

Sahajdhari Sikhs: Victims of Electoral Politics?

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THE DECISION OF THE UNION GOVERNMENT, reported in the media in early November 2003, to remove the names of Sahajdhari Sikhs from the voter lists for the S.G.P.C. general elections is motivated by electoral politics, and not theological tenets. The decision is also beyond the constitutional competence of the State, that is, the Central Government in practical terms, to lay down as to who is or is not a Sikh, or even to prescribe as to who should be associated with the Gurdwaras management as voters for the election to the general house of the S.G.P.C. Under Article 25(l) of the Constitution of India, the State, at the most, can make law only for “regulating or restricting any *economic, financial, political or other secular activity* which may be associated with religious activity”; the decision of the Central Government as regards the deletion of the names of Sahajdhari Sikhs from the S.G.P.C. voter lists — which amounts to knocking out the Sahajdharis from the Sikh folds by depriving them of a role in the management of the Sikh shrines — goes beyond the above law-making power of the Government under the Constitution of India. The very fact that the Shiromani Akali Dal President, S. Parkash Singh Badal, during his recent tenure as chief minister of Punjab did not recommend to the Centre the deletion of names of Sahajdhari Sikhs shows that the liberal Sikh opinion is opposed to electoral politics getting precedence over religious matters.

The real issue, and rightly so, is of keeping off from the Gurdwaras’ management those Sikhs who shave their long hair or trim their beards; such Sikhs are already barred from getting registered as voters under section 49(l)(a) of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925. The case of the Sahajdhari Sikhs, fully recognized as Sikhs in the 1925 Act, is on different theological footing; the Sahajdharis are, traditionally, those Sikhs who though born in non-Sikh families are Sikhs who “perform ceremonies according to Sikh rites” and who do not “use Tobacco or Kutha (Halal meat) in any form” and who are not “*Patit*” and “who can recite Mul Mantar”, as defined in Section 10-A of the 1925 Gurdwaras Act. In other words, Sahajdhari Sikhs, Kesadhari Sikhs and Amritdhari Sikhs are three stages in the spiritual self-development of a Sikh. Instead of targeting those Sikhs with shorn hair and clipped beards; the decision under reference prescribes a wrong remedy for a wrongly diagnosed malady in the management of the Sikh shrines.

In electoral politics, where is the statistical evidence that, in any constituency, a large number of non-Sikhs, that is, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, have at any time registered themselves as Sahajdhari voters to the extent of tilting the electoral result in the S.G.P.C. general house elections?

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