

The Sikh Calendar in West

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THE PROPOSED CHANGES IN Nanakshahi Calendar recently enacted by SGPC may jeopardize our important achievement in the Western World. Let me explain through a case report.

Although Sikhs have been members of the North American communities for over a century it is only recently that, we are becoming a part of the Western public life. One aspect of our public life is the presence of our children in the public schools. That very fact presented many challenges. One of them was recognition of Sikh presence through the public holidays in the public school calendar.

With the hope that something important was within our reach I accepted my nomination and later appointment on the Dallas Independent School District Religious Faiths Advisory committee in 2007. During this tenure, I was selected to serve as a member of the Dallas School Calendar Committee. In this role, I was asked to help develop a school calendar.

After much deliberation and presentations over a period of several months, I succeeded in getting several Sikh historical days in the school calendar. Because of the large size of the Dallas School district, its leadership makes state wide impact. Thus, our holidays were copied in the calendars of almost all school districts in Texas.

The Sikh holidays included Vaisakhi, Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, Gurtagadi of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur, and Birthday of Guru Nanak Dev; a higher panel dropped the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh, though included in the original list. It was done perhaps to limit the number of potential holidays.

Now I felt that the inclusion of our holidays in the school calendars in North America is a big achievement and it should not be jeopardized by offering dates that are not recurring as we may not continue to be represented when time comes to update calendars. The process takes a long time and requires appropriate representations in important committees and task forces access to which is not guaranteed to us.

The dates I gave to the Calendar Task Force were from Nanakshahi Calendar. I was warned that they would stay as they were at the time of the proposal and dates would not change. Even the Guru Nanak Birthday would stay as it was printed in the Calendar of the year of its first publication. I had to accept that condition lest we lose the recognition of that event.

I am detailing this account to illustrate the potential harm done to our identity in the Western world should we revert to the lunar calendar.

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