

# KESH DIVINE GIFT OF THE LORD

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This paper by Gurcharanjit Singh Lamba was submitted in the Punjab and Haryana High Court in the ongoing case which also ended up involving the definition of Sahajdhari Sikh. The WSN takes pleasure in bringing this document on record, particularly because it was cited by several lawyers in the case.



The Kes is so important for a Sikh that it is one of the five sacred K's, kakars, staining with Gurmukhi alphabet 'K'. On the other hand, tampering with them by cutting, trimming or shearing in any manner is a bajjar kurahit - a gross transgression and the offender Sikh is branded a patit -an apostate. A Patit is no more a Sikh. So much so that a Sikh dyeing kes or beard is also declared a tankhahia, religious sinner and his offerings at Sri Akal Takhat or any other Takhat is not permitted.

Under Section 4 (Chapter X) (Article XVI) (i) of the Sikh Rahit Maryada,

Living in consonance with the Guru's Tenets.....A Sikh should, in no way, harbour any antipathy to the hair of the head with which his child is born. He should add the suffix "Singh" to the name his son. A Sikh should keep the hair of his sons and daughters intact. (page 24)

The importance of Kes can be gauged from the fact that a person denigrating it is even debarred from voting rights for the SGPC elections. To wit the relevant section of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925, Section 49 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925,

49. Qualification of electors.- Every person shall be entitled to have his name registered on the electoral roll of a constituency constituted for the election of a member or members of the Board who is a resident in that constituency and

(ii) is a Sikh more than twenty-one years of age, who had his name registered as a voter in such manner as may be prescribed:

[Provided that no person shall be registered as an elector who-

(a) trims or shaves his beard or Keshas.....  
The entity and the identity of a Sikh are interdependent. Though there is no doubt that merely by sporting unshorn hair a person will not become a Sikh, but it is also true that without kes a person cannot be a Sikh. It is thus construed that every person keeping unshorn hair does not become a Sikh, but every Sikh is and ought to be kesdhari.

"Sikh" literally means a follower. The one who does not follow the tenets cannot lay claim to be called a follower or a Sikh. Says Guru Amar Das,

He alone is a Sikh, a friend, a relative and a sibling, who walks in the Way of the Guru's Will. (Guru

shxyнк jн n l pVv  
vvl w ] (567-9,  
vfHhу mU 1)  
Your nose is so  
graceful, and your hair  
is so long.

Granth Sahib, page 601)  
The life of a follower has to flow in a system. This system is known as rahit maryada. Maryada is a word derived from Sanskrit root word marya, which means the two banks of a river. If the water flows within the embankments then it is river and serves humankind. However, if it spills over or breaches its embank-



A picture of a Sahajdhari given in the Mahan Kosh (Encyclopaedia of Sikhism) Languages Dept. Punjab

They came into this Dark Age of Kali Yuga naked, and you shall depart again naked if you fail to lead your life in maryada. (Guru Granth Sahib, page 74)

Every religion has its rules and regulations. It is imperative for a religious person to honour the sentiments, feelings and codes of every other religion. Guru Gobind Singh was asked by the royal peer, sage of emperor Bahadur Shah: "Which of the two religions is better, yours or mine?" Guru ji's reply was, "tum ko tumahara khoob, hum ko hamara khoob - for you, yours is wonderful and for me, mine is fine." Hence it is abundantly clear that Sikh Rahit Maryada or Sikh Code of Conduct is to regulate the life, deeds, do's and

don'ts for a Sikh only. It does not interfere with any other religion or religious group and will not invite any intrusion by any one else.

Kes and the dastar that covers it are divine gifts from Creator Lord received through the Guru. Discarding these primary 'articles of faith' by a Sikh is a willful act of contempt against the will of God and Guru.

Didar, guftar and kirdar -appearance, conversation and the inner character, are the three parameters to judge and assess a person. The later two stages come in if the person does not falter at the first stage itself

The Sikh Rahit Maryada is a well codified text containing the do's and don'ts for a Sikh. Contrary to common belief, the Sikh Rahit Maryada is not created by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee or SGPC. SGPC is its mere publisher and acted as a facilitator for its codification. In 1931, the SGPC, under the convenership of Professor Teja Singh, an authority on Sikhism, constituted a Sikh Rahu Reet Sub Committee. The Committee consisted of Jatdhars of all the Takhts, the Head Granthi of Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar (Golden Temple) and well recognized and respected Sikh scholars and prominent Sikhs of various seminaries and institutions who had made unparalleled contributions in the field of religion and service to the Panth. The draft Sikh Rahit Maryada prepared by this committee was widely circulated all over the world and views and suggestions were invited and considered. Finally, in 1945, the present form of the Sikh Rahit Maryada was approved and published. It is, thus, the collective wisdom of the entire Sikh Panth and contains the Sikh rules and regulations applicable on each and every Sikh.

It will be interesting to note that following are the primary sources of this Sikh Rahit Maryada:

- "Guru Granth Sahib
- "Banee (religious text) of Guru Gobind Singh
- "Writings of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal
- "Rahit Namas
- Guru Granth Sahib is the embodiment of the Ten Gurus but contains banee of six Guru Sahibs. Guru Gobind Singh's banee is contained

gr kyrcn kps silg  
Jury ]1] (387-12,  
Amsw, mU 5)  
With my hair, I dust  
the feet of the Guru.  
||1||

separately in Dasven Patshah ka Granth or Dasam Granth. Bhai Gurdas I was a cotemporary of Guru Arjan Dev ji. Bhai Gurdas II was a cotemporary of Guru Gobind Singh ji. Bhai Nand Lal, the renowned Persian scholar who served the Mughal Durbar; had left the Emperor's service and came to stay at Anandpur Sahib, the camp headquarters of Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh valued his writings and gave recognition by giving the title to his works too.

The special status of the writings of Bhai Gurdas I and II and Bhai Nand Lal can be ascertained from the fact that in Harimandir Sahib or any Gurdwara, besides Gurbane, the hymns and compositions of these two scholars may be sung and recited. Bhai Nand Lal was dictated The Sikh Code of Conduct, known as Tankhahnama, was dictated by Guru Gobind Singh to Bhai Nand Lal and is an important source of the Sikh Rahit Maryada.

The significance and reverence shown to the Kes is evident from the fact that Guru Gobind Singh named the Takhat which is the birth place of the Khalsa as Takhat Kesgarh Sahib, which means "the blessed fort of unshorn hair."

The foundation stone for keeping unshorn hair was laid by the first Guru itself. Guru Nanak categori-

cally stated that it is essential for a person to keep unshorn hair as this is a blessing from God and doing away with it is a breach of trust and misappropriation. In fact, a Sikh by doing away with his kes breaks his relationship with Guru Nanak. The following are quotes from Makke di Gosht -Guru Nanak Sahib's conversation with Muslim sages, which were held during his sojourn to Mecca.

Your nose is so graceful, and your hair is so long. (Guru Granth Sahib, page 567)

hир hir nmwidiMieE gir mTir gr pg Jnrh hm btl ]1] rhwau] (1335-1

The Guru has implanted the Sweet Name of the Lord, Har, Har; within me. I dust the Guru's Feet with my hair: ||1||Pause|| (Guru Granth Sahib, page 1335)

The true divine sunnat (injunction) is the hair brought by birth. Blessed is the one who keeps the hair as a trust of God.

The primary sunnat is hair and the one who adorns it on his head acquires the status of a rishi (sage) or a sayyid (Muslim holy man) (Conversation of Mecca-Madina, page 144, Punjabi University)

mie isrpwadiKaledir l lAieAie bllr ml [ nmk Akyplr j l iPr lTj iе ml [ iPr gieAie drgh lvic Akryik nlsn[ sbq sriq rb dl Blm bplm[

(mkj mdrj dl gSit, plr 144. pjlbl Xlnvrstl)

Says Nanak, the hair is the blessing of the Lord to man which ought to be presented back. The man has to present himself in the court of Lord with this trust. The one who could not keep the hair intact has is in fact committed breach of trust and is to be regarded as faithless.

