

The Importance of Unshorn hair : A Gurbani perspective

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WHILE SIKH HISTORY IS REplete with examples of Gurus and their followers sporting unshorn hair and laying down their lives to uphold their right to do so, this article contains extensive references from Guru Granth Sahib, emphasizing that every individual who has come to this world –Sikh or non-Sikh, has to submit to the Will of God Almighty. Like everyone else, the life of a Sikh should also be one of unflinching regard, respect and submission to the Will of God.

No transgression, howsoever trivial it may seem to the liberal-minded, neo-religionists, apostates and non-believers, can be tolerated and would tantamount to a violation of the theological code enunciated by God. As far as the Sikhs are concerned, any violation of the principles and code of conduct evolved by the Gurus in consonance with the Will of God Almighty and implemented by the Gurus during their lifetime and thenceforth by the Khalsa Panth – the collective wisdom of the Sikh nation, is simply unacceptable and would be a contravention and indiscretion against the Way of life laid down by the Gurus and a breach of the Will of God Almighty.

The first-page prologue of Guru Granth Sahib –the present Guru of the Sikhs enunciating fundamental principles for leading lives in this mortal world, lays to rest any controversy about the significance and importance of unshorn hair. Conveying the basic philosophy of religion, Guru Nanak clearly and unambiguously talks about submission to the Will of God. Guru Nanak sayeth:

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ

॥ [SGGS: 1]

So how can you become truthful? And how can the veil of illusion be torn away? O Nanak, it is written that you shall obey the Hukam (Order) of His Command, and walk in the way of His Will. ||1||

Lest anyone have any doubts, Guru Nanak, in the very next stanza, further reiterates that all human bodies take shape under the order of Almighty God:

ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੋਵਨਿ ਆਕਾਰ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਕਹਿਆ ਜਾਈ ॥ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੋਵਨਿ ਜੀਅ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਮਿਲੈ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥ (ਜਪੁ, ਮਃ ੧-੧)

By His Command, bodies are created; His Command cannot be described.

By His Command, souls come into being; by His Command, glory and greatness are obtained.

So according to the Guru, everything is created under the will and order of God Almighty, including parts and shapes of human bodies. Obviously hair on the human body is

also created as per his will. So, primarily, cutting or shaving hair is going against the Will of God. If we don't cut our hair, they grow to a standard length only, but if we continue cutting them, they keep growing daily, though we may have cut miles of them. Is it not fighting against the will of God (hukm rjewel)?

Pseudo-religious leaders with sinister motives and those who find it difficult to follow the path of the Guru come with all kinds of excuses and ruses to disobey, expressing ignorance, doubts and questioning the call of the Guru. Our present Guru – Guru Granth Sahib guides us clearly to sail through this sea of ignorance. Without mincing words, the Guru sayeth that only God and the Guru are infallible, everyone else is. Thus, keeping shorn hair can be human fallibility, but it cannot be the dictum.

ਭੁਲਣ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਅਭੁਲੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਕਰਤਾਰੁ ॥ [SGGS: 61]

Everyone makes mistakes; only the Guru and the Creator are infallible.

A question that will logically arise, "Is this for Sikhs alone? As mentioned at the outset, the principles of truthfulness and godliness mentioned in Guru Granth Sahib are the laws of God meant for all humanity and not for Sikhs alone. These laws of God are not for Sikhs alone, but they are for all the human beings. If a majority of the human race does not keep unshorn hair as per the Will of God, the followers of the Gurus, the Sikhs, for whom the keeping of unshorn hair is mandatory, are convinced that humanity will have to accept this. The majority will have to bear in mind that founders of all major religions kept unshorn hair: Jesus Christ, Mohammad Sahib and the various Hindu avatars and deities. Upon attainment of Nirvana, Gautam Buddha too sported unshorn hair. The spiritual consciousness of humanity cannot imagine religious leaders without unshorn hair.

The story goes that once, while traveling by sea, the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore threw his shaving kit into the sea. Upon enquiry, he said, "I have realized God, and the first step I have taken is to throw out this kit. I realized that cutting hair was a clear violation of the Will of God." The present availability of pictures of Hindu deities with shorn beards, *et al*, is part of the pernicious attempt to rewrite and repaint history for narrow religious and political ends.

The Guru repeatedly points out that one will continue to be follower of Sikhism, only so long as one continues to follow the Law of the Guru. Without leaving any room for interpretation and interpolation, as being done today by those who are disposed inimically to the Sikh religion, the Gurus cautioned that those who disobey shall suffer:

ਸੋ ਸਿਖੁ ਸਖਾ ਬੰਧੁ ਹੈ ਭਾਈ ਜਿ ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਵਿਚਿ ਆਵੈ ॥ ਆਪਣੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਜੋ ਚਲੈ ਭਾਈ ਵਿਛੁੜਿ ਚੋਟਾ

ਖਾਵੈ ॥ [SGGS: 601]

He alone is a Sikh, a friend, a relative and a sibling, who walks in the Way of the Guru's Will. One who walks according to his own will, O Siblings of Destiny, suffers separation from the Lord, and shall be punished.

