

# **Hail Hair!**

**By Dr. Birendra Kaur**

## **PREFACE**

We, the Sikhs, revere hair out of love and devotion for our Gurus, and do not need any scientific justification for the same. But, people often ask the astonishing question: "If we should not cut our hair, then why do we cut our nails?" - suggesting thereby that we are being illogical and backward. It was this question that prompted me to have a closer look at the biological aspects of hair, zoology being my subject.

Actually, hair is a characteristic feature of all mammals, but the specific hair and beard of man are peculiar to him alone. Thus, hair / beard is an identification mark of a human being, and not a Sikh alone, and, as such, should be respected by all. A man is incomplete without natural hair. To be a Sikh, the complete natural form is the basic requirement, although by no means, the only requirement. As a complete man, he is to tread the path shown by the Gurus with total dedication and commitment.

It may be felt, after reading the contents, that if hair is really all that important, how come we do not notice any effects of cutting / shaving, etc., even over generations? Well, just as there are influences that are produced instantaneously (cyanide and some poisons), there are others that may take hours / days (allergic reactions), or months / years (addiction to drugs), or even generations (lower sperm count in men). In a similar vein, the effects of removing bodily hair will be noticed over generations. I feel certain that man is more in need of hair today than he has ever been, since more harmful radiation are reaching the earth on account of ozone depletion, and hair has the ability to absorb them.

The book is written in the hope that it will enable man to see the wisdom of leaving the body intact, and hail hair!

July 1, 1998 Birendra Kaur

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### ***The Song Of The Sikh***

*"Ah! Well, let my hair grow long...  
I cannot forget the knot He tied on my head;  
It is sacred; it is his mark of remembrance.  
The Master has bathed me  
In the light of suns not yet seen;  
There is eternity bound in this tender fragile knot.  
I touch the sky when I touch my hair,  
And a thousand stars twinkle through the night...  
Who says the hair is no more than grass? ...  
Yet a single hair is a dear remembrance,  
An heirloom, a trust, a pledge, a love,  
A vow, an inspiration.  
My form is but a statue of dumb gratitude  
for The knot of Friendship tied by those Kings of Eternity,  
The Gurus who came to the Punjab;  
The Saviors who were gracious to love me,  
And made me a home in the Realm of Eternal Beauty."*

*- Puran Singh*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Sikh way of life is frequently described as *gadi-rah* - (Bhai Gurdas, Var 5.13.1). Free translation of this expression, would be 'a motorable highway.' On the other hand, this path is also referred to as 'sharper than a sword's edge' and 'narrower than hair's breadth' - (Guru Granth Sahib p. 918). This comparison seems to contradict its earlier comparison to 'a motorable highway.' In reality, however, there is no contradiction whatsoever. The former description refers to its openness and accessibility to all. It is not a private footpath for individual trekking, or a 'No Thorough Fare' lane, prohibited to public, unlike some other disciplines monopolized by privileged sections of society, or those that prescribe different paths for different people. The *gadi-rah* or the highway of Sikhism welcomes everybody without distinction of caste, color, or gender. Once they understand the traffic rules, they can travel together, enjoy the journey and reach the destination. There are no pitfalls, or the botheration of congestion.

The comparison to the edge of a sword, however, refers to a discipline that is required for a successful journey. This is the discipline based on His Law (*Hukm*) revealed to the Gurus. This discipline is built into Sikhism, as an extension of the one governing the universe. Any deviation from it will stop short of the destination. It conveys the inviolability of His *Hukm* and the firmness with which it has to be observed. The Sikhs of the Guru are expected to understand and recognize this *Hukm* and follow it for an enduring peace and happiness - (Guru Granth Sahib page 156).

God, in His mercy, has given to man a wonderful physical form adapted to perform different functions. Biologists have studied the human body, and marvel at the complexity and detail of the functioning of its various organs, although their understanding is still far from complete. Countless organs of the human body are constantly performing functions vital to survival. We know that they are essential, but have only vague ideas about how they perform these functions. Full details may never be understood, but the little knowledge we have acquired, inspires only wonder and awe over their perfection. No scientist has ever claimed that any physical organ of the human body is superfluous, or that he could improve upon its functioning. That would be tampering with perfection and tantamount to gross arrogance.

The Sikh way of life is nothing but an attempt to live in tune with Nature or *Hukm*. Body is a gift of God. It is sacred and should not be mutilated. Hair, as a part of it, acquires the same sanctity. The Gurus banned shaving or tampering with hair, since it is repugnant to *Hukm*, and made it a symbol of Sikh identity. One who violates this principle loses the claim to being a true disciple of the Gurus.

Unfortunately, some enthusiasts of the so-called modern civilization have mounted a campaign against hair, particularly the beard. They want to force their civilization on everybody. The process is simple: "Take a razor, shave off your beard, and you become civilized." This view, illogical as it is, cannot be taken seriously and deserves to be ignored. But this is not the view of an isolated crank. The ignorance is widely shared among non-Sikhs, and is spreading among Sikhs as well.

Some Papers in India, claiming to be the National Press, are actively engaged in this process of 'civilization.' Two articles, '*Do we need facial hair?*' and '*A hairy tale*' by Anthony Clavane and Neelam Mathews, respectively, appeared in *The Times of India*, which ridicule those sporting a beard. These articles drew sharp reaction from Sikh quarters. But, the Paper projects such articles prominently, and does not like a contrary view to see the light of the day. Why?

There is a reason. It is 'The Gospel of the Razor' given by the razor industry and supported by the allied cosmetic industries. The stake is tremendous. Neelam Mathews, in her article, states that, "It costs Rs. 250/- a week just to trim it (a beard)." Just think how much it costs to shave off a beard 'close-enough' with a razor every morning, and another supplementary operation later in the day to take care of the 'afternoon shadow'. And then consider the population in billions involved, to know the size of the industry! The figure would be in staggering trillions of Dollars.

It is also a veiled attack on some religious communities that hold hair and beard sacred and essential for their identity. It has taken its toll among Sikhs also, particularly its youth. When they see shaven faces and cropped up heads all around, they think it is the norm. They do not question it, and tend to join the mainstream, oblivious of the fact that, in the process, they are losing their identity, joining the vast anonymity, and discarding their own rich heritage and philosophy.

It is, therefore, heartening that Dr Birendra Kaur has taken up the challenge and made these articles her special target. Being a biologist, she is eminently qualified to speak with authority on the subject of human hair.

While industrialization has played a great role in the progress of mankind, it is not an unmixed blessing. We are acutely aware of the havoc caused by the clandestine drug industry, as is clear from the death penalty prescribed in some countries for this trade. We are also aware of the danger from the tobacco industry, and ceremoniously observe a 'No Smoking Day' once a year. The alcohol industry, too, has been identified as a threat, and some Governments are trying to enforce prohibition through law. Unfortunately, we have failed to see the threat to mankind, posed by the razor industry. Recent researches have shown that shaving is one of the possible ways of spreading AIDS.

Respect for the natural human form bestowed by the Creator is a cardinal principle in the religious philosophy preached by the Sikh Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh considered it so important that he included tampering with hair among the 'four cardinal sins' that attract ex-communication from the Khalsa Order.

The Sikhs of yore never questioned the Gurus' judgement. They had the wisdom to realize that the Gurus knew best. But today, when science holds the sway, most people, particularly the youth, demand an explanation or justification for everything. This is all the more necessary in the case of human hair, when cutting / shaving has become a mark of civilization.

In this brief volume, Dr Birendra Kaur has convincingly proved that the human hair is a biological necessity and an organ of the body performing vital functions. Tampering with it is fraught with grave risks and health hazards. Not satisfied with mere positive statements, she has also dealt with common criticism of hair, and exposed how ill informed and ignorant the critics are.

The book is a real contribution to knowledge and addresses questions that had defied answers. It fulfils a long-felt need and, apart from being a morale-booster for Sikhs, it should also save the human race at large.

July, 1998 Kharak Singh

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*The disciple, who lives in the Guru's Home,  
Should submit to His Will and Command for sure,  
And pride not on what he does,  
And meditate ever in the heart on the Lord's Name.  
He should sell-out his mind to the Guru,  
Then, such a servant has all his desires fulfilled.*

*- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 286*

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## 1. HUMAN HAIR: A BIOLOGICAL NECESSITY

Hair is a characteristic feature of mammals, which are commonly known as 'Hairy quadrupeds' - a group of animals that mark the climax of evolution. Also, mammals are the dominant animals in the world today, due partly to their ability to regulate body temperature in the face of variations in environmental temperature. This requires regulation of heat production and heat loss by the body. Hair plays an important role in regulating the latter. Impulses from the brain (hypothalamus) cause the hair to stand on ends, thereby enclosing an insulating layer of air just outside the skin. This layer reduces the loss of heat by radiation.

Even among mammals, man marks the climax of evolution and possesses the most complex and highly developed brain as well as the longest hair on head. This feature cannot be without significance. It cannot be a matter of mere chance or a mistake by Nature, because if the tail has been lost, the hair could have been lost too. Rather, there are numerous features in the human body that show retrogression. Some of the anatomical ones are:

- Loss of opposability of the great toe.
- Loss of hair from body.
- Teeth becoming smaller and fewer, and changing shape.
- Shortening of the muzzle and jaw symphysis.
- Loss of jaw power.
- Diminution in strength of zygomatic and temporal arch.

