

Dastaar for Women

Dastaar (turban) is a very important part of Sikh religion. To Sikhs it is more than what is a crown to a king or queen. Sikh Gurus showed a great respect to turban. But some people think it is only for men and women are not required to wear it. This article will explain why Sikh women should wear Dastaar (turban).

First I will quote from [Guru Granth Sahib](#). Guru Ji says "Saabat Soorat Dastaar Sira" means "Let your total awareness be the turban on your head" (Page 1084). This clearly states that a Sikh is instructed to live a natural life and have unshorn hair and to protect and keep those hair clean he/she must wear a Dastaar on his/her head. This line does not make an exception to women. Sikh Gurus gave women the equal rights. Both men and women are given the same message, which means the above line implies to both not only to men. If we are Sikhs of Guru Granth Sahib Ji then we must wear Dastaar doesn't matter if you are male or female.

[Guru Gobind Singh Ji](#) and Rehtname make very clear points about women wearing Dastaar. Guru Gobind Singh Ji said "Jab Lab Khalsa Rahe Niara, Tab Lag Tej Diyoon Mein Saara" which means "As long as Khalsa preserves its uniqueness and follows the path of true Guru I will bless them with all of my powers." This clearly shows that Khalsa must have its uniqueness which means to have that uniqueness one must have a Dastaar on his/her head. Furthermore, when Bhai Jait Mal Ji presented the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji to Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Guru Ji said, "I will give my Sikh a distinct and unique appearance which will allow him to be recognized while standing in millions".

This uniqueness comes from following the path of Sikhi, which is to have unshorn hair and wearing Dastaar on the head. One can easily recognize a Sikh by looking at his appearance and most of that does come from Dastaar. Guru Ji did not say that he would give uniqueness only to men. When Guru Ji said "Khalsa" he meant men and women both. Men and women both are Khalsa. Guru Ji gave the same Rehat Maryada, same uniqueness, same message, same symbols, same religious Bana (dress) and same rights then how are women excluded from wearing Dastaar. Guru Ji made no distinction and referred to men and women as Khalsa and instructed them to wear Dastaar. In above line the word "Niara" clearly means different from others and it does mean wearing Dastaar. It doesn't say only men have to be "Niara".

Furthermore, Guru Gobind Singh Ji said "Khalsa Mero Roop Hai Khaas" which means "Khalsa is my own self image." Again, Khalsa means men and women both. Guru Ji did not make two different Sikhs or Khalsa. He made one Sikh and there can only be one type or kind of Sikh. There is only one Khalsa. Women make different hairstyles, color their hair, and tie them in the back, which is prohibited. Those women are nowhere near Guru Gobind Singh Ji's image. Guru Ji always wore Dastaar. Not only Guru Gobind Singh Ji but all of the other nine Gurus practiced wearing Dastaar.

So how are women who dye their hair "Roop" (image) of Guru Gobind Singh Ji? They are not. Guru Ji had one image not two. Guru Ji had unshorn hair and wore Dastaar. Women without Dastaar do not even come close to that image. When those women look in the mirror, do they see Guru Gobind Singh Ji? I don't think so. Dastaar is a sign of dignity. Men still have their dignity but where is women's dignity? They have lost it in fashion. Not many Sikh women wear Dastaar but their numbers are growing. Even white Sikhs men and women wear Dastaar. Women must wear turban as instructed by Guru Ji himself because that's what makes them unique and an image of Guru Ji.

Right up to the reign of [Maharaja Ranjit Singh](#), Sikh women had been steadfast in following the edicts of the Satguru in respect to their spiritual inner life as well as dress, including Dastaar. That is what J. D. Cunningham himself saw and wrote in the middle of the Nineteenth Century when he wrote his book, History of the Sikhs. He writes: "The Sikh women are distinguished from Hindus of their sex by some variety of dress but chiefly by a higher top knot of hair." Even after the Punjab came under the British rule, Dastaar was conspicuously seen in case of Sikh women as well as men right up to the Gurudwara movement and the establishment of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee in 1926. Until then, no one - man as well as woman was allowed to be baptized (by taking Amrit) at Sri Akaal Takhat Sahib without Dastaar.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the present one, as a result of the Sikh renaissance movement, a number of Khalsa schools for girls were established in Punjab. Small Dastaar was prescribed as an obligatory head dress for students as well as teachers in such schools at Jaspalon, Ferozepur and Sidhwan in Punjab.

