

Hindu Conference of Canada

The Hindu Conference of Canada supports the establishment of a One School System in Ontario. We believe that the current system of preferential funding for Catholic schools is discriminatory. We also fervently oppose any attempts to try to 'level the playing field' by funding schools of other religions: we believe this will promote division in society and the possible promotion of terror and hate using public resources.

As representatives of the Canadian Hindu community, our position is based on the values and practices of Hindus both today and throughout our history. In India, the world's largest democracy with an 85 percent Hindu population, the Hindu community does not receive government funding for educational schools. Education, scholarship, and independent thought have always played a critical role in Hindu civilization: the world's oldest universities were founded in India. These institutions operated independently from temples and religious teachings.

Here in Ontario, various private schools are part of the Ontario Multifaith Coalition, which is lobbying for funding to different faith schools. The possibility of hate and violence being taught within private faith based schools is a clear and present danger in Canada. Kim Bolan of the Vancouver Sun has reported that in BC, Mr. Malik, a Sikh who was charged in the worst terrorist act in Canada (Air India bombing), is the founder of a society which has opened two Sikh Khalsa schools in the area.

While some privately funded schools may be linked to notorious and undesirable people and organizations, the possibility of these schools applying for public funding raises the nightmare of unwitting government involvement in the promotion of terror and hate. Proponents of the Multifaith alternative will undoubtedly assure us that schools receiving public funding will adhere to an approved curriculum. This eerily echoes earlier assurances by groups pushing sharia law in Ontario: the line at that time was that sharia courts would have to follow guidelines in their rulings.

These arguments are fatally flawed: Ontario institutions already suffer from massive shortfalls in resources, and only the gullible could imagine that we would be able to muster the resources to monitor teachings within faith schools. We are asked to believe that in addition to funding our secular school system, Ontario has the wherewithal to extend support to several faith schools as well as the stringent enforcement needed to monitor these schools for inappropriate conduct.

The other issue is the question of free choice. In the sharia debate, the suggestion that women would have the choice of using secular or religious courts was negated by the fact that women in some cultures would inevitably be pressured into making choices which contradict their own wishes. This issue is also a factor in the debate over schooling. It is naive to assume that families will not be pressured into favoring religious schools, especially considering the overwhelming influence of 'gurdwaras' and religious fundamentalists within these communities. In BC, for instance, Mr. Mali, charged with the Air India bombing, not only is setting up a new Khalsa school in Surrey, but received strong support from the Gurdwara Singh Saba Society president.

Given the limitations of our public institutions, the addition of public funding to the toxic stew of fundamentalists, radical religious institutions, and faith-based schools found in some communities is a prescription for division and disaster. The only publicly funded school system appropriate for a secular democracy is one where all Canadians can read together from a common sheet which outlines our shared values and vision.

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