And, some of the ontogenetic features are:

- Gill clefts, of which there are four in the embryo.
- Tail indicated by 4-5 bones at the lower terminus of the spine, coalesced in the adult into the coccygeal bone, which is concealed beneath the skin.
- The lanugo / foetal hair covering the entire body except palms and soles.
- Power of grip of newborn during the first few weeks of its life.

Some organs in the human body have become vestigial, i.e., they are present, but functionless, such as:

- Vermiform appendix.

- Bands of muscles for moving ears.
- Hair-erecting muscles of the scalp.
- Dermal muscles for twitching retained in the face only.
- Third eyelid / nictitating membrane.

On the contrary, the hair on the head region in man has increased manifold as compared to other mammals. It thus follows clear that Nature is operating by an unknown mechanism, following a definite plan, and gets rid of certain features and improves upon others, as per requirement. Even senses of smell and hearing are not so acute in man as in some other mammals.

The dense and long growth of hair on the head region shows that the body is trying to increase the surface area for some particular function. Such a trend to increase the surface area is seen in every system of the body, e.g., highly coiled intestines with finger-like villi on their inner surfaces for absorption of digested food; alveoli in the lungs for exchange of O<sub>2</sub> and CO<sub>2</sub>; glomerular capillaries in the form of a bunch, and coiled tubules in the kidneys where urine filtration takes place. The circulatory and nervous systems show extensive branching to reach every nook and corner of the body. The following fact shows the extent to which an increase in the surface area can be achieved by the body: If all the blood vessels in one's body were straightened out and placed end to end, they would be 1,00,000 miles long, long enough to go round the equator four times. Even the surface of the human brain has maximum fissures (folds) corresponding to its increased mental abilities. The results that will be produced by decreasing the surface area at these points should be easy for all to imagine.

### **1.1 Functions of Hair**

Hair perform a variety of functions. Some of these are listed below:

- Trap an insulating layer of still air just outside the skin, and thereby reduce loss of heat by radiation.
- Absorb harmful radiations from the sun.
- Act as storehouse of trace elements, such as, zinc, chromium, etc.
- Act as graveyard of harmful elements, such as, lead, arsenic, etc.
- Hair follicles can make androgenic hormones.

- Beautify the body (otherwise why do people not shave off all the hair from the head completely? Bald men are desperate, and would pay any price to get hair back on their heads).
- Keep out coarse dust particles, e.g., eyelashes, hair in the nostrils and external auditory canals.
- Eyebrows prevent water or sweat from falling into eyes, due to their location and particular direction.
- Axillary and pubic hair lessen friction between limbs and body, and between limbs, respectively, during locomotion.
- Axillary hair provide larger surface area for evaporation of sweat.
- Beard and moustache are for differentiation of sex. Mostly males are decorated in Nature, e.g., lion, peacock and other birds, deer, etc.

### **1.2 Is Hair Lifeless?**

Hair is erroneously considered lifeless because of lack of any visible connection with the brain. But, the brain is not controlling /communicating with our body through nerves alone. Hormones, which are chemical mediators, also regulate various body functions. The immune system of the body fights infections with the help of co-ordinated action of cells, which have no visible connection with each other or with the brain. So, presence or absence of nerves alone cannot determine the connection of a particular part of the body with the brain. If hair was really dead to the brain, then how does it come to know that it has been cut, and responds by growing it again to a specific length? Once the specific length has been attained, further growth ceases. Thus, undoubtedly, the brain is well aware of the condition of hair, cut or uncut, even upto its tip! This is a sure sign of life. Thus, by cutting our hair, we are actually putting extra load on our body, as the energy and the raw materials (protein, etc.) required for growing hair time and again would be manifold as compared to the amount required for their maintenance only. And, the hair, like any other living organ of the body, responds to ageing - in its variations in length, denseness of growth, and greying. The condition of the health of a person is also reflected in the hair - in its luster, shine, etc.

Lack of sensation in hair along its shaft (visible part of hair) is no indication of it lacking in life, for, even the brain shows no such sensation. There is a group of animals (phylum Porifera), which do not possess a nervous system at all. A blow to any part of their body produces no response whatsoever. Do we call these animals lifeless? Similarly, most plants do not show any sensation either.

Further, a part that we call 'lifeless' may be without sensation, but definitely not without function. Rather, its function is as important as any living part of the body, if not more.

For example:

- What would be the fate of an egg without the shell?
- What would be the condition of the body's living cells without the covering of the dead cells, i.e., upper layers of skin?
- How can teeth perform their function without enamel?
- What life would a bird lead without feathers?
- How would many freshwater animals overcome unfavorable conditions and not become extinct without cysts?
- How would majority of plants survive and propagate as a species without formation of special devices meant for dispersal of seeds?

Actually, different parts of the body or different cells cannot be categorized as useful / not useful. Each is only specially modified to perform different function(s) for the benefit of the same individual. What the cells of a kidney can do, the cells of pancreas cannot. That does not mean that the former are more important than the latter or vice versa.

### **1.3 Hair vs. Nails**

It is often argued that hair and nails are similar, and a question frequently asked: "If we should not cut our hair, then why do we cut our nails?" But even a superficial study of the two shows them to be extremely different from each other. Whereas the hair grows from a tubular pit (hair follicle), formed by sinking in of the most actively dividing layer of the skin (stratum germinativum) into the lower dermis, the nails are only modifications of the upper dead layers of the skin (stratum corneum). Further, the base of every follicle bulges out forming an inverted cup, which receives blood capillaries for nourishment and nerve fibres to make the hair sensitive. An oil gland, known as sebaceous gland, opens into every

hair follicle, the secretion of which lubricates the hair. A muscle is also attached to the base of every hair for bringing about movement. Pigments are added to the shaft of the hair as it grows. None of these features is associated with the nails.

Structurally also, hair is extremely strong, and resists breaking due to its elasticity and flexibility. Strength of hair can be estimated from the following facts: a human hair laid on a bar of steel and then passed through a cold rolling mill would leave an imprint on the face of the steel; a hair of a man's beard is about as strong as a copper wire of the same dimensions; if a rope were made out of strands of long hair, it would be strong enough to lift an automobile. Nails, on the other hand, are very brittle and rigid, breaking off easily. Hair are countless (up to 1,25,000 on head region alone), thereby increasing the surface area, as if to meet a specific requirement. Nails number only twenty in an individual.

The differences between the two do not end with the structural features. Even the body's response towards the two is totally different. Our body, throughout life, tries to maintain a particular length of hair. And if the hair is cut anywhere, the body responds by growing it again to the specific length. It clearly indicates the link of the body with the hair all along its length. The body shows no such response to the nails, which grow from birth to death at the same rate, irrespective of whether cut or not. It follows, thus, that cutting of nails does not tell on the body at all, whereas, as mentioned earlier, cutting of hair means extra load on the body.

Practically also, hair does not interfere in any daily activity, whereas it is impossible to work with long nails. And even if not cut, nails generally break off on their own; rather it takes great effort to maintain them, even up to a short length.

In contrast to the long list of the functions of hair, only one function can be attributed to nails - protection of the tips of digits, and that too is limited to the part in contact with the skin. On the other hand, hair carries out the majority of its functions while its shaft has no contact with the skin.

To sum up, if there is anything on the head that can be compared with the nails, it is dandruff!

It is also argued that hair has been lost from the body in man, because the body is kept covered. If that be the case, then instead of being retained, the axillary hair because of its

location and the pubic hair because it has been covered *ab initio*, should have been the first to go. Also, the hair on the face, neck and hands should have remained.

Nature knows best what to discard or retain. Whatever is retained is not without purpose. If we are unable to explain something, it does not mean that it has no significance. We must look for an explanation, rather than deny the role or existence of something we do not see.

There are sound frequencies we do not hear; light waves, that make everything visible, we do not see; odors that we do not smell; there are animals that do not see as many colors as we do; some things we can neither see nor deny, such as emotions, bond between mother and child, force of gravity, etc. So, if there are things we do not see, hear, or smell, does it imply their absence? Just as an ant cannot comprehend the size and shape of an elephant, life and its processes are beyond human comprehension in the present state of knowledge. Our vast solar system, which is beyond reach even today, is just a speck in the universe! Even our smallness is beyond our comprehension.

Hair is a gift from God, not a burden. Guru Gobind Singh, in his infinite wisdom, commanded us to respect it and refrain from tampering with it. This is the visible token of his affection for us, as well as our faith in him. If we have faith in our Guru, who was in communion with God, how can we do anything, but follow his advice and leave our hair uncut?

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*My mind wants nothing except the Beloved Lord.*

*I have searched through all the worlds,*

*And I find that nothing equals even*

*a hair of my Beloved Lord.*

- *Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1209*

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It is sacred; it is his mark of remembrance.

The Master has bathed me

In the light of suns not yet seen;

There is eternity bound in this tender fragile knot.

I touch the sky when I touch my hair,  
And a thousand stars twinkle through the night...  
Who says the hair is no more than grass? ...  
Yet a single hair is a dear remembrance,  
An heirloom, a trust, a pledge, a love,  
A vow, an inspiration.  
My form is but a statue of dumb gratitude for the knot of  
Friendship tied by those Kings of Eternity,  
The Gurus who came to the Punjab;  
The Saviors who were gracious to love me and made me a  
home in the Realm of Eternal Beauty."

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### Body

No knowledge can be more satisfactory to a man than that  
of his own frame, its parts, their functions and actions.

