

'Kesh' - An intrinsic Ordainment for Sikhs

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"*Sikhi keshâ suasâ sang nibhai, Tinha dee kamaee da dhyan dhar key, Khalsa ji, bolo ji Waheguru*", a Sikh prays daily in the *Ardas* (or supplication) to God, either at the collective level of the *sangat* (congregation) in a Gurdwara or at the personal level in the privacy of one's home.

What does it mean? Those who equated one's life's breath with the *kesh* (scalp hair) and who followed Sikhi by maintaining *kesh* till the last, even under life-threatening situations, but never gave up being a Sikh; remembering the sacrifices made by them, say Waheguru O'wondrous Lord.

Elemental: *Kesh* - the elemental gift as one of the five *kakaars* ordained by Guru Gobind Singh Ji to keep and maintain. Keeping uncut hair is the hallmark of a Sikh. A Sikh is identified by the *Kesh* and *Dastaar* (turban) as protection and adornment. When Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa out of a pious Sikh, a great psychological transformation took place. Any other human being can hide in the multitude of a crowd, but how can a Sikh hide himself? The physical identity given to a Sikh – that of maintaining and keeping uncut hair on one's head makes it child's play to spot such a person. One need not ask that person who he/she is – it is understood that the person is in all probability a Sikh. Giving a physical identity to his followers, Guru Gobind Singh Ji shattered the 'fear factor' and thus, were 'hawks born out of sparrows'. It needs tremendous courage to stand up for one's faith. A Sikh is always taken for granted as a fearless and bold person, who can do anything under the sun, not caring for anyone other than what the Guru commands.

Love & Loyalty: A Sikh is a learner and a disciple of one's Guru. How can a *chela* not be in love with one's Guru? A Guru becomes the trend setter. Whatever one's Guru says, one follows each and every command and does not dare to challenge or refute. If I love someone, it is quite natural that I shall not disobey that person and whatever the person likes and wants me to do, I shall do without any hesitation, what the Guru commands. Whatever I do shall be within the gamut and benchmark of the Guru's teachings.

The love and loyalty arise out of the respect I develop for someone due to the virtuous qualities present in that person. A person is identified, liked and respected due to the presence of extraordinary qualities. The sacrifices made by Guru Gobind Singh Ji and His family are extra-ordinary and unforgettable. How can a Sikh forget the sacrifices made also by Guru Tegh Bahadur, Guru Arjun Dev, Bhai Taru Singh, and by all those Sikhs who gave up their lives but never gave up *Sikhi*. How lucky am I to be one of the descendants of Guru Nanak's transmitted ideology and revolutionary thoughts that freed me from the '*janama, janama dey bharam*' (doubts and delusions accumulated from a multitude of births).

Futurist: Had the hair 'ordination' for Sikhs not been decreed intrinsic by Guru Gobind Singh - Sikhs would have long ago been sucked into the 'black hole' of the majority community. Keeping uncut Keshas is the unspoken commitment, which universally declares, "Come what may, I shall never give up my Sikh Way of Life and my faith."

There are many hidden agendas with ulterior motives all over India to erase the identity of the Sikhs with subtle attacks made (by the Arya Samajists in particular) since pre-independence. The continuous ridiculing of Sikhs in the media, specially the impudent Bollywood films, and puerile 'Sardar ji' jokes, since independence from British Rule, has created a deep dent in the psychology of Sikh youth to create a sub-conscious feeling of

inferiority complex for oneself.

Self-serving History Books: At the educational front, Indian school history books have never given the due respect that the Sikh Gurus' sacrifices highly deserve. Another attack is the attempt of (the RSS instigated) conspirators who intend changing the terminology of Guru Granth Sahib. When will the Sikh leaders learn that Guru Granth Sahib bears the final seal of the Tenth Master? Whoever dares to tamper with the Holy Granth of the Sikhs is the gravest enemy of the Sikh Panth? No effort should be spared to counter such forces even at the cost of one's seat of power and, if required, to put at stake one's life too. Shouldn't the same criteria be followed when anyone dishonors any of the *Kakaars* of a Sikh?

Outrage: The recent incident in Jaipur of a Sikh school boy in his teens whose hair was forcibly tonsured by a group of miscreant youngsters in a melodramatic manner, apart from relevance of the instigation due to the involvement of a girl, portrays the psyche of the non-Sikh community who dare to touch a 'key article' of the Sikh Faith in fits of rage, resentment and hostility. How can a true Sikh at heart sit mute and not protest over such audacity and insult meted to a fellow Sikh?

All Sikhs have to become alert and aware that no one, [I repeat, no one] can dare to play, touch or dishonor the hair, hallmark of a Sikh and expect to get away unpunished. Sikhs all over India are deeply hurt and seething in anger, wanting immediate justice for the Sikh teenager and timely punishment for the guilty. It is comforting to note that the Sikh Federation of U.K. has offered support on behalf of a number of Sikh organizations in Great Britain and elsewhere, which is crucial at this juncture. Perhaps, 'an online declaration' to condemn the action can influence the Indian Sikh leaders to take a strict stance on this sentimental issue.

It is equally essential to make the non-Sikh communities aware of the need to respect the Articles of Faith of a Sikh. Mere staging of demonstrations, peace rallies and submitting petitions to the Governor (like the one held at Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata) is not the final solution. What purpose will the Commission appointed by the S.G.P.C. serve?

Strategy: A double-pronged strategy needs to be adopted. The civil and criminal laws in India need to be amended with respect to the minority Sikh community. A Bill has to be presented in Parliament whereby honoring and giving due respect to the Articles of Faith of the Sikh community be made mandatory and directives be given to the N.C.E.R.T to include such information in school text-books all over India under various Educational Boards in Social Science subject under the Civics section. Furthermore, for those indulging in perpetrating disrespect and dishonor of any Article of Faith of the Sikh community, severest punishment be meted out for which new laws, if necessary, should be framed. Signed petitions on a mass scale should be urgently submitted to the Prime Minister in this matter by all the Sikh organizations active in Sikh affairs all over India and the diaspora through the Akal Takht to take up this matter expeditiously with the Centre to maintain peace and harmony amongst diverse communities co-existing in India.

The initial and timely reaction at Mumbai where Sikhs held a 'peace march', followed by a 'Trade Bandh' of Sikh establishments, is highly appropriate and commendable. The rest of the country was too slow and lethargic in responding to staging mass protests. The Commission, which was appointed by the S.G.P.C., should table its report publicly. We shall eagerly await the outcome and suggestions of the Commission. What will be of interest is to determine if the Jaipur lad grows and maintains his hair once again. If he does not recover from the mental and psychological trauma caused by the incident we would have lost another youth from the fold of Sikhi. That will be regrettable and tragic.

The film "*Kambdi Kalaa*", released in mid 2006, deserves to be mentioned here in the light

of recent happenings* in Jaipur, Jamshedpur, Haryana and Delhi. A pioneering work of Sikh sisters – director Ish Amitoj Kaur and producer Gagan Amitoj Kaur, both debutants, is perhaps the first such film to be made in the Sikh diaspora which principally revolves around the hair issue of Sikhs, besides touching on a host of other issues faced by the Sikhs. A must-see film of 57 minutes, having both Punjabi and English dialogues. The underlying focus of the film is : 'If you can't be true to your faith, how can you be true to someone you love?' A Sikh's commitment to his/her faith is much more important than any other issue in one's life, whether it be personal, social, political or financial.

ਦਾਤਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਭ ਸੂਰਤਿ ਤੇਰੀ ॥ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਸਿਆਣਪ ਹਉਮੈ ਮੇਰੀ ॥

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