(Conversation of Mecca-Madina, page 144, Punjabi University)  
Akl nmk sн scasxhbbw/d plr[ ihlmlsl mн die isr gh Olej hlir[

(mkj mdrj dl gSit, plr 138. pjlbl

Xlnvrstl)  
Says Nanak to Pir Bahaveen, both Hindus and Muslims by losing the hair in fact have lost head and have become sirgum.

(Conversation of Mecca-Madina, page 138, Punjabi University)  
Thereafter all other Guru Sahibs and bhagats whose banee was included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib also made mention about long hair and beard. To wit,

Your nose is so graceful, and your hair is so long. (Guru Granth Sahib, page 567)

hир hir nmwidiMieE gir mTir gr pg Jnrh hm btl ]1] rhwau] (1335-1

The Guru has implanted the Sweet Name of the Lord, Har, Har; within me. I dust the Guru's Feet with my hair: ||1||Pause|| (Guru Granth Sahib, page 1335)

I make my hair into a fan, and wave it over the Saint. (Guru Granth Sahib, page 745)

I make my hair into a fan, and wave it over them; I apply the dust of their feet to my face. ||1||Pause|| (Guru Granth Sahib, page 749)

gr kyrcn kps silg Jury ]1] With my hair, I dust the feet of the Guru. ||1|| (Guru Granth Sahib, page 387)

ks silg ds pg JraaiehlmnrQ nr ]1] With my hair, I dust the feet of your slave; this is my life's purpose. ||1|| (Guru Granth Sahib, page 500)

npak pks kir hdir hdisr sbq sriq dsgr isrn ]12] Purify what is impure, and let the Lord's presence be your religious tradition. Let your total awareness be the turban on your head. ||12|| (Guru Granth Sahib, page 1084)

idvs rln grpaepl saiks cvr kir Pr ]1] (969-19, nmkl I, Bg kblr j l) Day and night, I press Your feet, Lord; I wave my hair as the chanwar (ceremonial fan). (Guru Granth Sahib, page 969)

sydwIAW sclAiw ij gr crnl l glnh ] (1419-12, sl k vnrW qvDlk, mU 3)  
Those beards are true, which

brush the feet of the True Guru. (Guru Granth Sahib, page 1419)  
The references are not only restricted to hair on the head -Guru Amar Das ji, the third Guru, even speaks of the unshorn beard. Then there is the order of Guru Gobind Singh.

You are blessed by me. Take care of your Kes twice daily (morning and evening) with kangha (wooden comb)..... have no association with those (being Sikhs) who shear their hair or kill the girl child.

Kangha or the wooden comb is also one of the five kakars. The order to comb the hair twice makes it abundantly clear that a person with a shorn head or the one who is a jatadhari (sadhus growing their hair but not maintaining cleanliness) does not qualify to be a Sikh. The order is categorical and forthright -a person is to have normal kes given by nature.

The poet Sainapati, who was head

sydwIAW sclAiw ij  
gr crnl l glnh ]  
(1419-12, sl k vnrW  
qvDlk, mU 3)  
Those beards are true,  
which brush the feet of  
the True Guru.

of the fifty two poets of Guru Gobind Singh, mentions about the requirement of kes in the following way:

hkn n plVsls dWl n mlwVsaq vн grlvnglgrlj l ka Kl sa]30] (st gr sbi, shpiq, AIDAwie plm)

A Sikh is neither to smoke nor to cut kes or beard. He then is the blessed Khalsa of Wahe Guru.

(Sri Guru Sobha, Sainapati, Chapter Five)

Bhai Nand Lal had asked questions to Guru Gobind Singh about the do's and don'ts for a Sikh and the replies are compiled in Tankhah Nama. Interestingly, during those times, anyone serving at the Mughal Court and getting tankhah, that is wages was looked at with contempt and was called a tankhahia. Significantly, the term is used in Sikh terminology for a gross religious transgression.