- Jefferson

If any thing is sacred, the human body is sacred.

- Whitman

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## 2. DO WE NEED FACIAL HAIR?

Anthony Clavane poses this question in his article under the same title in the columns of the *Times of India*. And the 'evidence' produced and the 'arguments' advanced by him in the body of his article, leave no doubt about what the answer of an unwary reader should be. The first thing that catches one's attention is the caricature of a face with a long beard, overgrown protruding teeth, a nose tilted flat to one side, and eyes almost missing. The obvious suggestion is that beard is not only itself ugly, but also leads to extra large size of teeth, deformity of nose and loss of eyes! In all fairness, it must be acknowledged that he has not concealed his bias. However, to be able to endorse such a preposterous assumption, one would certainly need an extraordinary degree of ignorance.

But the author does not depend upon his artistic skill alone. He has furnished 'evidence', although it is more from history or annals of fun, than from any scientific study. He quotes a 1907 experiment in which two men kissed a young woman after walking through Paris. The incident is indeed interesting and makes his article readable. But it is difficult to call it an experiment, since it is lacking in practically every requirement of a scientific trial. There are no replications, and hence no data which could be subjected to statistical treatment. There is no information on the personal hygiene of the two main actors in the drama. Who was conducting the 'experiment'? And with what purpose? Did he not know that no valid conclusion can be drawn on the basis of a single trial? And so on.

Any way, let us have a look at his conclusions. "Harmless yeast germs were found in the clean-shaven man's solution, whereas the bearded man's swarmed with malignant microbes." This is indeed very interesting. The two men walked the same street of the same city. It is natural to expect that they would catch more or less of both types - the harmless yeast germs and the malignant microbes. The author is suggesting, however, that the malignant microbes can distinguish between a bearded man and a clean-shaven man in order to swarm to the former, carefully avoiding the latter. If the malignant bacteria swarmed the beard of the bearded man, then where do you think they swarmed more in the case of the clean-shaven man? If another test had been done to compare the alveoli of the lungs of the two men, the answer would be clear. For, these would be found in the lungs of the clean-shaven man, who had no beard to entrap them. This test was done in

1907; imagine if a similar one was done today! Hail the beard! It traps malignant bacteria from entering the lungs. Is it being suggested to remove the strainer for pouring tea, because it collects all the tea leaves? Although the beard is not originally meant for this purpose, men can, in fact, benefit from it in the present day polluted environment.

While the structure of hair is such that it can trap bacteria, it does not provide any congenial or favorable conditions for their growth and multiplication. On the other hand, shaven skin is one of the best substrata for their survival and multiplication. Shaving, which has to be repeated at least once everyday, invariably result in cuts, some of which are microscopic - and that is all the malignant bacteria and dreaded viruses need to swarm to the interior of our bodies. (Or may be the microbes can distinguish between the cuts inflicted by shaving from other types of cuts!) A shaven face is rather unhygienic. In fact, it should not be called 'clean-shaven', but 'unclean-shaven.' We all know how important it is to maintain an intact skin in modern times, when fear of AIDS, hepatitis-B, etc., is writ large on the face of mankind.

If hair are really posing such a problem, we will have to train ourselves to shave off eyelashes, eyebrows, hair in the nostrils and ear canals, which otherwise have a definite protective role, but must also inevitably be swarmed by malignant microbes, following the results of the Paris experiment.

There is one solution to the problem by which we can retain all other hair on the body and lose only the beard and moustache - and that too from the roots, and for all times to come. And that is to stop the testes from producing the male hormone, testosterone. How would you like that? The only casualty of this would be the other male secondary sexual characters. These are only the unwanted deepening of voice, broadening of shoulders, growth and distribution of hair on body at puberty, enlarged and stronger skeletal muscles, development of accessory sex glands such as prostate and seminal vesicles, and sexual behaviour and the sex urge. But look what you have achieved - only the harmless yeast bacteria will come near you! What a relief!

Since beard is an organ of the body, it is most ridiculous to place smoking and the keeping of beard together as habits. An addiction of the body cannot be compared with an organ of the body. Then what about other organs of the body, other than the beard, which are more

'smelly' and more of 'a danger to public health', such as, mouth, armpits, feet, and, sex organs. It is not any particular organ, but the hygienic standard that an individual maintains, which determines how much of a health hazard he is to society. The whole body needs cleansing regularly. We also wear clothes, which must harbour bacteria with time. Do we stop wearing them for that reason? Why do not Ross Perots, Walt Disneys and Margaret Thatchers further prefer naked underlings to dressed ones?

It is a fact that men who maintain beard are a minority (not 'oppressed', though), and may be 86% of women disapprove of beards, and that smooth chops are preferred as political candidates, but has it ever been proven that what the majority does, thinks or feels, is right? Consider Rabindra Nath Tagore, Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman, George Bernard Shaw and other great man sporting charming beards, who belonged to this minority. Were they 'obsessive', 'psychopathic' or 'impotent'? Did they have some other sexual problems, prescribed by Parker? Nobody, not even a hundred per cent of people, can deny or challenge the accuracy, meaningfulness and wisdom of Nature's decision. And there are women who find bearded men extremely handsome, and think that men without beard are not men. And also that shaven men look like dressed chickens or eunuchs. However, the fact remains that the location and growth of hair on the human body is a decision of Nature, and is not subject to an opinion poll amongst an ignorant population.

Great visionary artists like Michaelangelo and William Blake have depicted God with full flowing beard. To William Shakespeare, a beardless man was 'barefaced', which according to *Oxford Dictionary* means shameless and impudent. *The Book of Knowledge* states: "The thought of beards generally brings to mind learned professors, artists, or perhaps Father Christmas..." About the spiritual symbolism of the beard, *The Encyclopedia Britannica* states: "The bearded races of mankind have commonly held the beard in high honor. It is the sign of full manhood ... Adam, the primal man, and the deities and prophets of many faiths have been traditionally pictured with beards, as were kings and nobles and dignitaries ... In India and Turkey, the beard was allowed to grow as a symbol of dignity and wisdom ... among Turks, slaves were shaved as a mark of servility." According to Anthony Clavane, even today some bosses prefer clean-shaven underlings!

Nature has decorated the male human being, as it has done many other species (lion, peacock and other birds, deer, etc.) And further, the beard and moustache have not been 'retained', but bestowed on man, as no other animal has this type of decoration. It is one of the many gifts of Nature to man, who, owing to these gifts, is the most evolved and intelligent species of animals today. Does a tree look better, when cut to a shape? Will a lion or a peacock look better after having been to a barber? Are these animals and many others suffering from 'sexual anxiety' or some 'appalling personality defect'?

A psychological problem can only be associated with those who shave or style their beards, rather than with those who maintain them. To wear the beard in its natural form is the only natural, normal and logical thing to do. Having a beard is not being aggressive. In fact, it is a sign of living in harmony with Nature. On the other hand, it is shaving which is an act of aggression on Nature! And such attacks are done in the erroneous belief that it beautifies man. How can we improve on God's creation? Can we paint the lily better? If God wanted man without a beard, he could easily have created him as such (for example, has he not created him without a tail?). A man who shaves is an apostate violating God's order, refusing His gift.

Actually, shaving of the beard is a wrong approach to the actual problem. What would be Anthony Clavane's next suggestion? Remove the lungs? The real problem is pollution, which needs to be tackled. If the Taj Mahal or the buildings of London city are in the danger of being ruined with pollutants in the air, is it a solution to bring down these magnificent structures? Will it solve any problems? The grave problems that man faces today, such as acid rains, cancers, ozone depletion, greenhouse effect, etc., are all results of interfering with Nature. If only man would acknowledge his shortsightedness, so many problems would not arise. In view of short-term profits, deforestation started, and only then did we realize the importance of trees - when it was too late! It is sad that in spite of so many obvious results of tampering with Nature, man has not learnt any lessons. Man calls himself wise (*Homo sapiens*), but when will wisdom dawn on mankind! The farther we are moving from Nature, the closer we are getting to our own END.

As mentioned earlier, human hair or beard is an organ of the body, and discussion of this subject legitimately belongs to the discipline of biology. This author has drawn support

from the like of Margaret Thatcher, Ross Perot, Walt Disney and Tupper. One may ask what are their credentials as biologists? And what are the author's own in pleading the barber's cause?

The author also beneficently advocates 'a little social engineering' to change human behavior, and would like to entrust this responsibility to Edith Sessions Tupper, who gave the verdict, 90 years ago : "If the 20th century should remove whiskers from the face of man, it will be glory enough for 100 years." God, save the society from such 'social engineers' who see nothing beyond nose (or beard) for glory of mankind over a full century!

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### **Do we need facial hair?**

*Anthony Clavane*

Beards are ugly, unsanitary and serious health hazards, says Anthony Clavane. Think of all the pollutants trapped in that hair.

Sometimes, a little social engineering would not go amiss. Policies designed to change human behavior tend to be frowned upon in the free world: compulsory seat belts and smoking bans are all very well but the line is firmly drawn at laws prohibiting the cultivation of facial hair. This seems to me to be a great shame.

Isolated 20th century figures such as Margaret Thatcher, Ross Perot and Walt Disney have all insisted that their underlings be clean and unticked. They are part of a noble pogonophobic tradition dating back to early Christian times, when clean-shaven Romans guarded Western civilization against shaggy savages.

