



## Turban–Sikh Identity and Religious Associations

Sukhman Kaur<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Ramandeep Bawa<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Harleen Kaur<sup>2</sup>, Alpa Sharma<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Masters Student, University Institute of Fashion Technology and Vocational Development, Sector 14, Panjab University, Chandigarh,160014.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, University Institute of Fashion Technology and Vocational Development, Sector 14, Panjab University, Chandigarh,160014.

### Abstract

*The study established an understanding of the origin of the styles of Turban and further understand the relation that lies between the Turban as a headwear and the religious association it portrays about one's identity. The complexity connecting an individual's identity and popular religious connotations shall be unfolded. In other words, the turban is seen as a religious symbolism and also a style in itself for the young.*

**Keywords:** Turban, Religious Identity, Styles, Head Wear

### INTRODUCTION

“Sikhs believe God to be a perfect creator. It therefore follows that whatever He creates is perfect. The keeping of uncut hair is therefore, recognition of God's perfection and the submission of a Sikh to the Will of God.” GURU GRANTH SAHIB.

#### Turban

A turban is a type of headwear based on cloth winding (doing *poon* of turban).Featuring many variations, it is worn as customary headwear by people of various cultures. When a Sikh man or women dons a turban, they feel proud and protective while wearing the Turban and they feel they are wearing a crown. Turban in Punjab is known as a Dastar which derives from dast-e-yar it is also called ‘THE HAND OF GOD’ is an item of headwear associated with Sikhism, and is an important part of Sikh culture. Taking about the history of turban is an article of faith that represents equality, honour, self respect, courage and spirituality. The Dastar has been an important part of the Sikh religion since the time of the First Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji who honoured Guru Amar Das Ji with a special Dastar when he was declared the next Guru.

Guru Gobind Singh ji, the tenth Guru wrote: - *Kangha dono vaqt kar, Paag chunekar bandhai* (Comb your hair twice a day and tie your turban carefully, turn by turn) The Turban for Sikhs is a gift given on Baisakhi Day in the year 1699 by the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh ji .Turban was introduced in Sikhism as an aristocratic attire to dissolve class discrimination - As a mark of protest against Aurangzeb (17th century), who had suppressed the custom of wearing turban for Hindus.

Spiritual Context - To protect their long hair - tied in a knot

on top of the head (right above the Crown Chakra) known as ‘Rishi Knot’.

The legend of Akali Maharaja Ranjit Singh which is also known as LION OF THE PUNJAB. The turban style which he use to wear was DASTAR BUNGGGA. Tall blue turban with steel quoits and daggers. Quoit turban (Dastar bungga) also known as a fortress turban. This turban came to be the hallmark of the Akali-Nihang during the time of the Sikh empire, and was known as the boonga dastar; literally, the “tower turban” (boonga referred to towers/fortresses occupied by Sikh warriors, and dastar is the Persian word for turban).



**Plate No. 1.1** Maharaja Ranjit Singh wearing Dastar Bungga.

Source of picture <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailyexcelsior.com%2Fmaharaja-ranjit-singh-greatest-leader-in-world-history>

Sikh royals simply tying this larger regal turban over their smaller Khalsa style one. This remained a distinguishing factor in appearance, as Muslim and Rajput royals would usually keep their hair exposed underneath their turban, while Singh's would keep it tied underneath a *joorha* and “base” turban, on top of which they would tie their regal turban. Overtime, Sikh Raj led to many divergences in turban

style, and there was heavy variation among how Sikhs tied the regal turban. Some styles were more loosely tied, open, and flowing, some styles stuck closer to the Khalsa-style turban, some with more stylistic innovations from external groups like the Rajputs or Pathans, some fused with helmets, and some tied more tightly in more of a triangular shape with the middle dip being symmetric. This last style would mark the trend for the further development of the Sikh turban, and can be seen as the predecessor to the *nok pagh*, or triangular turban.



Plate No. 1.2. Raja Lal Singh wearing typical regal turban

Picture source <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=http%3A%2F%2Fjodhsingh.medium.com%2Fa-visual-history-of-the-sikh->

### Dastar Bunga

The original Sikh turban of the Khalsa Fauj, the Dastar Bunga. The Nihang's pharla is being covered at the tip of the turban.

Dastar bunga, or turban fortress in Persian, is a style of turban used by a specific sect within the Sikhs, the Akali Nihangs (egoless immortals). As an essential part of their faith the warriors used the turban as a store for their expansive range of weapons.



Plate No. 1.3. The original Sikh turban of the Khalsa Fauj, the Dastar Bunga. The Nihang's pharla is being covered at the tip of the turban.

Religious Associations implies how the turban is related with different religious sects, who have adopted the wearing of turban but have different ways of adorning them.

Like **Namadhari and Nirankari associations**. A **Nirankari** is a 'Sant', trying to lead a simple saintly life at all times, in all places and among all relationships. Here, saintly does not mean dressing up in a specific way, rather embellishing our deeds with truth, love, tolerance, compassion and selfless service. A Nirankari is guided towards selfless service by the mission's first doctrine of Sewa, which does not mean helping or doing a favour; rather meting out our responsibility being a human to serve others without seeking anything in return; it is indeed a blessing of God to have given us the intent, strength and intelligence to be able to serve others. We thus, thank the one who gives us an opportunity to serve.



Plate No. 1.4. Satguru Jagjit Singh Namdhari

Picture source <http://www.namdhari-world.com/>

Sri Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji was born on 22nd November, 1920 at Sri Bhaini Sahib to Mata Bhupinder Kaur Ji & Sri Satguru Pratap Singh Ji. He studied multi languages, religious scriptures, gurmatmaryada & classical music among others in the 'Gurukul' of Sri Bhaini Sahib. He was married to Mata Chand Kaur Ji. After Sri Satguru Pratap Singh Ji left for his heavenly abode on 22nd August 1959, he became the spiritual head of Namdhari Sikhs. He propagated the traditions of Sikhism to Sikhs around the world.

"*Naam japo, kirat karo & Vand Chako*" i.e., meditating on the 'Name of the God', earn an honest living and contributing & sharing part of your earnings for the betterment of the less fortunate is the basic concept of Sikhism. They are 'Nirankari', which means they have been endowed with the spiritual truth and awareness of the eternal, formless, all-pervading almighty God by the grace of our Satguru; and with this one God, who may be addressed as Allah, Ishwar, Vitthal or Nirankar, our relationship is that of mindful remembrance. This one Nirankar becomes the source of our strength in times of weakness, our foundation of peace in times of turmoil, our fragrance of love in times of hatred and our key to moderation in times of ego and attachment. Our connect to Nirankar is effortless and smooth. All one has to do is recite the three lines of Simran and be aware of the Gyan (God-Realization) as bestowed by the Satguru. Here are the three magical lines that lead a soul to the sphere of nothingness:

"*Tu Hi Nirankar*" (Only YOU are the Formless Almighty God)

“Main Teri Sharan Haan” (I completely surrender unto YOU)

“Mainu Baksh Lo” (Forgive all my sins)



**Plate No. 1.5** Avtar Singh Mauni, 60-year-old resident of Patiala, is on the verge of a world record courtesy his 100 pound turban. When unwrapped, Mr Mauni claims, it stretches to 645 metres - almost the same length as 13 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Picture Source <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymail.co.uk%2Fnews%2Farticle-2736691%2FThe-Turbanator-Devout-Sikh-wears-world-s-largest-turban-takes-six-hours-weighs-100lb>



**Plate No. 1.6.** A bunga dastar captured from the Anglo-Sikh wars on display in a British museum. A procession of Akali-Nihangs in British-controlled Amritsar in 1905

Picture Source <https://www.sikh-news.com/r/a/history-of-sikh-turban-10839>

Gopal (2020) researched about the Nihang’s once valiant warrior now a fragmented community who can become a Nihang the person should also remember the five banis, should wake up at 1 am for daily ablutions, should do his prayers in the morning and evening. Nihang’s wear Dastar Bunga turbans.

Puthanmadhom (2020) explained about Dastar, which is a Persian word used by Sikhs. The Sikh turban or dastar is a symbol of strong religious faith. Dastar aids in keeping the

uncut hair clean and manageable The Dastaar is a piece off that is wrapped and tied. It is most commonly six meters long; however, it can range in size and width depending on how it is tied. The Dastaar is most commonly made in Full Voile, Rubia voile, or Rubia.

Anand (2019) The turban is the one thing that identifies a Sikh more than any other symbol of their faith. An edict handed down by 10th Guru requires Sikhs not to cut their hair. People who decide to be come fully baptized into the Sikh faith and stop cutting their hair began wearing a tall turban. Mostly we have seen women tying turbans are mostly Sikhs living outside of their traditional homeland of Punjab in India. This is something that the younger generation in the diaspora is doing. It’s a sign of religiosity in which some Sikh women are no longer content with just wearing a chunni(headscarf).They feel contented wearing a turban that clearly identifies them with being Sikh and so women now also want that clear sign of being a Sikh.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study was to identify the Dastar Bunga and Regal styles of turbans worn by people residing in Chandigarh. The study further investigated the religious associations of turbans and their variation in style of two sects of Sikhism(Nirankari and Namdhari).

