

IMPORTANCE OF HAIR IN SIKHISM

Written by Dr. Devinder Singh Sekhon PhD
Monday, 17 December 2012 18:56

1. **NATURE'S GIFT:** There are certain things in nature that do not seem to have any importance to us. But, whatever has been created by Waheguru, is important at least to Him otherwise He would not create that. It is a different matter whether we realize the importance of those things or not. Hair is a nature's gift to most of the land mammals, particularly to humans. Every new born child, regardless of the gender, has hair. Hair has multiple functions for us including some vital biological functions as discussed below.

2. **LOOKS:** The most important visible function of the hair is to add beauty to the looks of human beings. Imagine a woman without hair on her head. How ugly will they look! Women spend hundreds of rupees per month to get different hair styles to look more attractive. If there were no hair, how will they design it? Women without less hair wear wigs to hide their bad looks because of the loss of hair. So, you can see the importance of hair for women.

The hair plays a similar role for men. Hair provides a majestic look to the men, especially the facial hair. Male beard adds to the personality of men and creates an impression of dominance. Anybody with hair looks much more impressive with the turban on the head than when he has his hair cut and no beard. Compare the pictures of S. Bhagat Singh and those of S. Udham Singh with and without the turbans, and you will notice the difference.

In 1972, an American wrote an article about Sikhs in National Geographic. He had met a Sikh gentleman while traveling from Delhi to Amritsar by rail about whom he wrote: I had never seen a man as handsome as this gentleman in my life. This is the impression that the turban and hence hair creates about Sikhs.

It is said that Maharaja of Patiala, S Bhupinder Singh, went to see Adolf Hitler of Germany in 1935. When the Maharaja asked Hitler's secretary for some time to see the latter, Hitler refused to see the Maharaja saying that he had no time for such trivial people. **On the insistence of the Maharaja, Hitler agreed to see him only for the time it would take him to come down a flight of stairs. But when Hitler saw the Maharaja, he was so impressed by his looks and his personality that he talked to the Maharaja for a full hour.**

The proof of such an impression of the Maharaja on Hitler is provided by the fact that Hitler presented a 1936 May Bach V8 car to the Maharaja which was on display in the palace of the Maharaja till 1955 when it was again gifted away. Remember, the Maharaja could not have impressed Hitler in the capacity of the ruler of a very small state in a slave India. It was only his looks and his personality that impressed Hitler.

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Even the male animals look much more impressive with their hair than the corresponding females. For example, a lion looks much more impressive with his mane than the lioness. Same is true of a horse and a mare.

3. GENDER DIFFERENCES: The gender differences in some animals are very clear and they can be told apart just from their sizes and looks. Males are generally larger and more impressive. For example look at the rooster and the hen, peacock and peahen, a lion and lioness, a male and a female goat and so on. On top of being more impressive, the males also seem to be highly conceited. But other than facial hair, human can hide their identity by wearing suitable clothes and make up etc. Nature has created a big visible difference among human males and females in that males get beards whereas females do not unless there is some harmonic imbalance in their bodies. So, why do we destroy this Nature's gift by cutting our hair and shaving beards?

4. IDENTITY: Maintaining one's identity is extremely important to humans. Every sovereign country nation has its own flag as a sign of its identity and hence pride. Throughout the history, nations and individuals have struggled and laid down their lives to re-establish and maintain their identities. Hair gives a unique identity to the Sikhs because no other people grow their hair and beards the way the Sikhs do.

Cutting of hair has been, and still a sign of slavery and sad situations. In many countries, hair of the prisoners was cut to take away their dignity which implies that growing of hair is a sign of independence and self-esteem. Our Hindu brothers still shave their heads when their fathers die. Similarly, the heads of the widows, especially those of the young were shaved to show that they had lost their main support,

The Arabs proudly show their identity by covering their heads with a scarf which is held in place by a stretchable band. All the Arab heads of states including the king of Saudi Arabia cover their heads like that on their international visits. Likewise, the orthodox **Jews** wear a scalp cap in public to show who they are.

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Continuing with the identity issue, when the former prime minister of India, Indra Gandhi, married a non-Hindu, Feroze Shah, without the approval of her father, M.K. Gandhi controlled the explosive situation. To kill Feroze Shah's identity as a non-Hindu, Gandhi, very cleverly invited the former to his place and expressed his desire to adopt Feroze Shah as his own son and give him the family name of Gandhi.