All evidence suggests that beards are unsanitary. Consider the 1907 experiment in which two men kissed a young woman after walking through Paris. A sterilized brush was passed over her lips and dipped into a sterile solution of agar and sugar. Harmless yeast germs were found in the clean-shaven man's solution, whereas the bearded man's swarmed with malignant microbes.

In 1985, a Soviet scientist discovered that beards caused a build-up of unhealthy substances that were then inhaled. They were especially dangerous, he surmised, if worn by smokers.

According to Chinese scientists, chemical pollutants are trapped in the hair: "Those with both moustaches and beards may breathe as much as 6.1 units (at least 4 units more than the clean-shaven)," reports an official newspaper. "Beards violate the requirements of hygiene and are not desirable."

Some 90 years ago, Edith Sessions Tupper arrived at the same verdict. In the *Chicago Chronicle*, she denounced them as "harbors of dirt and disease. If the 20th century should remove whiskers from the face of mankind, it will be glory enough for 100 years."

Civil libertarians bristle at the thought of pubs, restaurants, shops and workplaces, never mind governments, forbidding facial fuzz. Yet, like cigarette smoke, the beard is both smelly - emitting a range of odors from its owner's eating, drinking and, err, sexual habits - and a danger to public health. Even pogonophiles place the two vile habits in the same category: as the apologist *Guinness Books of Beards and Moustaches* says: "Men who wear beards in modern times are as much an oppressed minority group as smokers."

According to a 1993 Gallup poll, 86 per cent of women disapprove of thatches, and American researchers have discovered that political candidates with smooth chops have five percent advantage over hairy opponents.

In 1969, N. Parker, an Australian psychiatrist, argued: Gentlemen who wear moustaches are generally obsessive, psychopathic, impotent or have some other sexual problem. Parker was lambasted at the time for such barefaced cheek, especially by those who consider facial hair to be a sign of male virility. But according to Darwin's theory of evolution, man retained it as a means of display to threaten rivals: so a beard or aggressive moustache may be a sign of sexual insecurity.

A bristling jaw line arouses suspicions of a cover-up, whether it is sexual anxiety, a weak chin or some appalling personality defect. Smooth jaw lines, on the other hand, are synonymous with vibrancy.

- *The Independent*

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*Nature is a volume of which God is the author.*

*- Harvey*

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*God has given you one face,  
And you make yourselves another.*

*- Shakespeare*

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*Guru Nanak's noble religious ideology  
Gave birth to a great Nation of Sikhs,  
Whose greatness is reflected in their  
Character and face.*

*- Rabindra Nath Tagore*

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### 3. A HAIRY TALE

The whole article is inane, and is accompanied by a cartoon with an unproportionately lengthy beard that encircles the entire text. Is she not sensitive, like Ms Gita Agarwal, 'to India's religious beliefs that do not permit some to cut their hair'? Rather, her main object is to ridicule them. One may ask her if Rasputin's beard enforces his 'sinfully sexual image', then what do Christ's and Father Christmas' beards enforce?

For Neelam Mathews' information:

- The specific tuft of hair on the chin in goats is their characteristic feature. It is a secondary sexual character, and its presence distinguishes the male from the female. Why should goats not have any such character when most of mammals and birds have? What one could 'wonder' instead is that why does a man style his beard to a goatee.
- Beard, of course, is acquired without doing anything. Could the author explain what she did to acquire her eyes, heart, lungs, etc., or her (little) brain for that matter? And, how come she is unable to grow a beard herself?
- It is not the bearded men that resist discipline. It is them alone that follow the discipline of Nature.
- As for employees looking better with shaven faces, of course, because a shaven face alone looks servile. A bearded face is majestic and royal.
- Bajaj puts the cost of trimming at Rs. 250/- per week. But why should it be trimmed in the first place? As for shampooing the beard, the author should have compared this cost with the cost of shaving, which involves, according to Blossom Kochhar, soap, warm water, shaving gel and sharp razor and an electric shaver to take care of the afternoon shadow. And, she has forgotten to mention an aftershave lotion, which is obligatory for the cuts inflicted during shaving.
- Much has been said about the psychological and hygienic factors in the preceding rejoinder. Maintaining a beard in its natural form is the only normal and logical thing to do.
- A natural beard is not a symbol, just as is not a forehead or head. It is when you do something to an organ, like putting saffron marks on the forehead, or retaining a

pigtail on the head, that it becomes a symbol. Certainly, one of the essential features of a guru is a natural beard. What can a clean-shaven teach about the creation and the Creator?

- A beard is a beard is a beard, just as a hand is a hand is a hand. Beard is a part of the priceless body gifted by the Almighty. Just because it feels no pain, can we justify mutilating it in the name of style? May be, it is a test that God puts man to, to see if we acknowledge His supremacy.
- As for the masks requiring smooth cheeks, it should be possible to design masks to suit bearded faces. But, better still would be that we work on eliminating situations that give rise to the need for masks, as every major city in the world today is a death trap. Let us not advance our technology in a direction in which we are even unable to breathe freely. Or human beings will soon start looking like robots or extraterrestrial creatures.
- Besides, look where Samson's strength lay!
- I have great sympathy and really feel pity for the men, on whose minds the most pressing issue is that 'razors just don't seem to get close enough.' I suggest, out of great concern for them that they pray to God, every time they shave, to make them women in their next births.
- Her search has revealed that beard gives an impression of male authority, is all male, and is a symbol of male benevolence, strength and inscrutable enlightenment. But, the only comment she could make in the end is that beard is a wonderful place to store food scraps and small quantities of marijuana.
- It is in bad taste to comment on people's appearances. It should be possible for all to wear the look they want, without being made fun of. Otherwise, anyone could write an article even about the author herself.

The day is not far when scientists will discover the threats posed by shaving, and the UN will declare a day of the year as 'No Shaving Day' on the lines of 'No Smoking Day'.

Being a woman myself, I wish to give her credit for the article that discourages men from keeping facial hair. She has done Women's Liberation Movement a great favor. Let us

erase from the face of mankind, whatever little of manhood remains; let us make them look like us; let us absorb their identity; let us demolish the masculine look.

While on the subject of beard, it is understandable for women to feel embarrassed by growth of moustache or beard on their faces, but one wonders how can men go around with shaven faces, unashamedly!

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## **A Hairy Tale**

*Neelam Mathews*

### Beard Facts

- The most remembered beard, is that of Rasputin's, the father of the hypnotic stare and an inspiration to many an aspiring cult leader.
- Side-whiskers with a luxuriant growth were called 'mutton chops' in England.
- Meanwhile, sideburns were named after General Ambrose Burnside of the US, who sported them.
- A pointed tuft of whiskers on the chin was called the 'Imperial', in honor of Napoleon III.
- 'Walrus', a thick moustache growing downwards looked like the real thing.
- Professionals preferred Van Dyck, popularized by the painter's portraits of Charles I.
- Ancient Egyptians hennaed and frizzed their beards after the fashion of the times.
- The plant 'Old-man's-beard' was thought to stimulate hair growth.

*The luxuriant beard enforced Rasputin's sinfully sexual image. It also graced the chins of some of the greatest thinkers. Neelam Mathews finds out the attitude behind the beard and what prompts men to grow one.*

When my teenage son proclaimed his intention to grow a beard, it was hair-raising for me. Why, in heavens, should a perfectly clean barely-shaven 16-year-old want to look 26? Because Prime Minister I.K. Gujral has it?

This set me pondering on the subject of beards. Let's face it, the beard is a largely ignored, sometimes maligned and little understood symbol of male benevolence. In the past, a bushy, hairy face and head was always a potent symbol of strength in a man. A healthy beard was a pre-requisite if a man wanted to give the impression of male authority. No one trusted a beardless king. Besides, look what happened to Samson when he let his guard down!

In the past few decades, the beard has fallen into grim disrepute. Even the remaining faithful propagators of the hippy movement have enjoyed an on-again, off-again relationship with mainstream, multi-national razor-blade companies.

Fortunately, in these times, the beard is a fashion proclamation. From Adam of Genesis and Richard Branson to Kabir Bedi and fashion designer, Ravi Bajaj, they all have their hairy trademark.

*In the past, a bushy beard was always considered to be a symbol of strength. Today, one of the 20 most pressing questions on men's minds is that razors just don't seem to get close enough.*

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### **3.1 How Useful Is The Beard?**

(The points in *italics* are Neelam Mathews')

- *You can stroke it when in deep thought.*

Shows a link between a beard and a mind that thinks!

- *It keeps your clothes clean as you don't need a napkin.*

And, saves trees!

- *It is a compensation when you're balding*

To look like a man all your life!

- *Use it to frighten kids.*

Just as Father Christmas does!

- *Use it to play with kids.*

Reason good enough to keep it!

- *Use it to tickle someone.*

Another good reason!

- *Save on razor and blade costs.*

And improve your economy!

- *Get rid of the girlfriend who insists you shave it off.*

And get a sensible one!

### **3.2 No-Beard Policy**

Domino's certainly would have been applauded by the Romans for following its no-beard policy that seems to have got the pizza home-delivery giants into courts and headlines on its home turf in the US. During a case, the judge said, "Sales would be better if employees looked better."

