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Saffronizing California's History Curriculum: Long Distance Hindu Nationalism In The United States

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The University of San Francisco

SAFFRONIZING CALIFORNIA'S HISTORY CURRICULUM:
LONG DISTANCE HINDU NATIONALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

How U.S. public schools teach South Asian history has been a site of contestation since the 2000s. California's solicitation of community input into its history curriculum has brought ideological clashes to the California Department of Education (CDE); these conflicts over South Asian history are an extension of struggles in India driven by rising Hindu nationalism, a widespread movement for a "Hindus-first" India that brutalizes subaltern groups and dissenters. This violence is often justified through manufactured histories demonizing Indian minorities and glorifying an ancient, Hindu civilization.

This dissertation focused on the 2016-2017 controversy surrounding the CDE's process to revise its history curriculum. U.S.-based Hindu nationalist groups, including the Hindu American Foundation and the Uberoi Foundation, took part in the process starting in 2014. In 2015, South Asia academics submitted to the CDE numerous challenges to the accuracy and political messaging of the histories supported by Hindu nationalist groups. In 2016, progressive and minority activists became involved, forming a coalition called South Asian Histories for All (SAHFA) to support the scholarly recommendations and to challenge sectarian narratives.

This perspectival case study, authored by a SAHFA member, analyzes Hindu nationalist efforts to influence California's history curriculum, through interviews with scholars and activists critical of Hindu nationalism and analyzing public documents. This study utilized three analytical frames to challenge sectarian histories.

The first frame identified key groups on different sides of the controversy and the funding involved. Using tax returns and public documents, the first data chapter

established the Hindu nationalist affiliations of several major groups participating in California's history revision process and the resources mobilized in support of their versions of South Asian history.

The second chapter analyzed the political messaging of the histories supported by Hindu nationalist groups, recognizing the groups targeted by the prejudices and hate energized by such narratives (e.g. as connected to caste, gender, and religion) and relating the political messages to events in India and to critical responses from progressive groups.

The third discussed the mobilization strategies used by Hindu nationalist groups to insert their histories into California's history curriculum, and the responses from non-Hindutva scholars and activists.