Bhai Daya Singh was the first of the panj payaras who offered their head to Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib when the Khalsa was created. His rahitnama too eulogises the kes as follows:

st dsclwplSnl Anilpor mlblTjQ dXa isB j l pbn kIAu, samhnrj j l rihqnmr khley i j s kysnngsmkq hie[

aqr: kpa ka bVe Adb h[ ks mqi ka srp h[ .....j W sls kymD Bg ml nKf, Af p[ bvl bD] ks Fip rky klla dvl kal kry pig cankylDf] ..... j eksll dl bAdbl hie qll qnKhl plbtq h[ j yrgrlj l bhq ikrpw kry Kl sa bKS[ saXa pcas flfymrjpbkq Alhtq Ckay rihq nmj snw[ .....rn sr lr sjkDln Cpl] ..... [

(rihqnmr Bael dpa isB)  
The Tenth Master was at Anandpur Sahib. Daya Singh asked Him, O Lord! please bestow on us the uniform code of conduct (Rahit Nama) which will help us attain salvation. The Lord replied, the hair should be respected greatly. Hair is the image of our mother. Tie hair in a knot in the middle of the head. Tie a full turban. Keep your hair covered. Comb your hair twice a day,

..... those who desecrate the hair are cursed till death. If the Guru showers his grace and the Khalsa forgives the violator it is to be flogged fifty to a hundred times and subsequently he is to be baptized and sermonized with Rahitnamas. ....never ever remove hair from any part of the body.

Bhai Chaupa Singh, who was not only a cotemporary of Guru Gobind Singh but took care of the Guru in his childhood, his

Rahitnama says,  
grlka isK dhl dym n l hie[ (rihqnmr Bael capu isB iCbr)  
No Sikh should remove any hair from his body.

grlka isK kpl dl pil xll kr[ dlvkq kll h[ Deydhl ml , ml hQ n l hie j l ain pvxy dyl scq rht[ grlka isK kps mhr inSni iskl dl j ex[ (rihqnmr Bael capu isB iCbr)

Let a Guru's disciple nurture hair with care. He should comb hair twice a day. Let the hair be cleansed with curd, do not touch hair with soiled hands. Ensure that lice do not breed in the hair: Remain alert. The Guru's Sikh should treat his hair as the very seal of Sikhism.

jeictycaey saqnKhlAur j eksDarl kl P l wey saqnKhlAur (rihqnmr Bael capu isB iCbr)  
One who plucks grey hair is a tankhahia, religious offender: Likewise one who dyes hair is also a tankhahia.

j eksDarl hie kjbtykqrllrky saqnKhlAur j eksDarl dlla nil dWlltkjAQv kbl nil mne l vwey saqnKhlAur (rihqnmr Bael capu isB iCbr)  
A kesdhari who gets hair of his son shorn is a tankhahia. The one who chips his beard with teeth or uses scissor or plucker is also a tankhahia.

Some other important Rahitnamas also depict the importance of kes for a Sikh.

Rahitnama Param Sumarg  
Ar j ekel isK sl Akal prK Kl sja huw iqs kav'isB j r' kih Adnkr[ isr ks rky dlr n kry Bdx n kr[ (rihqnmr prm smrg)

If a Sikh is the Khalsa of the Almighty he deserves to be honoured and addressed as Singh. Sikh is to inviolably keep hair intact, never shave hair, never shave head.