Though the court concluded that the existence of a beard on a man does not affect his ability to deliver pizza, Domino's manager, Ms Gita Agarwal, has no hesitation in stating that though the company continues to follow the rule in India, "We have exceptions, as we are sensitive to India's religious beliefs that do not permit some to cut their hair." She does add that this rule is by and large followed by most restaurants and hotels for hygienic reasons. A beard certainly seems to resist discipline. A few years ago, Qantas flight attendants were forced to shave after the airline claimed that oxygen masks needed a smooth cheek to stay tight on the face.

A beard is a beard is a beard? "No way," admonishes architect Anil Laul. "It is like saying furniture is furniture is furniture. Not everybody can be put into the same slot. Remember Shakespeare, Orson Welles, Karl Marx - didn't they sport different styles?" Designer Ravi Bajaj agrees most vehemently and believes with every ounce of vanity left in him that his beard style that he's changed recently to a goatee certainly suits him. He claims his new look is 'hot' and 'trendy.' Does he think his new look is seductive? He explains candidly, "While many women have an aversion to social hair, they know a good thing when they see one! I know it suits me. As for others, I cannot really say..."

Laul first sported a beard in college when he was teased for being *chikna* (smooth-faced). He grew a beard to prove a point. Decades later, it became part of his life. He adds, "People never took me seriously till I grew the beard. Besides, I feel it looks very distinguishing." Did he ever try shaving his beard off? "Yes, but nobody recognized me. And, as for my family who did, they refused to talk to me." He explains, "I'm not a

culture-culture. So, I do not do it to prove I am a high-funda kind of person. To me, it is just a habit."

Dr Sanjay Chugh, psychiatrist, who does profess in good humor that psychiatrists do not like to see anybody as 'normal', says, "While it does seem to be recognized as all male, sometimes people with recessive chins end up growing beards."

"Beards", says Dr Chugh, "are often found in people who are insecure and have low self-esteem. The need to be portrayed as 'ferocious' is the image that some desperately seek. But some just have beards because they like to." Did he ever sport a beard ? Pat comes the reply, "Yes, in college, before my exams. So, I didn't have to waste time shaving it."

Looking after a beard, however, is no easy task. Says Bajaj, "It costs me 250/- Rupees every week just to trim it." Laul shampoos it twice a week. One of the 20 most pressing questions on men's minds, it was found in a survey recently, was that razors just did not seem to get close enough to keep whiskers down all day.

### **3.3 Beard Care**

For those distressed with crestfallen whiskers, this is what Blossom Kochhar, hair and beauty consultant, had to say, "The only practical thing you can do to minimize your afternoon shadow is to give yourself an ultra close shave every morning. To do this, without irritating your skin, start by lathering your beard with soap and warm water to soften the whiskers. Without rinsing off the soap, spread on a shaving gel, and using a sharp razor, shave in direction of hair growth. Touch up with an electric shaver kept in your desk drawer for afternoon touch-ups."

Blossom claims she likes men with beards, particularly salt and pepper ones. She adds, "However, when I see unruly beards, I feel like taking them to a saloon and treating the hair to a good conditioner." She advises those with a round face to go for a goatee and those with a weak chin to sport a rectangular one. Abraham Lincoln, for instance, began his presidency clean-shaven. But, following a letter from a 12-year-old girl from a village, whose opinion was that his narrow jaw line and pointed chin could do with some hair, he grew one!

Faith, fashion and flamboyance may all have dictated the shape and size of beards that have been and those to come. Let's face it. It's one of the few things in life, which may be

acquired by doing nothing. Well, almost nothing! Remember, a guru is only as good as his beard! And on a more practical level, a beard is more than just a symbol of inscrutable enlightenment, it's a wonderful place to store food scraps and small quantities of marijuana! And while on the subject of beards, in case you are wondering why goats have beards, I do not know!

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*Resort is had to ridicule  
Only when reason is against us.*

*- Jefferson*

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*If this belief from heaven be sent,  
If such be Nature's holy plan,  
Have I not reason to lament  
What man has made of man?*

*- William Wordsworth*

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#### 4. WHERE THE ENVIRONMENT BEGINS

Much is being said and talked about Man and Environment. Man has progressed unbelievably with his intellect during the present century. The discoveries and inventions leave us awe-struck and have contributed a lot towards a better living in many respects. Unfortunately, somewhere along the way, he failed to foresee the long-term effects of some of his activities, which he undertook for short-term benefits.

It is a fact that the grave problems which man faces today, such as environmental pollution, acid rains, ozone depletion, greenhouse effect, cancers and many other health hazards, etc., are all results of overindulgence and tampering with Nature. Now, even mineral and other natural resources are being depleted. Overpopulation and excessive industrialisation have led to degradation of our very environment to an alarming degree, which will pose a threat to life on this planet, unless drastic measures are undertaken to check further damage and to undo the harm already done.

"We got into this mess by changing the planet's metabolism in ways we did not understand nor intend", says Jessica Mathews of World Resource Institute, "Technological fixes can turn around and bite you." But, this is one lesson man has difficulty in learning and believes in the magic wand of technology. Now, he is trying to tackle greenhouse effect and ozone depletion through geo-engineering, at an outrageous cost.

Some of the proposals for greenhouse gases are:

- A fleet of Boeing 747s to criss-cross the skies, releasing dust into low stratosphere, blocking sunlight;
- Use of naval guns to shoot dust into stratosphere;
- Send billions of aluminized hydrogen-filled balloons into the stratosphere to reflect sunlight;
- Orbit 50,000 mirrors, 39 miles squares, which would be ferried into orbit in pieces and assembled by space-walking astronauts; etc.

And for ozone depletion:

- Install powerful infra-red lasers on 1400-foot mountain sides and ricocheting between mirrors three miles apart.

Besides costs, the trouble with technological fixes is that they can leave a problem worse than before. The history of weather modifications offers little reason for optimism. Our knowledge of climate is too imperfect to know precisely how many dust-filled balloons to loft or how many 747s to fly to counter the oil and coal we burn. A few too many balloons, or a dust cloud a little too thick, and the geo-engineering might push the planet into a deep freeze. And instead of succeeding in making Mars green, man might turn Earth into another Mars.

Since pollution of the environment and its adverse effects on man cannot be attributed to any single factor, a multidimensional approach is the only way out to rectify the situation. Awareness and participation at global level is the need of the hour. While many of the harmful activities can only be curbed at national and international levels by governments, there are some measures that can be taken up by social organizations and require group participation. Apart from these, there are certain ways in which individuals can contribute towards a healthy environment on this planet, which require no laws or legislation for their implementation.

The body surface of every organism, whether animal or plant, shows specific modifications, which enable it to adapt to its surroundings for survival. This surface, thus, assumes a great importance in maintaining a healthy state of body. In much the same way, in case of human beings, the skin, and hair as part of it, is the obvious link between man and the environment, and as such, acquires great significance for this subject. Because of the variety of functions it carries out, skin is known as the "Master Organ" of the body. Our bodies are not sealed off from the environment, but communicate with it through various known and unknown means. In fact, environment is the medium in which human body sustains itself and performs its various functions.

Skin is the body's largest organ. It provides the body with a tough, flexible barrier that protects against diseases, injury and loss of water from the moist internal tissues. It also serves as a major sensory organ, registering pressure, touch, pain and temperature. It has about two million sweat glands distributed over the surface of the body, each communicating independently with the environment. These help in regulating the temperature of the body and excrete some wastes as well. Any blockage thereof develops

prickly heat. Every single hair of the body (of which there are about 1,25,000 on head region alone) is associated with a sebaceous gland, the oily secretion of which lubricates the hair and prevents the skin from becoming too dry. Blackheads form due to blockage of these glands' opening, which may result into acne and pimples. If certain kind of bacteria get into the pores, they cause boils. As such, it should not be difficult to understand that special care should be taken to keep the skin clean, and free from any foreign particles, so that the pores of the glands can communicate freely with the environment. And, maintenance and nurturing of this organ in its natural form is the only logical thing to do for it to function effectively.

But our activities are to the contrary. Can a tree carry out its functions without leaves or with painted leaves? In spite of knowing that interference with Nature is detrimental to our health, we refuse to infer that any kind of interference with the immediate environment of the human body will also have similar consequences. If, according to Dr Sobti of Panjab University, even paint on the walls of a room is harmful to us, then what about the endless variety of cosmetics, deodorants, antiperspirants, perfumes, sprays, aftershaves, lotions, hair-removing creams, dyes, etc., that we apply directly on our bodies? Also think of the tortures that monkeys, rabbits, rats, mice, etc., are subjected to in order to test these products before marketing. Not that the results of such researches are any guarantee of safety anyway. The majority of the products are not even tested before they are put on the shelves. According to the *World Book*, even the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States does not lay much emphasis on regulation of cosmetics, apart from asking the companies to mention the names of the chemicals used in the preparation of the products.

Imagine the state of affairs in a country like India. Moreover, why should industrialists spend large amounts of money, time and space, on such researches, when their products sell anyway? Researches in the U.S.A. showed that deodorants and antiperspirants containing hexachlorophane as the antibacterial agent could damage the nervous system. Antibacterial agent, a necessary component of such products, also destroys helpful bacteria harbouring the skin. *Sindhoor* and *bindis* are reported to contain poisonous chemicals. The hair dyes, which are only tested on swiches for the number of wash they

last, too, have been associated with breast cancer, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, leukemia, respiratory disorders, eye problems including blindness, skin problems, etc. The Consumer Guidance Society of India (CGSI) has reported that henna can also be harmful for some people. It can cause allergies like sneezing, cold, and respiratory problems, and that persons suffering from asthma should never use henna.

In a recent breakthrough, scientists have tricked human hair cells cultured in test tubes into making the melanin pigment that gives them color. They believe that they may one day be able to produce a lotion to replace the range of dyes and end the ordeal of everyone who has resented their hair turning silver. But, the side effects of such products will only be known after use by human beings. Although, keeping in mind the latest developments, it should not be difficult to guess the consequences. And, thank God, not everyone is convinced. Jilly Cooper, the vibrantly greying author, comments, "Do we really want to see old people with these terribly lifted faces that look as if they have come out of the deepfreeze too soon, with this young colorful hair on top? It will look bizarre!" Nafisa Ali, 40, a former Miss India and an actress at present, refuses to dye her hair, and considers her grey hair and wrinkles a reward from Almighty.

The excessive processing and polishing of many foods, such as sugar, rice, wheat, etc., has reduced their nutritional value to a great extent. In much the same way, is the natural human form being processed and polished in the name of *modernity* and *civilization*. We subject parts thereof to tortures of cutting, plucking, dyeing, bleaching, electrolysis, shaving, waxing, piercing, painting, tattooing, face-lifting, fat-suction, implanting, EMS, etc., without giving a thought to the side-effects. An artificially painted face is the *in-thing*, and the natural look is considered *backward* or *perverted*. All this is done in the erroneous belief that these *improve* our looks. Do we really believe that we can improve upon God's creation? No, we cannot paint a lily better! We even squeeze ourselves into extremely tight fitting, uncomfortable clothes, and pointed, high-heeled shoes, not caring for the hindrance that is caused to the circulating blood. We forego our health and comfort only to be labeled as *hep* or *sophisticated*. Beauty contests have quantified beauty into centimeters and grams, and it no longer remains a quality. We are willing to do anything, *ad nauseam*, just for the *Barbie* look.

Denudation of the body will have an adverse influence on our health, as did the denudation of the planet. Since denudation of the earth's surface kills the useful microorganisms therein, then what is the fate of the beneficial microorganisms guarding our skin following depilation? Ginu Kimani, an author, wonders, "Why all the fuss about removing bodily hair? What exactly are we eliminating when we strip our skins bare? Only one of the richest treasures of sexual chemistry - the pheromone-rich aroma, that clings to the roots of the body hair. And having done that, we are then encouraged to splash on some entirely alien scent that resembles nothing human, is mass produced in laboratory, and is tagged with an exorbitant price."

Actually, hair is considered lifeless and useless, and therefore, subjected to all kinds of cruel treatments at the altar of *fashion*. We shave, cut, color, perm or straighten them in the name of *style* or *comfort*. Do we mutilate or dispense with any other part of the body for similar reasons? Moreover, we must not forget that the upper layers of the skin, which provide protection to every organ of the body, are dead. Can anybody challenge the inevitable death of an individual without these layers of skin?

As is the case with every system of the body, the dense and long growth of hair on the head region is to increase the surface area for some particular function. The leaves of most plants, too, are structured in such a manner as to increase the surface area for maximum absorption of carbon dioxide and sunlight for photosynthesis. According to an estimate, a tree assimilates thirteen pounds of carbon dioxide every year, which is equal to the carbon dioxide released by a car driven for twenty thousand miles. No other air filtration device can remove this amount of carbon dioxide so cheaply. Any reduction, therefore, in the surface area of leaves of a tree will reduce this absorption proportionately. Likewise, since the hair has an ability to absorb harmful radiations from the sun, any reduction in its surface area will impair this function too, proportionately.

But, we are blinded by consumerism and desire for comfort, and do not even let Nature heal itself. A techno-fix is more appealing to us, as it promises to cure problems without requiring society to change its habits, which are actually the root cause of the problems in the first place.

Advertisements of various products in the media have taken us so far away from Nature that distorted images have become normal values. What to talk of children and the common man, even educated adults get exploited, and become willing victims. Surely, the industrialists and the models displaying their products are not interested in our health or well-being, but their own pockets. Professor Ramesh Kapoor of the Panjab University informed that certain media-persons even admitted publicly to being on pay rolls of certain industrialists. Advertisements capture the very minds of the people - children are lured into thinking that they can become gold medalists by consuming certain products; and women are given the complex that their worth lies only in looking young; and all are given the impression that men who smoke are the most healthy and brave. Can anything be more absurd? The media gives us a mindset, and we behave no better than sheep.

In a similar vein, men, as well as women, are made to believe that the closer the shave the more the man. But, beard and moustache are secondary sexual characters and represent masculinity. Sexual dimorphism is a common feature in many of the animal species. Would peacocks, many other birds, lions, deers, etc., look better after getting rid of their secondary sexual characters? Even trees cut to a shape are not as pleasant a sight as natural ones. Natural look alone is beautiful / handsome, and natural life style alone is healthy.

While on the subject of beard, I am reminded of incidents in the lives of two great men, as recorded by Sarup Singh Alag in *Hair Power*: "When Rabindra Nath Tagore experienced spiritual consciousness, he was then sailing in a ship. As a symbolic gesture of his submission before the power of the Divine, the first thing he did was to throw away his razor and other items used for trimming and shaving off hair into the ocean. The father of George Bernard Shaw immediately threw away his razor and started growing his beard, when one day Bernard Shaw, a small child, innocently asked his father as to why he shaves off his beard. The father had no satisfactory answer for this. He felt that this was an unnecessary exercise, and gave it up all together. Bernard Shaw also maintained the sanctity of his beard throughout his life." Some personalities of national and international fame who have maintained their natural form are Vinoba Bhave, Mahatma Hans Raj, Yogi Mahesh, Aurobindo Ghosh, Shankracharya of Puri, Dharendra Brahmchari, Acharya

Rajneesh, Socrates, Pluto, Aristotle, Herodotus, Michaelangelo, Walt Whitman, Karl Marx, Count Leo Tolstoy, Abraham Lincoln, W.G. Grace, Wilhelm Roentgen, Robert Koch, Charles Darwin and Rudolf Virchow, to name a few.

There is no denying that shaving is a waste of effort, money, time and energy. And, why fight a losing battle day after day? Imagine the benefits and impact of giving up shaving on alternate days alone, which, according to Mr Santosh Babu, from W.W.F., could solve the water problem of a metro like Delhi. May be environmentalists could lead the scientists, and go on a crusade to bring about awareness regarding health hazards and other disadvantages of shaving.

Through science, we are merely unfolding and naming the various phenomena, and devising means to benefit from them! Whatever man enjoys today is only from pre-existing matter. He is unable to create anything. Merely giving names to the phenomena taking place around us does not, in any way, explain why these things are happening. For example, by naming a phenomenon as 'photosynthesis' does not mean we have understood as to why it is carried out. Even if we had called it 'greeno-solar', we would not have learnt any more or less about it. Similarly, giving a name 'sinoatrial node' to the centre in the heart where the impulse for its contraction starts, does not explain anything. We can only be wonderstruck as to how it keeps beating, or why it stops ! Thus, even today, in spite of knowing so many facts and figures, we do not understand life.

Knowledge of more and more scientific terminologies, and acquisition of qualifications does not make us any wiser than those who do not know these terms. The terms known to a physicist are not known to a chemist. Can we say who is wiser ? Wise is he, who learns from the Almighty's volume - the Nature. There alone lies the way to our salvation. According to Albert Einstein, a scientist of eminence :

"In our endeavour to understand reality we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears its ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious he may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he may never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his

picture with the real mechanism and he cannot even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such a comparison."

It is preposterous to believe that man is in a position to *manage* Nature. Most of the inventions and discoveries we rejoice one day, become the cause of concern within a few years. What appears as the best remedy today, requires ban and remedies itself tomorrow. Our arrogance must yield place to the conviction that Nature alone knows best, and does nothing without purpose. The more we manipulate, the more we complicate. Let us submit to the Divine Law, and live in tune with His Will. Nature's decisions must be respected and complied with, in totality. The human body must be nurtured in its natural form. If only man would acknowledge his short-sightedness, so many problems would not arise. It is sad that inspite of so many obvious negative results of tampering with Nature and the natural form, we refuse to learn. Only a change in our attitudes and values will save the earth. Simple and natural living on the part of every individual will eventually lead to the closure of so many irrelevant industries, and consequent reduction in deadly wastes being added to our environment.

Let us leave a habitable planet for our children and grandchildren. Let us not live at their cost.

Hopefully, the governments will do their duties effectively and without delay, but let us get started with ours *ad interim*. Even if we consider our participation towards environment protection equivalent to a drop in the ocean, but for it, the ocean would be lesser by that drop !

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*Polished brass will pass upon more people  
Than rough gold.*

- *Chesterfield*

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*If any thing is sacred, the human body is sacred.*

- *Walt Whitman*

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*No knowledge can be more satisfactory*

*To a man than that of his own frame,  
Its parts, their functions and actions.*

*- Jefferson*

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*Everything in Nature acts in conformity with law.*

*- Immanuel Kant*

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*Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part;  
Do thou but thine !*

*- Milton*

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## 5. GROW GREY GRACEFULLY

Is the master work of wisdom,  
And one of the most difficult chapters  
In the great art of living.

