Importance of Turban (DASTAAR) in Sikhism

Historical Background

Turban is and has been an inseparable part of a Sikh’s life. Since Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, all Sikhs have been wearing Turban. Refer to Dr. Trilochan Singh's "Biography of Guru Nanak Dev Ji." All Sikh Gurus wore Turban. The Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct) specifically says that all Sikhs must wear a Turban. According to the Rehatnama of Bhai Chaupa Singh Ji, who was a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the five Kakars of Sikhism were: Kachh (special underwear), Karha (steel bracelet), Kirpan (small sword), Kangha (comb) and Keski (a small Turban).

Guru Gobind Singh Ji says,

"Kangha dono vakt kar, paag chun kar bandhai."

Translation:

"Comb your hair twice a day and tie your Turban carefully, turn by turn."

Bhai Chaupa Singh Ji says,

"Kachh, Karha, Kirpan, Kangha, Keski, Eh panj Kakar rehat dhare Sikh soi."

Translation:

The five Kakars of Sikhism are special underwear, steel bracelet, sword, comb, and small Turban. A person who wears all these Sikh symbols should be considered a Sikh.

Several ancient Sikh documents refer to the order of Guru Gobind Singh Ji about wearing five Ks. Bhai Rattan Singh Bhangu is one of the most famous ancient Sikh historians. He is the author of "Sri Gur Panth Parkash" which he wrote almost two centuries ago. He writes,

"Doi vele utth bandhyo dastare, pahar aatth rakhyo shastar sambhare |
"Tie your Turban twice a day and carefully wear weapons 24 hours a day. . .

Take good care of your hair. Do not cut your hair."

The following information describes the importance of Turban:

Holiness and Spirituality:

Turban is a symbol of spirituality and holiness in Sikhism. When Guru Amar Dass Ji left for heavenly abode, his elder son Pirthi Chand wore Turban which is usually worn by an elder son when his father passes away. At that time Guru Arjan Dev Ji was honored with the Turban of Guruship.

"Marne di pag Pirthiye badhi. Guriyaee pag Arjan Ladhi."

Guru Angad Dev Ji honored Guru Amardas Ji with a Turban (Siropa) when he was made the Guru. Similarly, the Turban (Dastaar) has remained the key aspect in a Sikh's honour. Those who have selflessly served the community are honoured with Turbans.

Sikh initiation ceremony (Khande ki pahul) is one of the most important ceremonies in a Sikhs' life. That ceremony cannot be completed without wearing a Turban. Indeed, a short-Turban (called a Keski) is one of the five requirements for Sikhs. The most revered Sikh symbol is hair. The Turban is required of every Sikh in order to cover his/her hair. This is also the primary reason the comb (Kangha) is another one of the five requirements in the Sikh way of life.

All the Sikh Gurus wore turban. Throughout our short history, all Sikhs have been required to do so. The Turban has indeed become synonymous with Sikhism. Yet, other religions such as Hinduism, Islam and even Christianity have similar tenets as evidenced by the following:
Once they enter the gates of the inner Court, they are to wear linen
vestments, they shall wear linen turbans, and linen drawers on their loins.

(Old Testament: Ezekiel 44:18-19)

**Turban as a Robe of Honor**

The highest honor that a Sikh religious organization can bestow upon any
individual is a Siropa. It is a blessing of the Guru which is bestowed upon a
person who has devoted a major portion of his/her life for the welfare of the
Sikh or the humanity in general. Sometimes a Siropa is also bestowed upon
the families of Sikhs martyrs.

**Turban in Social Life**

Muslim men and women in many countries still wear turban. It is said that
the Egyptians removed their turban during mourning.

Even in Punjab removing a turban from a person's head was considered a
sign of mourning. Bhai Gurdas, a Sikh savant, who was contemporary of the
several Sikh Gurus writes in his Vars:

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\begin{align*}
Tthande khuhu naike pag visar(i) aya sir(i) nangai |
Ghar vich ranna(n) kamlia(n) dhussi liti dekh(i) kudhange |
\end{align*}
\]

(Vara(n) Bhai Gurdas, Var 32, Pauri 19)

Translation:

A person, after taking a bath at the well during winter time, forgot his
Turban at the well and came home bareheaded. When the women saw him
at home without a Turban, they thought someone had died and they started
to cry.

There are many Punjabi idioms and proverbs that describe how important is
a Turban in one's life.