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Every study has its boundaries and is limited to a particular area. In the research of Turban, A Sikh identity and the religious associations the research is limited to following:-

Given the expanse of the Sikh community and the sub divisions, the study is limited to two identified religious sects viz. Nirankari sect and Namdhari sect. From the historical times to the present times, the styles of turbans have undergone variations, but the study will be majorly located around the parameters of two styles of turbans viz. Dastar Bunga and Regal Turbans. The difference in style is evident when it comes to different genders. As a significant part of their physical identity, the females of the community have also adopted the adorning of Dastars. The study is limited to the identifying of the styles of turbans in the two selected sects.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The symbolisms of wearing a turban are many from it being regarded as a symbol of sovereignty, dedication, self-respect, courage and piety but the reason all practicing Sikhswear the turban is just one - out of love and obedience of the wishes of the founders of their faith. It is important to seek an understanding of how religious symbolism is being altered by the contemporary fashion. Turban as a headwear and what religious association it portrays about one’s identity. The complexity connecting an individual’s identity and popular religious connotations shall be unfolded. In other words, is turban seen as a mere religious symbolism or is it now a style in itself for the young.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The best methodology implied in such studies is the Descriptive and Historical Research - A Qualitative Method. The design of the qualitative research is considered to be a general way of thinking about conducting qualitative research. As a qualitative study entrenched in the critical/cultural paradigm, answering research questions. The purpose of qualitative research is to describe either explicitly or implicitly, the role of the researcher, the stage of research, and the method of analysis. Qualitative research design encompasses a variety of accepted methods and structures. It is a systematic scientific inquiry that seeks to build a holistic, largely narrative, description to inform the researcher's understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The sample size consisted of 50 respondents. With regards to gender of the respondents, 52.0% respondents were male and 48.0% respondents were female. However, with respect to the religion of the respondents, 66.0% respondents were Sikh and 32.0% respondents were Hindus.

Religion

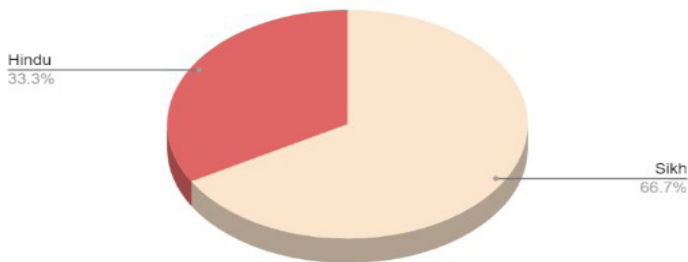


Fig. 1.1 Religion of the respondents

Gender

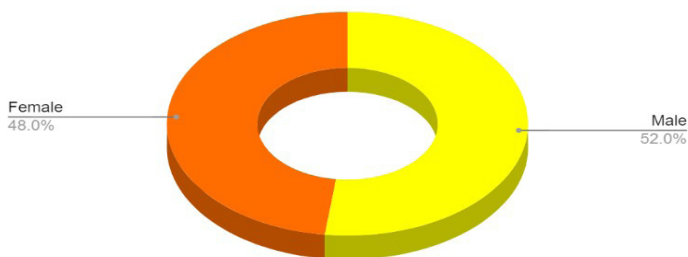


Fig. 1.2 Gender of the respondents

Turban as Religious Symbol and as Style

The qualitative data discusses the analysis drawn from the collected data on the chosen subject. Respondents were interviewed regarding their symbolizing turban. Turban is received with two meanings as religious symbolism and represent as style statement as believed by 54.0% of respondents. 44.0% considers it as a symbol of their religious association and 20% tend to believe it as their style statement. The data collected the conclusion which is drawn, is the turban as a religious marker for most of the people, but also seen as a dimension of experimental style for few people.

Ques1 How do you see turban ?

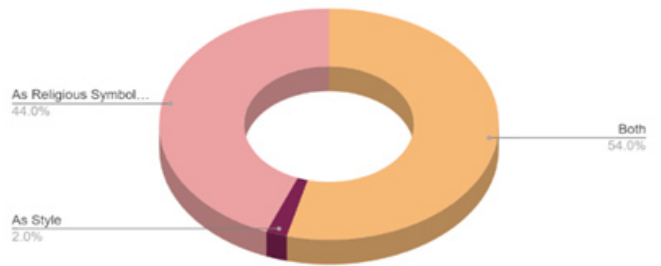


Fig. 1.3. Turban as Religious Symbol and as Style



Plate No. 1.7. The women's and men are wearing turban as style statement.



