based on them are often at variance with what the people of those cultures experience about themselves and also with empirical evidence.

Orientalists often see India as defined by primitive hierarchical structures of "caste" and outdated rituals. They conflate and essentialize Hinduism and Indian civilization into these structures and objectify Hindus ignoring their diversity, aspects of culture such as philosophy, aesthetics and art as also other achievements of the civilization.

Politically, colonialism might have ended in the last century, but many scholars have shown that its remnants are well entrenched in many different ways and that Orientalist biases still exist in the narratives about many of these cultures although they may not be ubiquitous at all times.

## 2. Erasing Hindu cultural practices from Harappan civilization

The textbook draft is trying hard to erase the references to Hindu cultural practices. For example consider this on page 255 about Harappan excavations:

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<sup>1</sup> Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books

“Historians have found many clay seals, stamps, statues, and figurines in Harappa. Some of these show features that are all present in modern Indian religions, such as male and female figures that resemble different deities, as well as small clay figures in traditional greeting poses.”

The paragraph is a paraphrasing of the lines in 2016 History Social Science Framework but the connection to the Harappan artifacts to Hinduism that the framework narrative clearly mentions is cleverly erased. Consider the lines from the framework.

“Some of the statues and figurines, as well as images on the seals, **show features that are all present in modern Hinduism**, such as a male figure that resembles the Hindu God Shiva in a meditating posture, as well as small clay figures in the posture of the traditional **Hindu greeting “namaste.”**”<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis not in original)

This seems to be a clear attempt at obfuscation and thereby an attempt at erasure of Hindu history.

Archeologists have found a wealth of information through excavations of hundreds of sites across the North and the North West India. They have uncovered many seals and artifacts that show cultural continuity between the ancient civilization and modern day Hindu practices. Please see the pioneering work of doyen of Indian archaeology Dr. B B Lal<sup>3</sup>.

It also contends on page 248 that “The arrival of the Aryans brought great changes to India, including the social system and beliefs that would become Hinduism.” There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the social structure and beliefs of Hinduism were brought into India. Even if one were to consider the outdated colonial Aryan Invasion Theory to be true, this becomes a far fetched speculation because in such a case too, most of India’s earliest sacred texts were composed in the Indian geography as evidenced in the texts mention of Indian rivers and other geographical elements.

Further as shown in the Harappan excavations a lot of artefacts point to the fact that there exists a cultural continuity between Harappan civilization and later day Hinduism.

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<sup>2</sup> 2016 History Social Science Framework, see Framework chapter 10, lines 823 to 841

<sup>3</sup> B. B. Lal (2009). How Deep Are the Roots of Indian Civilization?: Archaeology Answers. Aryan Books. (B. B. Lal, is a renowned Indian archaeologist. He was the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) from 1968 to 1972, and has served as Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla. He also worked for UNESCO committees.)

This text is a clear violation of category 1.2 of the Evaluation Criteria Map, which mandates adherence to the framework. This text does not adhere to the framework narrative even in spirit and tries to circumvent it but importantly it tries to erase Hinduism's history.

### 3. Buddhism as an improvement over Hinduism

Consider the text on page 264

"During the 500s BCE some Indians felt unhappy with the many ceremonies of the Hindu religion. They wanted a simpler, more spiritual faith. Many trained their minds to focus and think in positive ways. The training was called meditation. Some seekers developed new ideas and became religious teachers.

One of these teachers was Siddhartha Gautama..."

This is inaccurate and also constitutes an adverse reflection on Hinduism. erroneously suggests that meditation was not part of Hinduism. Secondly it projects that meditation was possibly invented later, and in a rebellion against Hindus. In fact, Siddhartha Gautama or the Buddha had learnt meditation from two Hindu teachers on which he built upon. Such description violates categories of Evaluation Criteria Map namely 1.10 which prohibits adverse reflection and 1.4 that mandates historical accuracy. Further, it also violates the adverse reflection clause of Standards of Evaluation of Social Content (2013)

The Pali Canon has a record of two Hindu teachers named Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta from whom Buddha learnt yogic meditation techniques<sup>4</sup>. They also mention the advanced meditation techniques that are still used in Buddhism. Buddha indeed had great original ideas and which are very important, but does that mean we erase the influences on which his contributions stand on and show them in such poor light?