References from Rehatnamas

"Each candidate for Baptism be made to wear kachhehra, tie hair in a topknot and cover the same with Dastaar; wear Sri Sahib (Kirpan) in Gaatra (shoulder belt). Then he/she should stand with folded hands." (Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh Ji)

"...Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa should keep his hair unshorn, have flowing beard and have simple Dastaar which saves him from impiety. Then the Sikhs asked what would happen to those Amritdhari who start cutting their hair or do not keep their hair covered. The Guru replied that they would be stupid and will lose their sensibility It is a blemish to remain bareheaded... Always keep two turbans. When the bigger turban is removed, the smaller be kept. The smaller turban should not be removed."(Bijai Mukat Dharam Shastra - Sakhi-8)

"(A Sikh) who eats food with turban removed from the head (i.e., bareheaded) is destined for 'Kumbhi' hell." (Rahit Rama Bhai Prahlad Singh Ji)

"One who combs hair twice a day, ties turban fold by fold and cleans teeth everyday will not come to grief." (Tankhah Naama Bhai Nandlal Ji)

"Whosoever roams about bareheaded, takes food bareheaded and distributes the 'prasad' bareheaded is considered punishable." (Uttar-prashan Bhai Nandlal Ji)

"Women should tie their hair in topknot and should not keep them loose." (Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh Ji)

"Keshas be washed. Turban or Dastaar should not be placed on floor but should always be kept with due respect. Food should not be eaten bareheaded." (Bijai Mukat Dharam Shastra, Sakhi 70)

It is thus, absolutely clear from the above quotations that remaining bareheaded at any time (except when washing, drying, and combing) and keeping hair loose and unknotted are basically against the Sikh Code of Conduct, which is applicable to all, men and women alike. For obvious reasons, therefore, the use of Dastaar is indispensable. There is no other way to keep the head covered all the time. Sikh women who wear only dupattas, mostly remain bareheaded, at least in the privacy of their own homes, while taking food, etc., and thus are, perhaps unconsciously, infringing the Sikh Code of Conduct in this respect.

A FEW HISTORICAL AND OTHER FACTS IN THIS RESPECT:

1. Well-known Sikh historian Bhai Sahib Bhai Santokh Singh has given a somewhat detailed description concerning Mai Bhaag Kaur (commonly known as Mai Bhago) of Forty Muktas fame in his well-known historical work GUR PARTAP SOORAJ. He mentions that Mai Bhaag Kaur had reached the highest stage of enlightenment and had almost lost her body consciousness...so much so that when her clothes became worn to shreds, she did not care to replace them. Sahib Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji called her in His Holy presence and instructed her to always stick to the Gursikh dress as prescribed in the Code of Conduct. In particular, she was ordered to wear Kachhehra and Dastaar. In fact, according to some chroniclers, the Dastaar was tied on her head by the Satguru himself. If this Dastaar was not a part of Sikhi, where was the need to include this item in the instructions given to a lady who had reached almost the Brahmgyan stage? It apparently shows that the Satguru gave very high importance to Dastaar.

2. In the Museum of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's fort at Lahore and Victoria Museum at Calcutta, the pictures of Sikh women of old time can be seen even now, depicting them with Dastaar.

3. Bhai Sahib Veer Singh, in his well known poetical work, RANA SURAT SINGH, depicts Rani Raj Kaur as a Saint Soldier or Rajyogi of the highest order. Her very impressive picture given in the book depicts her with a well-tied Dastaar, on which is also affixed a khanda-chakkar, the emblem of Sikhism. In another of his book "Mata Satwant Kaur" Satwant Kaur is shown as wearing Khalsa dress including Dastaar.