- Henri Frederic Amiel

The Guru's instructions to live in tune with Nature and according to the Will of God clearly guide us, in very simple terms; as to the attitude we should have towards ageing. Still so few of us grow old naturally. Most of us put up a fight against Nature, and dye the graying hair / beard to either a rusted look or a jet black color that it did not have even at sixteen. And, it is being practiced on such a large scale that it has become the norm, and any rare one, who does not dye his / her hair is made to feel abnormal.

We waste so much time, energy and money, trying to look younger. Ageing is a process that everyone goes through. Do we lack the courage to face and accept reality? Even if we do succeed in looking a little younger than our actual age, can we alter / improve the functioning of our organs, or deceive Yamaraj, for that matter? Why the desperation to look young? Do we have nothing to contribute to the betterment of society, but mere young looks? To believe in youth is to look backwards; to look forward, we must believe in age.

Some argue that we paint ourselves just as we paint our houses to look better. Should we compare ourselves to inanimate objects? Well, how would we feel, if the house always refused the color we wish to give it? Undoubtedly, we can only be acceptable to the Lord if we understand His Will, and not walk our own way.

"He who understands God's Will is approved."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 386

"Perform thou the worship of the Master,  
Which service is pleasing to the dear Groom.  
If thou walk according to thy own will,  
Then, the Spouse shall not be pleased with thee."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 440

Let us respect gray hair and not resist growing old, as many are denied the pleasure! Looking artificially younger can only be compared to objectifying oneself (since we are trying to look attractive to the opposite sex, other than our spouse who knows our age anyway). Why to reduce ourselves to the status of objects, just because we are endowed with the freedom of decision and action by the Almighty. Are we to use this ability only to interfere in His plans? Do we wish to convey to Him that we know better? Actually, the mad ad-world convinces us that one's worth lies in looking young and seductive only. Industrialists accumulate wealth by manufacturing a variety of cosmetics, and so do the models who advertise them. Do we seriously believe that they are our well-wishers? Why do we get exploited so easily? Do we have no thinking ability of our own?

All our dear ones know our age, so how does it matter what strangers think about it? Further, our certificates, expanding waistlines, sagging skin, stiff joints, potbellies, etc. speak volumes on our age. A healthy body with strength, stamina and suppleness will definitely feel and look good, irrespective of color of hair. Why do we not accept the changes that accompany age and grow old gracefully? Snow on the rooftop does not mean there is no fire in the furnace. And, surely we do not believe that our children will love and respect us more if we look younger. On the contrary, we are, directly or indirectly, passing on the values of falsehood. How about showing them the way to true happiness, by stressing on the beauty of the soul as well rather than that of the body alone?

The Gurus enlightened us about the true worth of human birth, but we find it difficult to break free from the superficial values of youth and looks.

"This human body has come to thy hand.

This is thy chance to meet the Lord of the world.

Other works are of no avail to thee.

Joining the society of saints,

Contemplate over the Name alone.

Make efforts for crossing the dreadful world-ocean.

In the love of worldliness,

The human life is passing in vain."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 12

"Wealth, youth and blossom  
Are guests only for four days.  
Like the leaves of the water lily  
They wither, fade and die away."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 23

When we cannot deny age, no matter what, then why fear the departure of youth? May be, youth has more muscle power, but the mind becomes maturer and sharper with age. The most famous of men achieved great heights in their respective fields only with age. Let us not insult this age of wisdom and triumphs of the mind by desperately trying to look younger. Let us work on the mind, which achieves greater heights with the passing years! The value of life lies not in the number of days, but in the use we make of them; a man may live long, yet very little. There are always things to do and values to imbibe, regardless of age. Giving up is the ultimate tragedy. If man has a realistic attitude towards life, he will not mind getting old. We shall pass through this world, but once, so let us concentrate on doing good deeds, which alone will count in the Lord's court.

"Life is shortening day and night.

O mind, meet the Guru and set right your affairs."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 13

"They are judged according to their deeds  
The merits and demerits shall be read  
In the presence of the Righteous Judge.  
According to their respective deeds,  
Some shall be near and some distant from the Lord."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 8

Imagine a world without old people. There would be so much less love, care, patience and comfort. It would be a chaotic place without the wisdom of the aged. So much art is wasted in appreciating the passing beauty of youth. Let us wake up to the genuine and ever-increasing beauty of old age. Let us make the natural look fashionable. Let the old folks feel more worthy and wanted as such, so that we can get rid of the complexes associated with ageing, and lead a more natural, healthy and meaningful life.

"Let me grow lovely, growing old;  
So many things do;  
Laces and ivory, and gold;  
And silks need not be new;  
And there is healing in old trees,  
Old streets a glamour hold;  
Why may not I, as well as these,  
Grow lovely, growing old?"

- Karle Wilson Baker

Ageing is the ascent of the soul towards its union with its source, the Almighty. The body is ultimately consumed, but the soul remains unaffected.

"Tired are the eyes, the ears and the beautiful body.  
Age has worn out my sense,  
But my love for *maya* goes not.  
O crazy one, you have been blest not with wisdom;  
And so you have wasted your life away.  
So long as one has life, one must serve one's God :  
For even when the body is no more,  
The love of God stays with us,  
And we find refuge at the Lord's Feet.  
He, whom the Lord blesses with His Word,  
His craving is stilled,  
And he realises the Lord's Will,  
And on the chess-board of life,  
Throws the dice of his conquered self."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 793

Let us prepare ourselves for the ultimate union. Let us decorate ourselves in a manner that is acceptable to the Lord.

"Wear the ear-rings of contentment,  
Make modesty your begging bowl and wallet

And smear yourself with God's meditation,  
Treating it as ashes;  
Wear the fear of death as your coat made of patches,  
Make chastity, like that of a virgin,  
Your path to achieve union  
And faith in God as your staff.  
Make the brotherhood with all,  
The highest sect of yogic order  
And deem the conquering of self,  
The conquest of the world."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p.6

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Train up a child in the way he should go;  
And when he is old, he will not depart from it.

- Proverbs XXII. 6

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Time does not change the worth of gold,  
Let's be like the tree which gets better when old.

- Omique.

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## 6. THE 5 Ks : NOT MERE SYMBOLS

- The higher castes among Hindus wear *janeoo* (sacred thread).
- *Brahmins* retain *shikha* (tuft of hair on the crown) and put saffron marks on their foreheads.
- Hindu married women wear *mangal sutra* (necklace) and apply *sindhoor* (red powder) in the parting of hair.
- Muslims shave the moustache, but retain the beard.
- Jews grow long sideburns.
- Jewish men and boys wear *yarmulkas* (skullcaps).
- The Star of David is the symbol of Judaism.
- Christians wear a Cross.
- Buddhist monks shave their heads.
- Jains go about barefoot, with their mouths and noses covered with cloth.

Symbols are meant to be visibly exposed to public view. They represent a belief, but may have no practical utility, whatsoever. The Cross symbolizes the death of Jesus Christ as well as all Christian beliefs. The Star of David represents the teachings of Judaism.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, refused to wear the *janeoo*, the Hindu religious symbol. In this refusal, it was not the symbol as such that he rejected, but what it stood for, the caste ideology; neither was he convinced of its spiritual significance. He condemned the caste system very strongly:

"What merit is in caste?  
Know thou the Truth within;  
Of whatever caste one may be,  
He who tastes the poison will die!"

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 142

He preached that there is only One Creator, Who is the Father of all, implying thereby the brotherhood and equality of all, and rejecting once again the caste system and the claim of superiority by one religion over the other.

Guru Nanak is the only man in the entire history of mankind, who, in spite of belonging to a high caste, declared equality of the lower castes with the high castes, and, in spite of

being male, equated the status of women with that of men, and that, too, five centuries ago in a geographic area where these were religiously-sanctioned norms. Some of the other unprecedented teachings and values that he inculcated are:

- Submit to God's Will.
- Meditate on Him with every breath.
- Live in tune with nature.
- Religious tolerance.
- Carry out social responsibilities.
- Pray for the welfare of the entire human race.
- Once on his path, swerve not, even at the cost of life.

He himself lived a natural and simple life, and advised his companions and followers to do the same. The successor Gurus, too, lived in conformity with Guru Nanak's teachings, and actively participated in every sphere of life for the spread of his message. They also practically demonstrated the system, even through battles and martyrdoms, whenever the situation demanded.

On the 29th March, 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa brotherhood, *Akal Purakh ki fauj*, the army of the Timeless Lord. The manner in which he achieved this was based on the rule laid down by Guru Nanak :

"If you seek to play the game of love,  
Then enter upon my lane,  
With your head upon your palm."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1412

On this day, he coined a new title for men and women, *Singh* and *Kaur* respectively, and bestowed the five Ks (*kakkars*) on them. These 5 Ks give religious identity to the Khalsa. This identity personifies the universalism of the Sikh religion as preached by Guru Nanak - brotherhood of man, equality of man and woman, justice for the downtrodden, and welfare of all mankind. The 5 Ks remind the wearer, all the time, of the high ideals adopted by him. They represent a bond with the Guru - a commitment to the Guru's cause - a proclamation to the world of one's love and dedication to the Great Guru.

Moreover, as against the *janeoo* that is worn only by men, and circumcision that can be performed only on men, the Guru prescribed the 5 Ks for both men and women alike, highlighting, once again, the equality of genders.

If mere symbolism was the Guru's seeking, or if his aim was only a distinct appearance for Sikhs, he could have devised some hair / beard / moustache style different from that practised by other religions. He could have demarcated a different area of the head for keeping of hair, in contrast to the location of *shikha* of *Pundits*, or another style of beard / moustache to stand out from that of the Muslims. He, instead, ordained to respect the human body in its natural form as created by the Almighty.