Plate No. 1.8. Officer in Indian Air Force wearing turban as religious symbol.

Who was Maharaja Ranjit Singh and type of turban he represents?

Respondents were further interviewed regarding their knowledge about Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the type of turban he represented.

It was an open ended question the conclusion which is drawn is Ranjit Singh, also spelled Runjit Singh, by name Lion of the Punjab, (born November 13, 1780, Budrukhan, or Gujranwala Pakistan. This turban came to be the hallmark of the Akali-Nihang during the time of the Sikh empire, and was known as the boonga dastar; literally, the “tower turban” (boonga referred to towers/fortresses occupied by Sikh warriors, and dastar is the Persian word for turban). Each boonga-dastar came to be seen as moving battle standard, with the *farla* representing a flag.

Respondents were also interviewed to know the significance of turban for today’s youth. 82% says, the turban symbolize all of the above that is respect, faith, pride and honour. This is one of the significant questions and it shows that most of the people have the popular idea of turban being associated with these characteristics. It shows the historical essence of the headgear is popular and well registered in the minds of many. The popularity of Sikh men in media can also be one of the reasons.

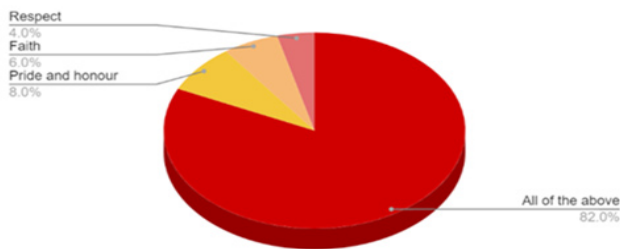


Fig. 1.4. Significance of turban for today’s youth

### The Turban for Sikhs is a gift given on Baisakhi Day by which guru?

This statistics of 98% explain that Turban in India is clearly understood to be not just a style statement but an essential religious decoration implying the historical background of the style. This explains that in spite of being a minority, the adorning of turban had very strong connotations attached to it from the very beginning, which have been recently solidified by the new media and literature. It was under the leadership of tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji that turban was introduced for all Sikhs not just as a symbol of holiness but also as a Symbol of Sovereignty, Equality, Sacrifice and Bravery. Sikhs believe God to be a perfect creator. It therefore follows that whatever he creates is perfect. The keeping of uncut hair is therefore, recognition of God’s perfection and the submission of a Sikh to the “Will of God.” The Gurdwara Burj Sahib Mai Desan patshahi Dasvi Sahib is situated in Village Chak Fateh Singh Wala Distt Bathinda is also a place of Historical Importance in the memory of SriGuru Gobind

Singh Ji, Where Guru Sahib Stayed for nine days along with Mata Sahib Kaur Ji and Mata Sunder Kaur ji, and few Sikhs.



Plate No. 1.8 Turban of Guru Gobind Singh Ji

## CONCLUSION

The data was collected from 50 respondents, acts as representative sample towards understanding the popular perception of turban as a religious symbol of Sikh identity or its extension as something more in the contemporary times. The data collected showed that respondents seemed to have a partial knowledge of the historical establishments of this head gear and its strong initiation by the tenth Guru of Sikhs. But their response also showed not much clarification is there about the different sects. The similarity in styles of men and women is clear and evident to all, which implies that it is an adornment not meant for fashion experimentation. The contemporary times have challenged the meanings of Turban, by bridging the religious identity with new styles and colors, thus bringing the adornment out of the closed boundaries.

## REFERENCES

1. Amit Amin and Naroop Jhooti. (2019). *Turbans and Tales: Portraits of Contemporary Sikh Identity*.
2. Roopinder Singh. (2004). *GuruNanak: His Life & Teachings*. Rupa Publications
3. Navjeevan Gopal (2020) *the Nihang’s once valiant warrior now a fragmented community* accessed from Who are the Nihangs? (indianexpress.com). April 15, 2020
4. Samarth Puthanmadhom (2020) *The Dastar* accessed from Membership to FRD - The Fashion and Race Database™
5. City of Pedals Neha Anand (2019) *how to tie different styles of turban*. Learn How To Tie Different Sikh Turbans | SikhNet

**Citation:** Sukhman Kaur, Dr. Ramandeep Bawa, Dr. Harleen Kaur, Alpa Sharma, “Turban–Sikh Identity and Religious Associations”, *Universal Library of Multidisciplinary*, 2024; 1(1): 37-41.

**Copyright:** © 2024 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.