



Embodied Constraint: Sikh Bodies and Secular Discipline in France

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Introduction

Move from symbol → body

- I. The Sikh Body as Sacred Integrity
- II. State Intervention and Bodily Violation
- III. Reconfigured Bodies: Adaptation and Fragmentation
- IV. Affective and Phenomenological Consequences
- V. Long-Term Transformations
- VI. Conclusion



The Sikh Body as Sacred Integrity



- Hair as divine integrity:
"It's God who gave us this body... you must respect the integrity of the body" [Bikramjit Singh]
- No bodily modification:
"We don't change anything about our bodies, so we do not cut our hair" [Bikramjit Singh]
- Turban as necessary bodily protection:
"We must tie up our hair... protect it with a piece of cloth" [Bikramjit Singh]
- Hair = core of identity:
"It's a symbol, their hair on their heads... the turban is protection of the hair" [Ranjit Singh]



State Intervention and Bodily Violation



- Explicit framing as violence:

"It was even so quite violent...we were children" [Bikramjit Singh]

- Bodily violation:

"They were physically harming us" [Bikramjit Singh]

- Forced removal = humiliation:

"I felt really... degraded... as if I was a criminal" [Suku Phull]

- Repeated exposure:

- removal is not just once or momentary, but constant (ID checks, etc.) [Mejindarpal Kaur]

Reconfigured Bodies: Adaptation and Fragmentation



- Hair repositioned:

"We try to tie our hair back...because we've got no choice" [Harpaal Singh, Goussainville]

- Bare-headed or altered forms:

"They either go... ponytail... plaits... or bare-headed" [Mejindarpal Kaur]

- Removing turban at school gate:

"I put it on...and just before going in, I take it off..." [Gurdwara Group Interviews]

Affective and Phenomenological Consequences



- Feeling “wrong” without turban:
“It’s wierd without your turban” [Gurdwara Group Interviews]
- Shock of removal:
“It was very very shocking...unacceptable” [Raman Singh]
- Self-perception altered:
“It was like I was from some other planet” [Raman Singh]
- Social withdrawal (body management):
- *avoiding canteen, isolating body from gaze* [Raman Singh]

Long-Term Consequences



- Cutting hair as irreversible rupture:

"Once a kid has cut his hair, he'll never come back" [Bikramjit Singh]

- Identity loss:

"There is a loss... a generation... not wearing headwear" [Mejindarpal Singh]

- Practical assimilation:

"They've cut their hair...and life has become easier for them" [Raman Singh]

Conclusions



- Anticipatory stress:

“You never know if they are going to let you in through the gates...it’s very stressful” [Harpaal Singh]

- Repeated exposure in daily life:

- *ID checks forcing repeated removal [Ranjit Singh]*

- Attack on one = attack on community:

“If you attack a child’s turban...then it’s an attack on the entire community of Sikhs” [Bikramjit Singh]