4. The Sikh women belonging to the Jatha of Bhai Sahib (Sant) Teja Singh Ji of Mastuana, have been seen doing Kirtan in congregations wearing Dastaar. He was instrumental in establishing Akaal Academy - a Higher Secondary School at Baru in Himachal Pradesh wherein all students - boys as well as girls - are required to wear Dastaar as a prescribed school uniform.

5. Jathedar of Damdami Taksaal Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji Khalsa Bhindranwale's whole family, including his wife, two sons and their wives practiced wearing Dastaar.

6. It is a historical fact that there was a time when a price was put on the head of a male Sikh. Greedy and unprincipled people, both Hindus and Muslims, availed of this opportunity to make money. When they could no longer find male Sikhs in the villages and towns, they started beheading Khalsa women and presenting their heads as the heads of young unbearded teenager Sikh lads. Even in those dark times Sikh women did not stop wearing Dastaar. It was only because of fashion and their misunderstanding of Sikh faith that they stopped wearing Dastaar and started piercing nose and ears.

7. S. Shamsheer Singh Ashok who has been an active member of the Singh Sabha movement and an erstwhile Research Scholar of the S.G.P.C., while discussing the prevalence of the use of 'Dastaar', states: "...and, consequently in the Amrit-Parchaar at the Akaal Takhat Sahib, this was a precondition even for ladies before they could be baptized there. Any woman who was not prepared to wear Dastaar was not baptized. This practice continued even after the end of the Gurudwara movement. Relaxation was made only when Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafar became the Jathedar of the Akaal Takhat."

The wearing of Dastaar enables Sikh women to show their distinctiveness of being Sikh or Khalsa like men. The importance of this Khalsa distinctiveness has been clearly emphasized by the Tenth Guru for the Khalsa as a community, both men and women, and not for men only. At the time of the baptismal ceremony, the same Amrit (Khande-Ki-Pahul) is administered to all

without any distinction, including that of sex. The title of Khalsa is bestowed on all of them. The same way of life and Code of Conduct is enjoined upon all of them. All of them are forbidden to roam about, take food, etc. bareheaded. How, then, have women become exempt from any of these injunctions? Dastaar is the only answer to this contradiction.

In view of all the aforesaid, it is clear that Dastaar has been traditionally worn by Sikhs, or Khalsa men and women, right from the birth of the Khalsa Nation. This practice has been enunciated and strongly emphasized by the Satguru himself. Akhand Kirtani Jatha, white Sikhs and a few other individuals and organizations are preserving this dignified Khalsa tradition with Guru's grace. Having become aware of these facts, the Sikh intelligentsia has also started showing a remarkable response in this regard. If the Khalsa is to live in accordance with the Rules of true Gurmat, both Khalsa men and women have to accept it. Dastaar is the crown bestowed by the Satguru for the head of the Khalsa, whether man or woman, who stands bestowed with the special form of the Satguru himself. By refraining from the use of Dastaar, a Sikh becomes a follower of his own ego instead of the Will of the Satguru. Wearing of Dastaar by Sikh women is decried mainly because modern day Sikhs want their women to fall in line with other women with respect to the so called modern way of life, including the modern fashions of dress. Sikhs - both men and women - will continue to be guilty of showing disrespect to the sacred hair by keeping them uncovered. In fact, it is the Dastaar's non-acceptance (and not its acceptance) that is very unconsciously eviscerating the Rehtname of their "tremendous and literally unlimited potency that operates on the collective subconscious level" of the Sikhs in general. One fails to understand how the use of Dastaar "...destroys the purity of the Khalsa and sabotages the unity of the Khalsa", as alleged by some. In fact, the shoe is on the other foot. If Dastaar is accepted by all Khalsa men and women, it will help in maintaining the purity and ensuring the unity of the Khalsa, as even women of the Khalsa faith, like the Khalsa men, will be distinguishable. Copyright © Search Sikhism 2017. All Rights Reserved.