The Guru cannot be obeyed in parts. He has to be obeyed in toto. We can't say, "Guru! This part of your order is fine and suits us but this part is not acceptable." This may be the way of the world, but this is not the way of religion, certainly not Sikh religion. At very many places in Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Sahiban repeatedly guide and order to live as per the will of Waheguru – the Almighty God.

ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ ਤਿਆਗਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਜਨ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਬੁਝਿ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਈਐ ਰੇ ॥

ਜੋ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਕਰੈ ਸੋਈ ਭਲ ਮਾਨਹੁ ਸੁਖਿ ਦੁਖਿ ਓਹੀ ਧਿਆਈਐ ਰੇ ॥ [SGGS: 209]

Renounce the intellectual cleverness of your mind, O humble servants of the Lord; understanding the Hukam of His Command, peace is found. Whatever God does, accept that with pleasure; in comfort and in suffering, meditate on Him.

There is another conspiratorial tactic and stratagem adopted by those within the fold of Sikhism by birth or by choice and by those who are politically motivated to create schismatic cults, to thwart the concept of unshorn hair. Their loose talk, for it is no more than that, runs on the following lines, “We are followers of the earlier Gurus, not of Guru Gobind Singh” or “the ideals of the earlier Gurus were different from that of the Tenth Master” Far from it. Gurbani is the wisdom of the Gurus, who were Lords Eternal – One Jot (eternal spirit) ran through all the Ten Masters and the Guru ratified this at many places. The Khalsa of the Gurus and not only of Guru Gobind Singh, with his unshorn hair – Keshas (and the mandatory other Ks) is the apotheosis of a Sikh.

All the six Gurus whose bani has been included in Guru Granth Sahib have used the nomenclature Nanak, though the individual contributions can be identified by the word Mahalla, meaning birth or incarnation. While reading, reciting, understanding, assimilating and following the contents of Gurbani, the Guru wanted his followers to make no distinction between one and the other.

ਜੋਤਿ ਓਹਾ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਸਾਇ ਸਹਿ ਕਾਇਆ ਫੇਰਿ ਪਲਟੀਐ ॥ [SGGS: 966]

Gurus shared One Light and the same principle, Guru just changed His body.

All the Gurus lived the great ideals that they preached. Keeping Unshorn hair is one important aspect. There are many hymns of Guru Granth Sahib which prove that all Gurus had unshorn hair:

ਕੇਸ ਸੰਗਿ ਦਾਸ ਪਗ ਝਾਰਉ ਇਹੈ ਮਨੋਰਥ ਮੋਰ ॥ [SGGS: 500]

With my hair, I wash the feet of Your slave; this is my life's purpose.

ਸੇ ਦਾੜੀਆਂ ਸਚੀਆ ਜਿ ਗੁਰ ਚਰਨੀ ਲਗੀਨ੍ਹਿ ॥ [SGGS: 1419]

Those beards are true, which brush the feet of the True Guru.

None of the above acts is possible with cut or shaved hair. Whereas the above references adequately demonstrate the humility of the Gurus, they leave no room for doubt about the Gurus being Keshadhari.

There are more examples to show how the Gurus had enriched the lives of Sikhs with utmost humility and like in the case of the Gurus; here too, there are unmistakable references that Sikhs were Keshadhari:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਅਪਨਾ ਸਦ ਸਦਾ ਸਮੁਾਰੇ ॥

ਗੁਰੁ ਕੇ ਚਰਨ ਕੇਸ ਸੰਗਿ ਝਾਰੇ ॥ [SGGS: 387]

I contemplate, forever and ever, the True Guru, with my hair, I dust the feet of the Guru.

॥1॥

Even the sayings of the Bhagats, whose Bani has been incorporated in Guru Granth Sahib suggest that they too were Keshadhari. For example,

ਦਿਵਸ ਰੈਨਿ ਤੇਰੇ ਪਾਉ ਪਲੋਸਉ ਕੇਸ ਚਵਰ ਕਰਿ ਫੇਰੀ ॥ [SGGS: 969]

Day and night, I wash Your feet, Lord; I wave my hair as the chauree, to brush away the flies. ||1||

Though the above hymns don't go by their literal meanings, these are just examples of the ultimate humility of the Guru, as only one who keeps the unshorn hair can quote them.

From Guru Nanak to Guru Tegh Bahadur - the first nine Gurus preached and practised submission to the Will of God Almighty and sported unshorn hair. The Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh codified it as a part of the Sikh code of conduct and made it a mandatory and compulsory discipline for every Sikh –man and woman, young and old, everyone without exception and ever since it has been so and will remain so for all times to come. Since then, over the last five hundred plus years, hundreds of thousands of devout Sikhs and those who adhere to the proclamation of the Guru have laid down their lives but never thought of relinquishing hair.