Rahitnama Bhai Desa Singh  
kpn Dp dje sc pavn[ hlieh gr kl mhr shwn[69[ (rihqnmr Bael dpa isB)

Let the hair be nourished in sun for it is the splendid seal of the guru. j b pihl ysb isbit apiel[ qb hl mnk djh bmael[

qn ies ky isr ks j dln[ sa ieh qn isgrh kln[79[ dWllm isr ks bmael[ hlieh idV ij h pBU rj w[

mt rj iе j usls mlwV[ khqrj g ksyhir pm[80[ plKhailon ibhtj ij m hhl[ aib ibna Bf im keel[

bsn ibna nrhl hl j s[ ksn ibn hK nr qS[81[ ksn nr Dyrh j b hl[ plrn rhp hie hl qb hl[

ks ek pn rhq j upel[ q kl nihm khl ni j w[82[ (rihqnmr Bael dpa isB)

God created the whole universe and also the human body. God bestowed the gift of kes on the human head to be its adornment. The beard, moustache and kes are embodiments of the inviolable will of God. Transgressing the Divine Will, how can one reach God with a shorn head? A man without kes is like a bird without feathers, a sheep without wool, or a woman without clothes. Only if a man keeps his hair intact can he claim to be a complete image of God. By adhering to just one principle of conduct - viz. keeping hair intact - a man achieves indescribable merit.

(Rahitnama Bhai Desa Singh)  
Khushwant Singh, in A History of the Sikhs, writes truthfully about the importance of hair:

.....It proves that the sense of belonging to the Sikh community requires both the belief in the teachings of the Adi Granth and the observance of the Khalsa tradition initiated by Guru Gobind Singh; and that there is no such thing as a clean-shaven Sikh - he is simply a Hindu believing in Sikhism.

Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Subegh Singh, Bhai Shahbaz Singh, Bhai Dayala ji are shining examples Sikh history who laid down their lives but did not agree to relinquish their hair: Hundreds of women and chil-

dren chose death in the jail of Mir Mannu at Lahore rather than do away with their hair:

In the "Gurmat Life" chapter of the Sikh Rahit Maryada it is clearly mentioned,

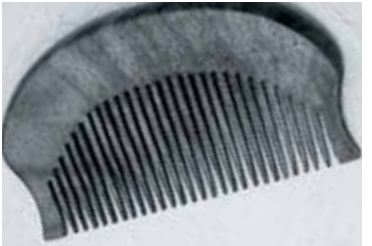
isrgH (kpsDarl hky j eks ktu dyl) nvl nr (j isK hky jeh kln kln) dr silg nhll krm[

You must not associate with a Sikh who had uncut hair earlier and has cut it or a Sikh who smokes. (p.38)

### SIRDAR v/s SIRGUM

The nomenclature of Sirdar and Sirgum needs clear understanding. Dar in Persian means "a person of" or one who possesses, e.g. izzadar, the one who has izzat or respect, vafadar: the one possessing vafa or loyalty, khuddar, the one who has khudi or pride. Similarly Sirdar literally means if a person has hair, then only he has his head in its place. Contrary to this if the person has shorn his hair; it is sir gum i.e. he has lost his head. This term was first used by Guru Nanak Dev in Makke di gosht .

The turban is the covering for the



From Sikh Rehat Maryada Section 4. (Chapter X). (Article XVI)(i). Living in consonance with Guru's Tenets.....A Sikh should, in no way, harbour any antipathy to the hair of the head with which his child is born. He should add the suffix "Singh" to the name of his son. A Sikh should keep the hair of his sons and daughters intact. (p.24)

kes which Guru Nanak claims he obtained as a blessing directly from God. This was passed on to the succeeding Guru and now adorns the faithful Sikhs. As Guru Sahib himself witnesses:

mlgr imil zac dml V[ ] (74-9, isrlngi ml 5)

I met with the Guru, and I have tied a tall, plumed turban. sxl pkar smrQ saAmn bbln kait swrj ] (631-4, srit, ml 5)

The Almighty Lord and Master heard my prayer; cutting away my bonds, He has adorned me.

pihir isrpwaj syk j n m j nmk pgt phrj ]2]29]93] (631-5, srit, ml 5)  
He dressed me in robes of honour, and blended His servant with Himself; Nanak is revealed in glory throughout the world. ||2||29||93||

Against this background, one has to view the true ecclesiastical position of the kes. Sikhs pray for the blessings of kes from the Lord in their daily prayer (Ardaas) and will continue to do till time immemorial. (The author is editor of community journal Sant Sipahi. This is an excerpted version of his paper)