

## **American Sikhs (3HO): Our Brothers across Seven Seas**

Sir: Questions, comments and conjectures persist about 3Ho having a bearing on our quest for knowledge pertaining to Sikhs, Sikhism, 3HO and its founder Sri Singh Sahib Harbhajan Singh Yogi, a devout Sikh. According to their website ([www.3HO.com](http://www.3HO.com)) they offer courses in advanced yogic disciplines and meditation at various 3HO centres in the US (operating as commercial units)

Yogi Ji ([www.yogibhajan.com](http://www.yogibhajan.com)) has earned accolades (ocasionally attracting 'sour-grapes type' criticism from envious adversaries) for delivering a highly potent message of Sikh Gurus to Caucasian Americans, who embraced Sikhism for spiritual attainment or personal reasons. Their radiant appearance project them as practicing Amritdharis; having adopted traditional Sikh names; they have elected to call themselves as "Khalsas" - as their family name.

Most Khalsas, and their families, often mingle with other Sikhs in gurdwaras. Their real, or perceived, contempt for non-Keshadhari Sikhs donning handkerchiefs and *patkas*, was never a secret. On the flip side, they are credited for not interfering in gurdwara politics and Sikh institutions! Yogi Ji was honoured at Darbar Sahib - the Golden Temple - with the title "Sri Singh Sahib". He is personified by his group as "chief religious and administrative authority for Sikh *dharma* of the Western Hemisphere." Since no Sikh was ever granted a mandate by Amritsar to make such claims, one may interpret his statement "... administrative authority for Sikh *dharma* of the Western Hemisphere" - as being quite distinct from other hemispheres! There are no regional boundaries among Sikhs, yet!

Contrary to impressions given, 3HO is not an "authoritarian" movement but works according to strict rules of social and religious conduct. As numerous other Sikh cults, 3HO is seen as an exclusive entity, and poses no real threat to mainstream Sikhism. It should be noted that from time to time there is change of heart and some Khalsas have returned to their flocks.

Several attempts were made (and are being made) by other faiths in North America to discredit 3HO; they hope to see it disintegrate - like Moonies, Hare Rama Hare Krishna and Rajneesh Bhagwan cults.

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## **SGPC and Holy Babas in the Sikh Polity: A Plea for Rationality**

Sir: The Sikhs, by very nature, are passionately attracted to holiness. The so-called holy 'Babas' are part of the Sikh heritage. Our Scripture, creates a lot of space for 'Sadhu-Sants', 'Braham Gyanees' and 'Bhagats' etc. (Refer inter-alia to *Sukhmani Sahib*.) The more they recite '*Nitname*' the more a desire manifests within, to seek '*Babas*' out for veneration. If some enterprising charismatic '*Babas*' occupy this space, let us admit, they are fulfilling an obsessive yearning of the Sikh society.

Given the adoration the Sikh masses overwhelmingly bestow on *Babas*, the only sensible course, under the circumstances, open to SGPC and the Sikh Intelligentsia is to gracefully accept the ground realities and accord due recognition to genuine holymen on some sort of territorial basis to take the Sikh Guru's original agenda further in this 21st century. Immediately SGPC do not have suitable talent available with them, so some of the existing charismatic '*Babas*' may be enlisted and recognized for *prachar*, to start with. Such official '*Babas*' will, in their own interest, eliminate the fake ones themselves, and the SGPC will sit on controls. Meantime, SGPC should initiate steps to develop suitable talent to take over the services currently being rendered by the '*Baba*' dispensations. Use of modern HRD practices would give desired results in a relatively short time. In course of time evolving situation would increasingly turn favorably win-win with initiative returning back to SGPC. Genuine *Babas* wedded to *Gurmat* and duly equipped with modern management practices and state-of-the-art technology, could make a difference, and the SGPC has been left with only two options: either be proactive with Guru's original program, or just become irrelevant.

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## **The Sikh Gurdwaras Bill - "A Recipe for Disaster" : A Viewpoint**

Sir, - Sr. Balwant Singh has done signal service (SR: Oct. 2002) to the *Panth* by his in-depth analysis of the Sikh Gurdwara Bill, 1999. In 1920's many eminent Sikhs had realized the predicament of the *Panth* and convened at Akal Takht, a *sarbat* Khalsa on November 15, 1920 and unanimously selected the *panj piaras* and a Jathedar of Akal Takht who would conduct the *sarbat* Khalsa. The Government preempted the Sikhs' move by announcing a committee of 36 Sikhs to manage Darbar Sahib Complex Gurdwaras on November 13. The *Sarbat Khalsa* held on the 15th – 16th November, 1920 unanimously elected a committee of 175 members, including all the 36 government nominees. This Committee was to manage all gurdwaras of the Punjab and

also those located in other parts of India. Members were elected to represent not only all areas of Punjab but also the Sikh princely states, and Sikh bodies outside Punjab, including Burma, Malaya, China and America. The inaugural meeting of this "Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee" was held under the supervision of *Panj Piaras* on December 12, 1920. The *Panj Piaras* scrutinised the credentials of each member regarding observation of *Rehat Maryada* on the upper story of Akal Takht, and all those who confessed to shortcomings, were given religious punishment. After this, all the 175 came down reciting *Gurbani*, and were presented to the *sangat*. Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia apologized in utter humility and asked for forgiveness if he had hurt the feelings of anyone. He was unanimously elected President of the S.G.P.C. The Akali Dal was formed on the 14th December, 1920 by the S.G.P.C.

**This S.G.P.C. organised by the *panth* worked in complete harmony for five years** and conducted the Gurdwara Reform Movement in which the whole *panth* was ready for any type of sacrifice. Hundreds of Sikhs lost their lives and thousands were imprisoned. This unnerved the British Government who saw a danger in the resurgence of the Sikh fervour and unity. The Hindus and Muslims of Punjab and not only the Punjab Govt. but also Indian and the British Govt. realized that if they allow this situation to continue it may lead to the Sikhs demanding restoration of their lost sovereignty. The Gurdwara Bill of 1925 was the outcome of serious and secret discussions by the Punjab, Delhi Govt. and the Secretary of State in London. This was designed to breakup the unity of the *panth* by involving them in the election process. Most of the Sikh Leaders were in prison and were hesitant to accept the Gurdwara Act. The Govt. utilized the services of some Sikh intellectuals, like Bhai Jodh Singh to convince the Sikhs in jail that the Govt. is giving the Sikhs all that they were agitating for. They should accept the Gurdwara Act and come out of jail after signing their approval. The only person who could see through the British game was S. Teja Singh Samundri who was reported one day to have died in the night.

S. Sohan Singh Josh, who published his book on Gurdwara Reform Movement in 1968, after spending two years and seeing the archives at Delhi, wrote that in the very first election to the S.G.P.C. under the 1925 Act, the Sikhs were divided into three main groups and fought the election using many corrupt practices, which are being used today for fighting the Parliament and Assembly Elections. The spirit of sacrifice demonstrated by the *panth* for five years simply disappeared. Since then, elections under the S.G.P.C. Act of 1925 have eroded the Sikh ethics. Whatever little it still exists would be taken care of by the All India Gurdwara Bill of 1999.

It is high time that we, the Sikhs (who were bestowed the sovereignty by Guru Nanak from the day one of his commencement of *Sikhi* and later repeatedly confirmed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji), realize how best can we look after our holy shrines.

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## **Riding Motorcycles: Should women wear helmets?**

Sir: In her article (SR-September 2002), Dr. B. K. Sohi (she does not write her full name like Baljit Kaur, or as assigned by her beloved parents by invoking blessings of Guru Granth Sahib) has referred to the flamboyant 'edict' of Sr. Khushwant Singh in (*The Tribune* dt. 4-9-1999): "I challenge any one of them: granthis, jathedars, scholars, to show me one line in Sikh scriptures to prove that wearing a helmet is against Sikh religion and I will eat six yards of my turban."

Being a Sikh, I wish to say that wearing a cap, hat or helmet is tantamount to slavery, as verily said by Guru Nanak Sahib in *Asa di Vaar* (Pauri 16 - SGGS 472)..: "They (Brahmins) seek approval of the Mughal rulers by wearing blue clothes" (of course, with *topi* or *kulah* on head as per Muslim style)!

Attention is also invited to the Guru Granth Sahib (Page 225) "Were I to become an accomplished Yogi, and invoke miraculous powers, wear a crown or ceremonial *cap* and have a royal umbrella waving over my head - Yet without devotion to the Lord of universe, how may I attain holy Truth?" SGGS (Page 1286) Guru Nanak Sahib says: " Ignorant fools confer caps of distinction that those without shame receive; They are like the rat that can not find entrance to the hole, yet may tie a winnow on its back to drag within." [Tr. Prof. Gurbachan Singh Talib]

Sikhs should not challenge - but follow - "*Gurbaani* and *Gurmatt*" as per Sikh Heritage. How can those who violate Sikh norms advise the Sikh ladies to wear helmets?

Dr. Sohi also mentions the case of a Sikh Brigadier's two daguthers who were involved in road accident and died because they were not wearing helmets driving a scooter. By that token, she should advise all persons to wear helmets when travelling by a car, bus, railway, or aircraft because thousands die during such accidents!

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