The neo-modern liberal approach at redefining Sikhism because of the prevailing wave of apostasy amongst Sikhs should not, and cannot, become the basis of maligning the path laid down by the Gurus. Any wavering from the fundamentals enunciated by the Gurus would be striking at the roots of the Sikh religion, and that would be an intolerable blasphemy.

This leads us to the question as to what should we call a person who does not follow the guidelines and commands of the Gurus in totality and particularly about keeping unshorn hair. Any Sikh, who mistakenly or deliberately trims or cuts his hair, is an apostate – a renegade who has relinquished the path of his Guru, called *Patit*. Though their number is increasing today, does it mean that they are loyal to Sikhism? Patits (piqq) are being wrongly interpreted as a section or class of Sikhism, which is misleading. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha defines a *Patit* thus:

piqq : 1) ifigAw hoieAw 2) Dm krm qoN ifigAw, pwpl 3) jwiq qo ifigAw, smwjoN kwirj (kiFAw)

Prof. Sahib Singh whose interpretational work of Guru Granth Sahib named Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan, in ten volumes is considered the most authenticated work in the field, gives the following meaning for the word 'Patit

piqq ... if gy hoey, nlc, ivkwrW ivc pey hoey [

Thus a patit is one who has fallen off from the principles of religion and the discipline of the community. As such, he stands out of the community. He has to undergo repentance and exemplary disciplining before being inducted back into the community fold from his ex-communication.

This code has the sanction of Guru Granth Sahib and is not one which has been evolved only by the Tenth Master or by the Khalsa Panth. Gurbani urges the defaulter to resubmit to the fold, seek pardon and begin a new life, without malice and without any unjustified restriction of any kind:

ਪਤਿਤ ਪਵਿਤ ਲਗਿ ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਪੈਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥

ਭ੍ਰਮੁ ਭਉ ਕਾਟਿ ਕੀਏ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥ [SGGS: 217-18]

I was a sinner, and I have been sanctified, taking to the Guru's Feet. Dispelling my doubts and fears, the Guru has rid me of hatred.

There is no denying that Gurbani is very clear that such patits can be pardoned and re-inducted into the Sikh fold, provided they again submit to the Will of God and Guru. The Khalsa Panth has also adopted a very simple procedure for pardoning a patit which is mentioned in the Sikh Rehat Maryada.

There is a specific instruction that the Sikh Sangat and the Five Beloveds (the Panj Piyaras) are not to take an obdurate stand in granting pardon, for the sole purpose is not of punishment but to dawn a realization that the simplest way to be back into the Sikh fold is implementation of a way of life which involves submission to the Will of God and Guru.

Those that seem to be worried about the dwindling numbers of the Sikhs need to know that this religion is dedicated to excellence of the human race and is not part of the race where only numbers decide future and destiny. Numbers are not a concern of the Guru, ethics and compliance with ideals is:

ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾ ਦਿਸੰਦੜਿਆ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਵੰਞੈ ਮਿਤ੍ਰ ਅਸਾਡੜੇ ਸੇਈ ॥

ਹਉ ਦੂਢੇਦੀ ਜਗੁ ਸਬਾਇਆ ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਵਿਰਲੇ ਕੇਈ ॥

[SGGS: 520]

The sight of them banishes my evil-mindedness; they are my only true friends. I have searched the whole world; O servant Nanak, how rare are such persons! ||2||

Either you are a Sikh or you are not. If you are a Sikh and claim to be one, unshorn hair is a pre-requisite. The House of Guru Nanak is inclusive in nature, and not exclusive. Everyone, of every religion, including those who oppose the Sikh religion or any religion are welcome to seek the blessings of this open house, but it would be foolhardy to consciously and stupidly allow anyone to take control reigns of Sikh institutions.

The Sikh Code of Conduct is based on Gurbani. The semantic discussion that has followed in the court rooms regarding definition of a Sikh is unnecessary and an adventure into the annals of religion, which courts should consciously try and avoid.

Any decision by any court in India or elsewhere, against the collective wisdom of the Khalsa Panth and the clear norms laid down by the Gurus in their own words, would not affect the Sikh way of life in any way. Such a decision would seriously jeopardise the faith of the Sikhs in the judiciary of the land where such decision is made.

The keeping of unshorn hair is part of the consciousness of the religious tradition of mankind. Saintliness, godliness and the spiritual search for truth with the keeping of unshorn hair is part of such vision and imagination.

Conclusion:

1. Keeping unshorn hair is part and parcel of the basic tenet of Sikhism and it is so important, significant and necessary that anyone who does not comply is a deviant.
2. An individual born in a Sikh family and sporting shorn hair may not be acceptable in law of the land as being classified as a Sikh, because religiously and socially, his rights as a Sikh stand withdrawn from the day he relinquishes this basic fundamental of the Sikh

religion. He may remain classified as a Sikh till he or she does not seek facilities as a right given to Sikhs.

3. No law of the land can be enacted or a court adjudicate upon the fundamental tenets of the Sikh religion, or any religion for that matter.

