

17 February 2014

To whom it may concern

The following is a statement being issued by the Centre for Historical Studies protesting against the recent decision by Penguin India to withdraw and pulp all remaining copies of Wendy Doniger's *The Hindus: An Alternative History*

We are outraged by the news that Penguin India has agreed to withdraw Wendy Doniger's much acclaimed book *The Hindus: An Alternative History* and pulp all existing copies of the book in stock. Professor Doniger is one of the most respected Indologists in the world. She has spent a lifetime exploring the richness of India's religious pasts, showcasing the creative interplay between multiple traditions — the Puranic and the Vedantic, the folkloric and the Brahmanic. Innovatively drawing on many disciplines, she has investigated the variegated world of Hindu mythology and theology, to explore what they say about order and chaos, morality and ethics, the good and the evil, the erotic and the non-erotic. Her reading of Hinduism has inevitably disturbed those who wish to sanitize and straitjacket Hinduism, and repress the multiplicity of traditions that constitute it. While welcoming all critical engagements with the book, the faculty of the CHS condemns any attempt to curtail the circulation of this book in any form

The decision of Penguin India to sign an out-of-court settlement to withdraw Professor Doniger's book is therefore an act of abandoning the basic ethics of publishing. What is most disturbing is the fact that Penguin Books — which had in the past a sturdy reputation of defending freedom of expression — has agreed to a settlement even without the Indian state or the Indian judiciary taking a position against the book. This decision will affirm the power of the forces of religious intolerance, encourage further attacks on authors who question the fundamentalist interpretation of the past, and subvert the right to freedom of expression. It will undermine further the rapidly eroding public space wherein critical debates and discussions can take place. This is a space that all who believe in democratic values — publishers included — need to preserve and defend.

Please note that individual names are not being listed in this statement as this is emanating from the entire faculty.

Thank you,

(Professor Rajat Datta)