This anti-Hindu narrative has its basis in the dynamics of intellectual movements in Europe than in India. This narrative of Buddha as a discontinuity and as a rebel against Vedic Hinduism, emerged in Europe in nineteenth century. For the many European scholars of nineteenth century who first collected and translated the Buddhist texts in the institutions of learning in Europe, Buddhism was to early Hinduism what Protestantism was to Roman Catholicism and sometimes also what Catholicism was to Judaism. Philip Almond in *The British Discovery of Buddhism* 1988, sees the origins of this comparison in the inner

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander Wynne 2007 'The Origin of Buddhist Meditation (Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism)', Routledge

dynamics of the European society at that time<sup>5</sup>. He notes that the “analogy of the Buddha with Luther served iconoclastic ends, highlighting in a particularly potent way the contrast of Buddhism and Hinduism.” In an atmosphere charged with anti-Catholic and sometimes also anti-Judaic polemics, Buddha was seen as a Luther, as somebody who rebelled “against the sacrificialism and sacerdotalism of the Brahmins”, their heathen practices, rituals, their priesthood and their archaic social structures. So what we see here too is an Orientalist construction of imagined categories based on the ideological divisions within the nineteenth century European society. The textbook draft perpetuates this narrative while ignoring the evidence and latest scholarship on the matter.

The textbook draft considers Buddhism as a rebellion against Hindu ceremonies and rituals. How then do we reconcile with the fact that Buddha himself often talks approvingly of the Vedic rituals, and the mantras as recorded in the Pali canon? For example, in the following words from Majjhima Nikaya 92 and in Samyutta Nikaya 111 in the Pali Canon, Buddha praises Agnihotra as the foremost of rituals and Sāvitrī (Gayatri mantra) as the foremost of meters.

aggihuttamukhā yaññā sāvittī chandaso mukham<sup>6</sup>  
(agnihotra is the foremost ritual and savitri the foremost of meters)

Agnihotra is a fire ritual performed with the chanting of the verses of Rig Veda, Savitri or Gayatri Mantra is also a mantra from the Rig Veda, dedicated to the Sun deity. Both of these rituals are practised by Hindus even today. Buddhists also practice many rituals that are similar to Vedic practices. One of the earliest of Buddhist rituals that is practiced in many parts of the world is the worship of deity Indra. He is, for example, worshiped by the Chinese Buddhists as Dìshìtiān, and by the Koreans as Hwanin. ‘Homa’, the fire ritual of the Vedas is practiced in Japan as ‘Goma’, and the carrier of this ritual to Japan was in-fact Buddhism. It is also common knowledge that Buddhism in Japan incorporates many Hindu Deities, such as Saraswati and Ganesha, as most recently documented by Benoy Behl<sup>7</sup>.

Further, as Gombrich notes, the Sutta Piṭaka, the second of the three divisions of Pali canon “contains several passages in which he [Buddha] argues that *brahmin*, properly

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<sup>5</sup> ALMOND, PHILIP, C. 1988 The British Discovery of Buddhism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Majjhima Nikaya 92 and in Samyutta Nikaya 111 in the Pali Canon

<sup>7</sup><http://www.uniindia.com/hindu-gods-forgotten-in-india-treasured-in-japan-filmmaker-benoy-behl/entertainment/fullstory/924144.html>

understood, is not a social character but a moral one, referring to a person who is wise and virtuous.”<sup>8</sup>(italics not in original)

The above examples show that the binary divide between the Buddhists and Hindus as being envisaged in the textbook drafts is inaccurate. There indeed existed differences between Buddhism and the many schools of Vedic Hinduism, as evidenced by their polemics and hagiographies, which are similar to the differences that existed within the different schools of Vedic Hinduism themselves. Yet these traditions do not correspond to the sweeping binaries and discontinuities imposed by the Orientalist frameworks. The reality is much more complex than these Orientalist biases allow.