The young Feroze Shah could not see the deep implication of this offer at the time, and readily agreed to the proposal. But later, when he realized how he was tricked into losing his identity, his relation with Indra went sour and he divorced her. Soon after that, Feroze Shah died untimely death because of his mistake.

Shaheed (martyr) Bhai Taru Singh gladly let the Muslim rulers at the time remove his scalp with a tool rather than let his hair cut and thus lose his identity. Many, many other Sikhs suffered similar hardships to maintain their Sikh identity.

The British knew very well that the Sikhs were very brave and highly moral people as a consequence they trusted them to a great degree. No Sikh in the British army was allowed to trim their beards, let alone cut their hair because the British also knew that the Sikhs had the good qualities because of their principles one of which was to grow full hair. The day the Sikhs would cut their hair, they would lose the noble qualities. It was because of the high moral principles of the Sikhs as enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib that the British had accorded special status to Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs. A special car (full bogey) was provided to transport Guru Granth Sahib by rail from one point to another by the British whenever the need arose. No other religious book enjoyed so much honour In the first two world wars, the Sikh soldiers fought with such bravery and dedication that all the enemies dreaded them.

The Sikhs earned such a respect even among the non-Sikhs that an alone woman found herself safe whenever she saw a Sikh. This was true even of Muslim women.

Even today women in Mumbai prefer to hire a Sikh taxi driver than a non-Sikh when they have to travel at night. Every Sikh should be very proud of this level of trust in them. **And remember that we will enjoy this respect and trust only as long as we keep our identity intact. The day we lose our identity, we will be just another individual among six and a half billion people in the world.**

5. BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE: Apart from the above, body hairs have their important biological significance as well.

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§ Hair protects us from the harmful UV radiation and other debris. Eyebrows and eyelashes protect our eyes from dust and some harmful bacteria as well.

§ Body hairs provide insulation to our body thereby protecting us from extreme heat and cold.

§ Hair retains much higher concentration of poisonous substances in our body – ten times higher than urine and blood. So, harmful chemicals in our bodies can be detected earlier with more accuracy using hair. Hairs retain such high concentration of harmful chemicals even long after our death.

§ Our head needs greater protection against injury because it houses the vital organ, brain. Hair provides some additional protection against head injuries.

§ If we gain unexpected acceleration, deceleration or if we spin or fall, the sensory hair cells warn the ears which in turn send signals to maintain body equilibrium.

All these function of the body hairs are important for safety and good health.

6. GURU'S COMMANDMENT: If you are a Sikh, then you don't need to be told that Guru's commandment is most important for the Sikhs to follow. Even though Guru Nanak Dev Ji did not put this in writing, but He definitely desired for His Sikhs never to cut hair because it is a gift of Waheguru and must be respected. He set a personal example and grew full hair, and so did all the next nine Gurus and the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the Tenth Guru made it mandatory for all Sikhs not to cut hair from any part of the body. In addition to the biological importance of the hair already discussed above, another reason for the Tenth Master to make this a requirement for the Sikhs not to hair was the idea of giving the Sikhs a separate identity. He wanted His Sikhs to be recognized even from a distance. In addition to a separate identity, the growth of hair also served as a uniform carrying some high moral values. Just like a policeman in uniform

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is far less likely to commit a crime, a Sikh in uniform of long hair is also less likely to commit some immoral acts because he is supposed to adhere to high morals.

To get a firm commitment of noble deeds, Guru Sahib administered the dagger-and-bowl pahul (primer) to His Sikhs, and warned them that the Sikhs will enjoy His trust as long as they adhere to the uniform and high moral values.

So, even in the absence of any other reason, Guru's Commandment is more than enough for us to grow hair.

My heart cries when I see our youth having their hair cut. They do not realize what they are doing to their future. They will be swallowed by the main stream, and we will lose all the glory that we enjoy being Sikhs. At the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there were only a handful of Sikhs, and see how powerful kingdom he established. It happened only because the Sikhs of the time listened to the commandment of the Gurus and had very high noble values. **I urge our youth to wake up and put a quick stop to their slipping in an immoral world.**