**Pag Vatauni (Exchange of Turban)**

People in Punjab have been and still do exchange Turbans with closest
friends. Once they exchange Turbans they become friends for life and forge
a permanent relationship. They take a solemn pledge to share their joys and
sorrows under all circumstances. Exchanging Turban is glue that can bind two individuals or families together for generations.

**Turban as a Symbol of Responsibility**

People who have lived in India would know the Turban tying ceremony known as Rasam Pagri (Turban Tying Ceremony). This ceremony takes place once a man passed away and his oldest son takes over the family responsibilities by tying Turban in front of a large gathering. It signifies that now he has shouldered the responsibility of his father and he is the head of the family.

**Turban and Sikh Military Life**

Turban is a symbol of honor and self-respect. The Sikh Army fought their last major battle against the British in 1845. All the Sikh soldiers and generals were wearing Turbans at that time. Shah Muhammad, a great Punjabi poet and historian, who witnessed that war, writes:

*Pichhe baitth sardara(n) Gurmatta kita, Koi akal da karo ilaj yaro. Sherh burshia(n) di sade pesh ayee, Pag dahrhia(n) di rakho laaj yaro.*

The Sikh chiefs took a unanimous and firm religious decision (Gurmatta), that they should have sense enough to judge the tenor of Maharani Jinda(n) Kaur and the crafty Britishers. They said that they were facing a very shrewed enemy and it was high time for them to save their honor because they were wearing Turbans and beards (both symbols of self-respect).

The Sikh soldiers refused to wear helmets during World War I and World War II. They fought with Turbans on their heads. A Sikh (Khalsa) is supposed to be fearless. Wearing a helmet is admitting fear of death. Many Sikhs received Victoria Cross which is one of the most prestigious gallantry awards in the British army.

Many Sikhs refused to remove Turban even in jails. Bhai Randhir Singh, a widely respected Sikh preacher, scholar and a freedom fighter had to undergo a fast to win his right to wear Turban in the prison.
High Moral Values:

Sikh history is full of facts that men and women of other faiths such as Hindus and Muslims felt safe when there was a Sikh around them. They felt secure from invaders and other people when Khalsa was around. The woman or the oppressed would feel safe and sound under the protection of "Khalsa". It was a common saying in Punjab:

"Aye nihang, booha khol de nishang"

Translation:

The Nihangs (Sikhs) are at the door. Dear woman, go ahead open the door without any fear whatsoever.

In the ancient times, the Sikh men had to fight tough battles with the rulers. They moved from village to village at night. Sometimes they had to hide. Women folks had a very high degree of trust in the Nihangs (Sikhs) who can be clearly identified with a Turban and beard. Women knew that the Nihangs (Sikhs) were of high moral character and never mistreated or molested women. So they fed them and helped them in whatever way they could.

Turban - A Symbol of Missionary Zeal and Courage

There are many references in the Sikh history that describe how Guru Gobind Singh Ji personally tied beautiful Dumalas (Turbans) on the heads of both his elder sons Baba Ajit Singh Ji and Baba Jujhar Singh Ji and how he personally gave them arms, decorated them like bridegrooms, and sent them to the battlefield at Chamkaur Sahib where they both received martyrdom. When the Sikhs go to an agitation (Morcha), they usually wear a saffron color Turban which is a symbol of sacrifice and martyrdom. When Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale courted his arrest, he wore a saffron color Turban.

Beauty:

"Khoob teri pugri, Meethae tere bol"
In the ancient Egyptian civilization Turban was an ornamental head dress. They called it pjr from which is perhaps derived the word "Pugri" commonly used in India and other Asian countries.

**Kingly Turban:**

Sign of Sardari.

It was meant for only kings. Minorities were not allowed to wear Turban and Kirpan.

"Ouch Dumalra"

Most respectful.

Bare head is not considered appropriate as per Gurbani:

"Oud oud raavaa jhaate paaye, vekhe lok hasae ghar jaaye"

**Identity:**

It provides Sikhs a unique identity. You will see only Sikhs wearing Turban in western countries.

If a Sikhs likes to become one with his/her Guru, he/she must look like a Guru (wear a Turban). Guru Gobind Singh Ji has said,

"Khalsa mero roop hai khaas. Khalse me hau karo nivas."

Translation:

Khalsa (Sikh) is a true picture of mine. I live in a Khalsa.

According to the historical accounts, Guru Gobind Singh Ji tied almost 18 inches high Dumala (Turban) just before he left for heavenly abode.