The textbook draft also contends that “Many people accepted the Buddha's message especially Untouchables and Indians in the lower jati. For the first time, these groups heard that they, too, could reach enlightenment.” which is also based on very thin evidence. Most of Buddha’s followers came from the elite as evidenced in the Pali Canons. Secondly, many great sages of Hinduism before the emergence of Buddhism came from the “lowest” of Jatis including Sage Valmiki who composed the Ramayana and Sage Vyasa who composed Mahabharata and compiled the Vedas. This, in fact is mentioned in the HSS framework narrative, a fact conveniently ignored by the textbook draft to portray Hinduism in a poor light.

#### **4. The Myth about Ashoka’s “conversion” to Buddhism after Kalinga war**

The textbook presents myths about Indian ruler Ashoka as historical facts. Consider the paragraph from section on Mauryan Empire on page number 271

“Ashoka was an unusual king. Like many rulers, Ashoka began his rule with fierce wars of conquest. Eventually, he came to hate killing. After one battle, he looked at the fields covered with the dead and wounded soldiers. He was horrified by what he saw. He decided that he would follow Buddhist teachings and become a man of peace.

Ashoka kept his promise. During the rest of his life, he tried to improve the lives of his people. Ashoka made laws that encourage good deeds, family harmony, non

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<sup>8</sup> Gombrich, Richard, F. 2002, How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers

violence, and toleration of other religions. He created hospitals for people and for animals. He built fine roads, with houses and shade trees for the travelers' comfort.”

The position that Ashoka converted to Buddhism after the war with the Kalinga has been shown to be a myth. It has absolutely no evidence to support it. Ashoka's army invaded Kalinga in 262 BC but it is evident from Ashoka's minor rock edicts that he had embraced Buddhism more than two years before the war<sup>9</sup>. Charles Allen writes in 'Ashoka: The Search for India's Lost Emperor' that from the minor rock edict it is evident that Ashoka embraced Buddhism in or about 265 BC<sup>10</sup>, which is years before the Kalinga war in 262 BC. This is a clear violation of Category 1.4 which mandates that the instructional material should be based on historical accuracy as well as category 1.6 which calls for primary evidences while describing historical figures.

## Conclusion

The textbook has many serious problems in the portrayal of Hinduism and India, only a few of which have been detailed above. These violate the California laws as also the criteria for instructional material as mandated by CDE. Hence it is imperative that these problems be addressed, failing which the textbook draft must not be adopted for teaching in California public schools.

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<sup>9</sup> See Sanjeev Sanyal, 2016, *The Ocean of Churn, How the Indian Ocean shaped Human History*, Penguin.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Allen, 2012, 'Ashoka: The Search for India's Lost Emperor', Abacus

## Notes

10)267: The Jains practiced strict poverty

11) Page 268: Ahimsa as a Jain teaching.

13) 280: "The Laws of Manu, a part of the Vedas

## 7th grade

1) Page 160: They also challenged certain religious traditions, such as the power held by elite priests in society.

3) Page 351: Guru Nanak challenged the authority of the Hindu Brahmins and the Jati system.

4) Journal Page 104: Greek Reports of India has sculptures of Buddha in Ajanta caves

5) Journal Page 110: "One of the mysteries was that there only exists one God, the creator and Lord of heaven and earth, whom men are bound to worship, for the idols are simply images of devils"

3) Page 259: Boys had gurus, arranged marriages

4) Page 261: Over time, the Brahmin religion blended with the ideas of other people of India. The mix of beliefs eventually became known as Hinduism.

5) Page 261: The Upanishads say that a soul that becomes one with Brahman is like a lump of salt thrown into water. The lump of salt is gone, the water tastes salty. The salt has become part of the water.

A similar narrative is perpetuated on page 251 when the text contends that "Guru Nanak challenged the authority of the Hindu Brahmins and the Jati system."