

News & Views

California declares October 2013 as Hindu American awareness and app

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*California declares October as month for Hindu awareness *: It was a historic moment for California’s Hindu American community, when the senate floor at the Capitol unanimously passed the resolution on Monday designating *October 2013 as Hindu American awareness and appreciation month.*

The bill was authored by state Senate Majority Leader Ellen M Corbett, who said, “As the senator representing the 10th state senate district, I am honoured to represent constituents from many diverse backgrounds including a significant number of Hindu Americans” She said California is home to a thriving community of over 3,70,000 Hindu Americans that enrich “our state’s diversity and professional assets in fields as diverse as academia, science, technology, business, arts and literature”. She thanked her colleagues for supporting the bill that recognises the contributions of Hindu Americans as well as *designates October 2013 in their honour.*[image: California declares October as month for Hindu awareness]

”It’s great to see that the contribution the Indo-American community is making is now being recognised at the highest levels of the state,” RoKhanna, former deputy assistant secretary at the US department of commerce in the Obama administration and 2014 Congressional candidate from California

district 17 told rediff.com. He said that the Indo-American community was contributing to the economy by creating jobs in California, through entrepreneurship and innovation. According to Khanna, about 105 people along with various interfaith groups were present at the Capitol on Monday. “I am very proud to see that the community believes in religious pluralism. I am running from the 17th Congressional district and I am fortunate to have people of strong faiths from different backgrounds that make our state and country stronger. I am a big believer in religious pluralism and also that people of various faiths should have a voice in public debate.”

“I am a proud American and like an American I think all different faiths should be respected,” he added. Answering a question on why it took so long for the state to recognise the Hindu community, Khanna said it takes a community’s decades of involvement. “It takes a decade to start and to establish a political voice.” ”This is the first time any resolution recognising Hindus has ever been passed in the entire country,” said Samir Kalra, director and senior fellow for human rights, Hindu American Foundation. “It is the beginning of the great movement for Hindu Americans in California” Kalra told rediff.com. ”It was historic, so it feels great.” He said today it’s at the state level and hopes one day it will reach at the national level. Kalra said the Foundation helped draft the bill and the measure would ”recognise and acknowledge the significant contributions made by Californians of Hindu heritage to the state.” Starting October, the HAF will work with the City Hall in California and schools and help them commemorate the event by hosting educational activities and teach and create awareness about Hinduism in general. “The

HAF is doing this for next generation, so that they feel proud about their culture.” <http://www.hinduhumanrights.info/california-declares-october-as-month-for-hindu-awareness/>

Dr. Koenraad Elst on the California Textbook Controversy

BELGIUM, June 29, 2013 (Hindu Human Rights): HPI Note: Following is the introduction to Dr. Elst lengthy and insightful analysis of the 2005-2006 fight over the portrayal of Hinduism in the 6th grade textbooks in use in California schools.

Already the younger generation asks what the California textbook affair was. Now that California has been endowed with a Hindu awareness month (in a resolution co-authored by the Hindu American Foundation, the first one scheduled for this coming October, Hindus are enthusiastic that they will be able to show off their culture. But past experience shows that Hindus are not good at selling Hinduism, both because they misjudge their audience and because they don't know their own tradition very well. The California textbook affair was a painful case in point.

The California textbook controversy

During the cold part of 2005-2006, the Hindu community in the USA lived in expectation of a school history textbook reform in which Hinduism would get a fairer deal and no longer be reduced to hateful stereotypes. All it took was to use the opportunities provided by the system, viz. to propose edits that were

historically and philosophically impeccable and then focus the attention on the dimension of equal treatment in the textbooks for all religions. After all, Christian, Jewish and Muslim lobbies were having a decisive say in the portrayal of their own belief systems, with the irrational or inhumane points whitewashed or kept out of view. Given the fashion of multiculturalism and cultural relativism, it was in the fitness of things that the judgmental Christian account of Hinduism would now be replaced with something more objective, even with a Hindu self-description. But that was not to be.

Two Hindu organizations, the Hindu Education Foundation and the Vedic Foundation, handed in a list of edits they proposed to be made to the extant Hinduism chapter. Some of these alarmed a handful of anti-Hindu pressure groups and a few like-minded academics, among them Michael Witzel and Stanley Wolpert. They pressured the California Board of Education (CBE) to reject the “Hindu communalist” proposals. Though entering the fray as accusers, they were then invited to sit in judgment upon the controversial edits. This led to Hindu protests, and after everyone had his say, the CBE let Witzel and pro-Hindu emeritus professor Shiva Bajpai work out a compromise. Where they did not agree, viz. on most of the really controversial points, the CBE kept the old version, or in other words, it rejected the Hindu alternative. All the anti-Hindu lobbies cried victory. So did the HEF, pleading that 70% of the proposed edits had been accepted. Yes, but those were only the non-controversial points. Wherever an edit had really been debated, the Hindu proposals had been overruled. Briefly, it was a smashing defeat for the Hindu parents.