The Guru's message is for the entire mankind, which he proclaimed a single race. Although variations in external physical features suggest division of humans into different 'races', the contention is not borne out by the molecular data. The molecular data show that the DNA base sequence varies as much between individuals of the same ethnicities as between individuals of different ethnicities. So, what the Guru claimed centuries ago has now been proven even at the electron microscopic level.

The Guru's decisions reinforced the teachings of Guru Nanak. His recommendation of a simple life style with unshorn hair and beard, highlighted the wisdom of living in tune with Nature, according to the Will of the Almighty. *Kes* (unshorn hair), as we have seen, has life, and is an organ of the body, performing a variety of vital functions, and, therefore, is of utmost importance to the body. Shaving or cutting amounts to interference with Nature. *Kangha* (comb) is necessary for the care of this organ, which requires regular maintenance to prevent matting and infestation with ectoparasites. So, in order to obviate shaving or cutting of hair, at the cost of interference with Nature, regular use of *kangha* is prescribed. It also stresses cleanliness and rejects the unhygienic practice of matting of hair.

The *kachh* (drawers) is a more comfortable, decent and practical wear than other comparable garments. It allows free movements to the body. There is no risk of exposure, and one can, thus, function efficiently. Its substitutes are either impractical, or indecent, or uncomfortable.

The tight jeans that the modern man is so fond of, lead to many complications. In addition to restriction of free circulation of blood and natural growth of the pelvic region, these cause damage to testicles in males and interfere with ability to have a natural delivery in females.

Morphologically, the anus, vulva, and urethra are in close proximity in females. And, whereas the stool is replete with bacteria, protozoan cysts, etc., the reproductive and urinary tracts must remain sterile. It is, therefore, much more hygienic to wear loose underpants to avoid inflammation and infection of the reproductive and urinary tracts.

In men, tight underpants interfere with the regulation of temperature of the testes (contained within the scrotum), which is absolutely essential for production of sperms and their survival. Sperm production and their survival require a temperature that is lower than that of the body. Because the scrotum is isolated from the body cavities, it provides a favorable environment about 3° F below the body temperature. On exposure to cold, special muscles in the walls of the scrotum bring the testes closer to the pelvic cavity, where they can absorb body heat. Exposure to warmth reverses the process. A rise in temperature to that of the body destroys the sperm cells, leading to lower sperm count and even sterility.

Biologists from Russia have already predicted a catastrophe for men, and are wondering if men are an already endangered species! They have reported an alarming 2% fall in male fertility every year, and that sperm in an average male has halved over the past 50 years.

The *kara* (steel bangle), which is required to be worn on the arm, is ideally positioned and makes itself seen / felt whenever we act, thereby reminding us of our pledge and commitment to the Guru. The Guru, thus, constantly assists us in leading a truthful life. It also provides protection. During a sudden attack, we raise our arm over the head as a reflex action. Martial arts, too, recommend this gesture to protect one's head from attack. In such a situation, the *kara* provides protection to the raised arm. And during a fight, the *kara* protects the arm that uses the *kirpan* (sword). Thus, just as comb (*kangha*) follows hair, the *kara* supplements the *kirpan*. Besides, it can even add to the force of a punch and is, thus, a weapon itself.

The fifth K prescribed by the Guru is the *kirpan* (sword). The word *kirpan* is derived from two words - *kirpa* (compassion) and *aan* (honour), which signify and highlight the purpose for which it is to be used. The Guru's soldier who carries a *kirpan*, must be a saint as well, and, as such, can commit no crime. His / her responsibility is to fight injustice. The Guru recommended the *kirpan*, although firearms were being manufactured during his times. The modern military guns, too, are provided with a bayonet at the anterior end. A *kirpan* has its own plus points: easy to carry; indispensable in hand-to-hand fight; never runs out of ammunition; and does not require license from any government, the Guru's saint-soldier being answerable to the Almighty alone.

It must, however, be pointed out that use of the 5 Ks alone, is by no means prescribed as a guarantee for salvation. Just as a separate dress code is prescribed for different games / activities to suit different requirements, the 5 Ks were made obligatory for the particular way of life of the Khalsa. We know, however, that simply wearing the uniform of a team does not make one a good player. So the stress remained on righteous deeds and truthful conduct for the Khalsa. At the same time, it must be stressed that one cannot be a member of a team without wearing its uniform.

The 5 Ks do not interfere with the functioning of the body in any way. The body has been left complete, in its natural form, without application of substances on its surface or mutilation of parts thereof. Much has already been said about the health hazards associated with interfering and altering the body's surface. Actually, by now we should have enough common sense to realize the importance of a natural and simple life style.

Thus, the 5 Ks prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh are not mere symbols, but are requirements of a complete, healthy and decent life style. If they were mere symbols, then miniatures of the 5 Ks worn around the neck in a string would suffice. Also, there was no need to prescribe five Ks; one would have served the purpose. Moreover, their value as symbols could also be questioned, since they are not meant to be displayed. The *kangha* is not placed over the turban, the *kara* may not show with full sleeves, the *kachh* is not worn over the trousers, and the *kirpan* does not have to be visible. The *kes*, of course, is to be respected as a part of the body, and their location is a decision of Nature.

One of the Gurus' main concerns was to liberate man from the meaningless rituals which plagued the society during their times. Some of the rituals practiced, to mention a few, are:

- Self-mortification / penance / tormenting the body;
- Bathing at places of pilgrimage, river banks, etc.;
- Celibacy / renouncing the world / abide on the bank of Asi rivulet near Kashi;
- Dwelling in wilderness, and at burial / cremation grounds;
- Practicing of 84 sitting postures of yogis;
- Controlling breath / sit in trance / stand on head / make still the circuitous chord / sit cross-legged for hours / maintain silence (*pranayam, samadhi, kundalini, monbrat, etc.*);
- Enduring hunger, poverty, pain of hot and cold water / denying sleep;
- Going about naked;
- Wearing a rosary around neck / two loin cloths / tinkling anklets on feet;
- Painting religious symbols and sacrificial / frontal marks on body;
- Rubbing sandal or ash on body / placing basil leaves on forehead;
- Circumcision / splitting ears / shaving head / matted locks / hair tufts;
- Diet restrictions like denial of corn / living on milk alone;
- Offering rice balls at Gaya / alms of many sorts, etc.

Such rituals were common in the belief that these would wash off sins, earn merit and bring honour at the Lord's Court.

But ritualism was strongly decried by all the Gurus. There are countless hymns in Guru Granth Sahib to this effect. The Guru deems ritualism as ostentations of self-conceit (p. 890), and as useless deeds comparable to a house of sand which cannot stand (p. 1348). The Guru says that rituals do not efface demerits. Rather, the persons performing such acts frequently fall a prey to ego (p. 1305), and their souls are consumed by the false pride of intellect (p. 335). The Guru also shows the true path:

"They who make truth their fasting,  
Contentment their pilgrimage,  
Cognition and meditation their ablution,

Compassion their deity,  
And forgiveness their rosary,  
Those are the most sublime persons."

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1245

As mentioned earlier, the use of the 5 Ks alone is, by no means, a guarantee for salvation. It is only their use as a part of the total discipline prescribed by the Guru that can bring *tej* (glory), and title to the Guru's love. Guru Gobind Singh's views regarding ritualism are as follows :

"Could the Lord be realised -  
by eating filth,  
then the swine would;  
by smearing the body with dust,  
then the ass and the elephant would;  
by haunting the cremation grounds,  
then the vulture would;  
by living in a domed monastery,  
then the owl would;  
by wandering listlessly,  
then the deer would;  
by standing still and silently,  
then the tree would;  
by abstinence from sex,  
then the eunuch would;  
by walking barefoot,  
then the monkey would."

- Akal Ustat, pp. 71-72

The 5 Ks are a category apart, and belong neither to the category of symbols, nor rituals. They are a distinct feature to Sikhism alone. Sikhism is distinct in many ways. For example, it is the only religion that:

- Advocates assimilation of the message following contemplation, instead of blind faith;
- Aims at spiritual growth without binding one to any superstition or myth;
- Guides one to have direct communion with God;
- Claims that liberation is possible during one's lifetime;
- Expects one to be a saint and a soldier, simultaneously.

Guru Gobind Singh decorated and equipped his Khalsa in a manner that emanates Guru Nanak's ideology of submission to His Will, brotherhood of mankind, equality of man and woman, justice for the downtrodden, welfare of all mankind. And that is exactly what the Khalsa form stands for.

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Waheguru ji ka Khalsa; Waheguru ji ki Fateh  
 God's Khalsa; God's Victory

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Blest ! blest is the destiny  
 of those saintly persons,  
 who, with their mouth,  
 utter God, and God's Name.  
 Blessed ! blessed is the destiny  
 of the holy men,  
 who, with their ears,  
 hear God's praise.  
 Blessed ! blessed is the destiny  
 of the good people,  
 who, by singing God's praise,  
 become virtuous persons.  
 Auspicious ! auspicious is the fortune  
 of the pious persons,  
 who, acting on the Guru's instruction,  
 conquer their mind.

The highest of all is the fortune  
of the Sikhs of the Guru.

These Gur-sikhs fall at the Guru's feet.

- Guru Granth Sahib, p. 649