



Crowned Heads

Turbans can come in many different shapes, sizes and colours.

There are large ones, there are small ones.

There are turbans suited for the battlefield, and then there are ones that are worn to the office or playing fields.

Each is unique to the wearer; each is an individual's crown.

There is no right or wrong way to tie a turban, as long as it is tied afresh and covers the head and hair.

Below are some categories of popular turbans:



'The Damalla'

These round turbans are traditionally seen in blue or orange; white and other colours can sometimes be spotted. A 'Damalla' is made from two layers; the outer layer sometimes holding weapons and symbols – and even symbolic weapons!

Winding for a Warrior

'The Damalla' is the traditional Sikh warrior turban. It cocoons the entire head, offering protection on the battlefield. A 'Damalla' is actually two or more pieces of cloth. The first is wrapped around the hair and ties off the wearer's hair into a top-knot. A piece of cloth as long as the wearer wishes is then chosen and wrapped around the head without ironing or folding.

The 'Damalla' is the oldest form of turban, worn by the Sikh Gurus themselves. Over time it has come to represent the Khalsa and the discipline of these Warrior-Saints.

The largest Damalla's are often seen crowning the heads of Nihangs, fierce warriors, whose modified 'Damalla's' are not just turbans but battle standards.



'The Kenyan'

A smart, ironed and crisply folded layered turban.

Colours: Varied; clean white in the tropics, a sedate black in modern corporate environments.

The East African Connection:

The so-called 'Kenyan' Dastaar is a popular turban with second and third generation British Sikhs. It was first worn in the UK by Sikhs migrating from Kenya and Tanzania, many of whom had filled senior roles in East African society. Judges, politicians, businessmen; their neat, precise turban style reflected their status as professionals.

The origin of 'The Kenyan' is in the formal, folded and pressed style of turban developed as parade dress by Sikhs serving in the British Indian Army. These uniform turbans were smart but also large, making each soldier's silhouette more imposing.

'The Kenyan' style remains in vogue and has become a signature look for British Sikhs.



'The Double-Patti'

A 'Double-Patti' can be difficult to positively identify as the wearer may adapt it into many different styles. It is usually larger than other turbans, with fewer folds and wraps. Colours are sometimes worn to complement shirts, ties, or even socks!

One is Not Enough

This style of turban is commonly seen in the Punjab, India. The 'Double-Patti' is named for the two long pieces of cloth which are sewn together into one wide band.

The open cloth is wound around the head and formed into a smooth layer while tying, giving the turban a thick and defined outline. This method enables the wearer to create different turban-styles according to their preference; rounded out, taller or angled.



‘Ladies Dastaar’

Equality across Identity

Sikh faith has equality at the root - women and men are always empowered to worship without any prejudice or restriction. In this way, a feminine counterpart of the Dastaar has evolved, with its own unique styles and variations. Many of the Singhian (or female Sikhs) who tie a turban wear a layered Damalla and drape it with a chuni (scarf) to distinguish themselves from their brothers.

Beauty personified

A woman's Dastaar may look more subtle and perhaps more chic than the masculine counterpart, but the woman who ties one accepts the same strict discipline as a man - not to pluck or cut her hair and to wear the 5 K's at all times. The discipline is difficult but rewarding.

Women who wear a Dastaar have many strong female role models to draw inspiration from, including: Mata Jeeto who played a pivotal role in the Vaisakhi baptism of 1699 and Mata Bhag Kaur (Mai Bhago) who led 40 Sikh deserters back to fight alongside the 10th Guru at the Battle of Muktsar and was the sole survivor against thousands of Mughals.

Splash of Colour

There are traditionally four colours associated with Sikhs: white, blue, saffron and black. The majority of Sikhs wear turbans of these colours or associated shades.

But geography does play a role in the colours worn: in the UK the two most popular colours are black and blue, whereas in India Sikhs often go for lighter and brighter colours – often co-ordinating the colour of their turban with other clothes they are wearing.

White is seen as a colour of peace and purity and has been adopted globally by various Sikh spiritual organisations. Sikhs also traditionally wear white at funerals and times of grief, contrary to the western concept of wearing black during mourning.

Blue is the traditional colour associated with the group of Sikh warriors known as the *Nihangs*. These bands of fighting men wear blue in worship of the immortal Lord, *Akaal*, and are also known as *Akalis*.



Today in India, members of the *Akali Dal* political party have also taken up this practice to distinguish themselves from other groups.

Saffron (a tone of golden yellow) is the national colour of Sikhs and is worn to show pride and celebration. It is said to have been worn by the founder of the faith Guru Nanak, and modern picture interpretations of the Guru reflect this.

Saffron became a sign of defiance during the Sikh separatist struggle in the 1980's and 1990's in India, with supporters worldwide wearing bright orange turbans. The political stigma attached to this colour of turban still exists.

Black came to prominence during the British Raj and was worn as a sign of protest, of mourning the occupation of the Indian sub-continent. Today it is mostly worn due to personal choice and has no link to its historic emergence.

Various colours are worn during the different Sikh ceremonies, and the turban is given centre-stage on these occasions.

Learning Outcomes

- 1 – Discover the various types of turbans Sikhs tie
- 2 – Find out about shapes colours and sizes
- 3 – See photos of different individual styles

Questions for the classroom

- 1 – Why is the turban important
- 2 – What types of turbans are their
- 3 – Why can women also wear turbans
- 4 – What does the colour orange represent for Sikhs?

Content from: Turbanology: Guide to Sikh Identity by Jay Singh-Sohal, Dot Hyphen Publishers, 2013

Turbanology

Training Aides

Photo Play

Match the different styles of turbans:

