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Kaur Formation in the Shadow of the Mouse

> *The physical identity of Singhs is quite simple. Either he keeps his dhari and wears a dastar, or he doesn't. There are a few combination of those options, such as wearing dastar but not having a dhari and vice versa, but in general, the visual portrayal of the Sikh male is standard and universal.*
>
> *The Kaur physical identity, however, is not so obvious or well-defined. Some Kaurs keep kesh, others do not. Some cover their heads with dastars, patkas, or chunis, while others choose not to cover their heads. Some Kaurs believe it is okay to try different hairstyles, while others stick to one.*
>
> *At this point in time, Sikhi does not have a collective, communal idea of what a Kaur looks like or what her physical identity should portray. This begs the questions: Are Kaurs, as a collective, suffering from a physical identity crisis?*[1] — Lakhpreet Kaur
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> *We often talk about "Kaurs" being princesses, but what does that really mean practically for Sikh women? I tell my daughter (Charanjeet Kaur) that her names means…* "Princess who is victorious in bringing people to the feet of God"*. But what does this mean to her at this age? She can only relate to the type of princesses that she knows, sees, and has been taught. As kids they are very visual and want to experience things for themselves through copying and role playing.*
>
> *This has made me think about how we as Sikhs have some serious work to do in relation to our Kaurs. In general most of the time when Sikhs are explained in terms of identity, we put forward the image of the Sikh Man and a Turban. Sikh women are kind of a shadow in the background not really part of the picture.*[2] — Gurumustuk Singh

Part I

These two excerpts from public Sikh blogs are indicative of the larger problem facing grown Sikh women and parents of Sikh girls in both the Western ethnic Sikh diaspora and the 3HO/Sikh Dharma movement: what does it mean to be a Kaur? How is it different from being a Singh? Why should it be different from being a Singh? In reality, these questions are not limited to just the women

1 Lakhpreet Kaur, "A Kaur Identity Crisis?" in *A Kaur's Thoughts* (Wordpress Blog, 10 September 2013) <http://kaurthoughts.wordpress.com/2013/09/10/a-kaur-identity-crisis/> .

2 Gurumustuk Singh, "Mirroring the Princess," in *mrsikhnet* (Wordpress Blog, 4 January 2011) <http://www.mrsikhnet.com/2011/01/04/mirroring-the-princess/> .

of Sikhism, as Doris Jakobsh and Eleanor Nesbitt point out in the introduction *Sikhism and Women*: "questions of 'who is a Sikh' and what constitutes Sikh behavior and identity have long perplexed the Sikh community as well as scholars of Sikhism."[3] The advantage to discussions of Singh identity, however, have an advantage in that there is a "gold standard" of the male Singh identity—represented by the five *K*s and the wearing of the dastar/turban—from which all other Singh identities and their variations of that formula are derived.[4] The difference, then, between issues of Kaur identity and Singh identity, is that there is no "gold standard" of Kaur identity from which to derive other physical representations of female Sikh identity. And since there is no starting place, there is therefore no place from which to argue the validity of one's own Kaur identity, and personal variations thereof, within one's personal context of community, traditions, and historical significance.

The other problem created by a core Singh identity is that it leads a faith that prides itself on universalism and inclusion into "the notion of a 'true Sikhism'" that "also bears the stamp, by its very nature, of acknowledging that there exists that which is *not* true Sikhism."[5] The same can be said for Kaur physical identity. Our class presenter outright dismissed the girls wearing turbans, *chunnis*, and t-shirts proudly declaring their status as Kaur. If that is not Sikhism, by his definition, then what is? After merely dipping my toe into the resources available, a picture is created of Kaur physical identity being one of invisibility outside of the context of relationship to the men in a Kaur's life. Doris Jakobsh agrees, at least when it comes to the basic use of Kaur as a naming convention without any other symbols attached to it, for "while a distinct naming practice for Sikh males was a prescribed and central aspect of Sikh identity, things were not nearly as clear for Sikh women. Injunctions regarding Khalsa naming conventions focused exclusively on males; ordinances wholly neglected naming specifications

3 Doris R. Jakobsh and Eleanor Nesbitt, "Introduction: Contextualizing the Issues," in *Sikhism and Women*, ed. by Doris R. Jakobsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 1.
4 *How* those variations of Singh identity are judged is the topic for another paper.
5 Jakobsh and Nesbitt 4.

for Sikh women folk."[6] As this invisibility has collided with Western feminism and its influence in the diaspora and the 3HO, Sikh women have found that invisibility to be the same as a vacuum, and are finding ways to fill it to their own satisfaction.

There is conflict between the "pure" intent of Sikhism in egalitarian terms of caste and gender and the cultural norms that end up corrupting that intent. However, when Jakobsh's students are tasked with drawing the line between Sikh principles and cultural norms to determine where the corruption begins, they cannot.[7] A religion cannot exist outside of its cultural context, and therefore much grows and changes within that context. "The clear-cut boundaries of what constitutes 'Sikhism', generally presented from the perspective of the "normative' Khalsa identity, simply do not suffice when the actual diversity of ethnic, cultural, and religious practices is more closely examined."[8] There are many aspects of Western culture that can be examined in relation to the formation of Kaur identity, but the most pervasive, and the one most relevant to my social location, is the one with which father Gurumustuk Singh is most concerned: the Western "princess," as reified by the Disney empire and its influence in American culture. The two things cannot be separated, no matter how much he wishes they could be, because as Nikky Singh reminds us, "The encounter with other faiths and ethnicities is fundamental to the shaping of the Sikh communitiy. […] Wherever they may live, the soil of the Punjab sustains the Sikh spirit and is in turn fertilized by it."[9]

Part II

Kaur

Synonyms (Sikh context): princess, female Sikh

Definition: J. S. Grewal does not even include "Kaur" in his glossary, and he defines Sikh as only as "a

6 Doris Jakobsh, "What's In a Name?: Circumscribing Sikh Female Nomenclature," in *Sikhism and History*, ed. by Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 176.
7 Jakobsh and Nesbitt 4.
8 Jakobsh and Nesbitt 7.
9 Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Sikhism: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011) 197.

disciple; used generally for a follower of Guru Nanak"[10] Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh defines "Kaur" as simply "'Princess'—surname for Sikh women"[11] with no other commentary or signifiers and symbols offered. Gurinder Singh Mann also defines "Kaur" as nothing more than a surname specifically for female Sikhs, given soon after birth.[12] McLeod's encyclopedia is almost as bare, stating that: "All female Amrit-dharis must add Kaur to their first name. As the custom is also followed by Kes-dharis and those of Khalsa background, the name is thus borne by a large majority of female Sikhs. […] The usage that applied it to all Khalsa women was not introduced until the time of the Singh Sabha in the early 20th century."[13]

That said, Nikky Singh goes into greater detail in her section on how Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa in 1699:

> "The *amrit* initiation was open to both men and women. Women were also to wear the five emblems of the Khalsa. As men received the surname Singh, women receive the surname Kaur, signifying princess, though once again, exact historical origins of this tradition are obscure. Single or married, Sikh women retain the last name Kaur. Thus the patriarchal structure of society is modified. Men and women no longer trace their lineage or occupation to the 'father'. 'Singh' and 'Kaur' became equal partners in the new family of Sikhism."[14]

This idealized, egalitarian description, however, is limited to Nikky Singh's introductory volume on Sikhism. In her more specific work on *The Birth of the Khalsa*, she is far more critical of the gendered implications and how they have been manifested over the years:

> "Sikh scholarship has erected them as markers of male Sikh identity that show Sikh men off and apart from men of other faiths. When they are implemented merely as antitheses of Hindu and Muslim prescriptions, the five *K*s end up importing the patriarchal hegemonies of these neighboring faiths into the Sikh way of life. […] Indeed, Sikh identity has been blatantly monopolized by the male gender, for it is the Sikh man, with beard and turban, who is 'positioned on book covers, as frontispieces, and within texts—to stand in for all Sikhs,' as Brian Axel remarks."[15]

10 J.S. Grewal, *Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition: History, Literature, and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 324.
11 Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Sikhism: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011) 237.
12 Gurinder Singh Mann, *Religions of the World: Sikhism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004) 85.
13 W. H. McLeod, *The A to Z of Sikhism (A to Z Guide Series)* Kindle locations 1555-7. Kindle edition.
14 Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Sikhism: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011) 52.
15 Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, "The Five Ks and the Accoutrement of the Khalsa," in *The Birth of the Khalsa: A Feminist Re-Memory of Sikh Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005) 99.

This is part of the problem—the five *K*s, which do *not* include the wearing a turban, and are to be applied to all Sikhs regardless of gender identity or expression, have been conflated over the centuries with the expression of Singh, and therefore male, identity. The best example of this in modern media is the character of Smrita in *Ocean of Pearls*.[16] While the main focus of the film is on the Singh identity of her boyfriend, Amrit, and his conflict over wearing his turban and keeping *kesh*, her physical Kaur identity is not once addressed. She has long hair, but the script does not comment on it. There is no obvious indication of her wearing the five *K*s, nor does she wear her hair in the braids that Nikky Singh is the female equivalent of the male turban: "Just as Sikh men can be easily distinguished by their topknots and turbans, so Sikh women can be distinguished by their distinctive braids and coiffures"[17].

As much as Nikky Singh insists that these physical signifiers exist for Kaurs, she also acknowledges that, like the rest of Kaur identity, both mental and physical, "The braids of Sikh women and their *dupattas* have not received any attention.[...] No matter what discipline or lens the *K*s are examined from, male scholars […] have entrenched Sikh interpretation in male experience."[18] Preeti Kapur and Girishwar Misra offer an explanation of how that invisibility came to be, despite the best intentions of the Gurus in creating equality within the Sikh community while failing to make sure it was expressed outward as well: "The nucleus of a woman's role revolves around marriage, preservation and conservation of the domestic sphere within the realm of nurturer—as a daughter, sister, wife and mother."[19] This, in a nutshell, is the source of the problem of physical Kaur identity. The presentation of the five *K*s and the turban is not for internal Sikh culture and society, but for identification in the larger world. While the intent of the Gurus may have been to create an egalitarian society for men and

16 Singh Neelam, Sarab et al, *Ocean of Pearls*, directed by Sarab Singh Neelam (Burnaby, British Columbia: Lighthouse Pictures, 2008).

17 Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, "The Five Ks and the Accoutrement of the Khalsa," in *The Birth of the Khalsa: A Feminist Re-Memory of Sikh Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005) 97.

18 Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, "The Five Ks and the Accoutrement of the Khalsa," in *The Birth of the Khalsa: A Feminist Re-Memory of Sikh Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005) 99.

19 Preeti Kapur and Girishwar Misra, "Changing Identities and Fixed Roles," in *Sikhism and Women*, ed. by Doris Jakobsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 189.

women, that equality still only theoretically existed within the community and not outside it. Since women were relegated to the home—out of necessity for keeping the home functioning and sustainable before many modern conveniences gave us the privilege of free time—the creation of an outward Kaur physical identity is a modern problem as women move out the nucleus sphere. Lack of public presence has led to lack of physical symbols. The advent of Internet and the collision with the Western influence of feminism means this must change. There is no such thing as the private home anymore.

Another example of the invisibility of the Kaur identity is the controversy over the Gap ad featuring a Sikh model that was defaced last December.[20] The outrage was directly linked to the male model in the ad, clearly identifiable as a Sikh due to his turban and full beard. The defacing on the ad, however, was due to someone mistaking that same turban and beard, supposedly the markers of Sikh identity, for Muslim markers instead. In addition, no one to date has made any significant commentary on the female model in the ad, who appears to be ethnically Indian but has no other clear indications of either Sikh or Muslim identity. This works in two ways, one positive, and one negative: the negative, of course, is that she is effectively invisible, seen only as an adornment dangling on the arm of the male Sikh model. The positive side, however, is that she is preserved from immediate involvement in the conflict at hand. This positive aspect, however, soon fades when the reality of modern times means that the previous seclusion of Sikh women in the private family home is no longer relevant, and conflicts that begin in graffitti can tragically lead to incidents like the gurdwara shooting in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.[21] The invisibility of the Kaur outside the Sikh community is no longer a protection against attacks from the outside world, and modern Sikh women are beginning to recognize this.

While Valerie Kaur, documentary filmmaker and the author of the Gap ad commentary chooses

20 Valerie Kaur, "How to Make Love, Not Bigotry," in *CNN Living* (3 December 2013) <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/04/living/gap-ad-sikh-identity/> .

21 "Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting," *CNN U.S.* (accessed 16 January 2014) <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/us/sikh-temple-shooting> .

to wear her hair long, and down, with no other obvious signs of Sikh identity[22], she also works in the background of modern Sikh media, choosing to put primarily others on film. Lakhpreet Kaur laments the fact that her Kaur invisibility means that she is forced to mourn Oak Creek differently than the male Sikhs in her community, as strangers come up to her male counterparts to offer condolences to them and not to her, for she has no way to identify herself clearly in the global context of what it means to be a Sikh woman.[23] And then there is Balpreet Kaur, who takes the physical identity of Kaur into the realm of separate-but-equal: she wears a turban and does not shave, even the facial hair frowned upon for women in Western culture.[24] Her appearance on the global stage is specifically due to her refusal (1) to be invisible as a Sikh woman and (2) to adhere to traditional gender conventions and expressions in either Sikh or Western culture. These three woman, whom all have the name Kaur and are forming their own definition of that means, are examples of what Jakobsh calls "the varied and fluctuating needs of a rapidly developing Sikh community during pivotal stages of its growth."[25]

22 See headshot included in the CNN editorial she wrote.

23 Lakhpreet Kaur.

24 Meredith Bennett-Smith, "Balpreet Kaur, Sikh Woman, Receives Remarkable Apology From Redditor Who Posted Her Photo," *HuffPost Religion* (27 September 2012) <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/27/balpreet-kaur-receives-recieves-remarkable-apology-from-redditor_n_1919336.html> .

25 Doris Jakobsh, "What's In a Name?: Circumscribing Sikh Female Nomenclature," in *Sikhism and History*, ed. by Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 184.

Part III

Princess

My choice of this particular "life-view/tradition" requires some explanation. While Unitarian Universalism is my affiliated religion, it is so broad and unspecific in its exploration of gender and identity—to the point where the eventual conclusion is your gender is whatever you want it to be and we have no proscriptions against however you wish to express it—that limited my examination for the purposes of this project to UU context in reality provided very little to actually discuss and compare in terms of the very real problems that Sikh women and girls must deal with every day. When I came across Gurumustuk Singh's post about his concerns for his daughter's identity in the wake of Princess culture, I found myself, the mother of a young girl, relating to many of his concerns that, while couched in Sikh identity, are also part of the larger feminist examination of Princess culture. I am also a member of what Dorene Koehler describes as the Disney temple cult in her dissertation that suggests "in the context of America's artistic milieu […] Hollywood's entertainment industry has developed a platform for mythic ritual. It argues that Disneyland is a product of this tradition, utilizing the entertainment industry's attributes to reinterpret traditional temple culture in the context of contemporary secular culture."[26] My use of the Disney Princess for the purposes of this final project takes Koehler's examination of both pop culture in general and Disney in particular at face value, based on my personal experiences of her dissertation being true. While I identify as a Unitarian Universalist in religious circles, much of my life centers around the Disney mythos, its stories, and rituals of pilgrimage and immersion in the amusement park culture, in how I rear my children, where my husband and I eloped (Disneyland) and honeymooned (Disney Cruise Line), and how we mark other life stages. For example, while most religion traditions mark the approximate age of thirteen as a passage to adulthood (or for Wiccan girls, the first menstruation), in the Disney milieu the first milestone is age three, when one

26 Dorene Sue Koehler, "Here In This Land of Enchantment: Disneyland and the Poetics of Ritual," (PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2012) iii-iv.

must start paying for admission to the parks and for entrance to the Oceaneers' spaces on the cruise ships. This is often the first signifier of ritual in the formation of a child's life. My family in particular has planned year-long budgets, and booked vacations, based solely on the age parameters established by Disney.

Koehler also shares my sentiments about the study of pop culture as an academic discipline, claiming that "a thorough understanding of popular culture is indispensable to intellectual and psychological vitality. Studying, digesting, and integrating the dynamics that intertwine myth and ritual are more than just an academic pursuit […] From this perspective, it is experience that constitutes the authenticity of a life lived, and truly understanding the myths and rituals of a culture means holding in balance story and ritual no matter where they reside."[27] I believe that examining the problem caused by the invisibility of Kaur identity can be done by acknowledging that "Satisfying true mythic hunger means engaging with the material in front of us, not only with what Religious Studies scholar Wendy Doniger calls *Other People's Myths*."[28]

Synonyms (Disney context): young girl, female lead character

Definition: A Disney Princess has many different definitions. She can be (1) the female lead character in a film produced by the Disney studios (excluding Pixar); (2) a female character specifically initiated into the "Disney Princess" brand by the company's authority; (3) female characters identified as princesses in properties acquired by Disney but not created by Disney (ex: Princess Leia in *Star Wars*[29], Princess Dejah Thoris in *John Carter*[30]); and (4) any young girl inside the existing phsyical space created by the Disney "temple cult" environment—amusement parks, resorts, cruise ships, etc. As the generations of girls who have grown up with Disney and are now adults have latched on to the concept of Princess in this context, more women are taking on the identity as well. I myself carried a

27 Koehler 18.
28 Koehler 19.
29 *Star* Wars franchise, introduced in 1977 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076759/?ref_=nv_sr_2> .
30 *John Carter*, 2012 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0401729/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1> .

Belle light-wand at my elopement in 2010, and have posed with Disney Cast Members posing as Belle by myself without my daughter on more than one occasion. My personal experience of *Beauty and the Beast* and the subsequent attachment I have to the character of Princess Belle is due to what Koehler describes as "The relationship between the invention of stories and the numinosity of a living tradition is inextricable and nonhierarchical. Story and practice are symbiotic. This relationship reflects the organic vitality of the soul. "[31] Belle is my favourite Princess because she is tied in time to my fundamental identity formation between eleven and twelve years old, and because she loves to read. And this is where the Disney Princess model differs in definition from the Sikh Kaur: there are many different Princess identities under one branding umbrella, which recognizes that girls and women do not all fit one mold, and the Disney temple cult is actively producing new Princess models for girls who don't feel they fit into any of the current offerings. The tradition is changing itself to meet the demands and needs of its female members, instead of ignoring or silencing them. This endeavour of cultivating Princess identity as a variation instead of a homogenous effort is successful past even Disney's own estimations, as the most recent offering in the Princess line is the sister-duo of Anna and Elsa from *Frozen*, who are smart, independent, powerful, and so popular with young American girls that Disney Parks literally cannot keep their costumes in stock. Many girls, mine including, have more than one Princess costume that they switch between depending on their mood. Inside the Disney temple cult environemnt, a Princess costume or other outward signifier (like a tiara) is not even required—any young girl who presents as physically female is called "princess" by every single Cast Member, always. The physical representation and symbols may change, but the core identity as a Princess, with however one personally defines it, stays the same.

Timeline of "Official" Disney Princesses

31 Dorene Sue Koehler, "Here In This Land of Enchantment: Disneyland and the Poetics of Ritual," (PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2012) iii.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs 1937[32]
Cinderella 1950[33]
Sleeping Beauty 1959[34]
The Little Mermaid 1989[35]
Beauty and the Beast 1991[36]
Aladdin 1992[37]
Pocahontas 1995[38]
Mulan 1998[39]
INTENTIONAL BRANDING 2000[40]
The Princess and the Frog 2009[41]
Tangled 2010[42]
Brave 2012[43]
Frozen 2013[44]

This timeline can be broken down into three generations of Princesses.

The first generation (Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty) is the more traditional, passive Princess that are the most objectionable in modern feminism. That said, even this group contains hints of rebellion against traditional female roles. Cinderella is snarky to her oppressive family, and while her love story is painted as blind love with no substance, in truth she is forced to run because she has spent the whole night talking to the Prince, like any normal modern date wherein two people are getting to know each other to judge how compatible they are as romantic partners. In *Sleeping Beauty*, critics often point out that Aurora is silenced for pretty much the sedon half of the film, while ignoring the fact that the same thing happens to Prince Phillip. Neither youth is allowed to speak again for the rest of the film, as they try to navigate their way through the power dynamics and

32 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029583/> .
33 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0042332/> .
34 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053285/> .
35 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097757/> .
36 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101414/> .
37 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103639/> .
38 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114148/> .
39 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120762/> .
40 Peggy Orenstein, “What's Wrong With Cinderella?” *New York Times Magazine* (24 December 2006) <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/magazine/24princess.t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0> .
41 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0780521/> .
42 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0398286/> .
43 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1217209/> .
44 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2294629/> .

problems created by their parents and their parents' enemies.

The second generation, from *The Little Mermaid* in 1989 to *Mulan* in 1998, is a progression of independence. It starts with Ariel, who is criticized for giving up her physical identity (which she claims doesn't fit her, and therefore is her choice to give up) for the sake of a man, and yet those same critics miss the fact that Eric *does not recognize* her without her voice. In the narrative, her physical presentation is irrelevant to her larger impact on the world and her ability to communicate. The generation ends with *Mulan*, who spends most of the film disguised as a man and ends up using her own culture's assumptions about women and how they are ignored by men to rescue the Emperor from his kidnappers and prevent the occupation of her native country by outside forces.

The third generation begins after the intentional branding by Disney in 2000, and this is no coincidence. Starting with Tiana, whose goal is to become a professional chef and business owner (with Princess as an accidental side effect) to Merida, who ends her film unmarried and tells a story about familial love as opposed to romantic love, to Anna and Elsa, who have redefined what it means to be a Princess (and eventually a Queen) as seats of power with responsibilities and without a Prince involved. Additionally, as those of us who grew up with previous generations of Princesses enjoy the new wave, we also see other franchises with Princess we love being purposely bought up by the Disney cult, and we embrace them into the new sisterhood: the two favourites in our house are Princess Leia, a savvy political activist and rebellion leader, and Princess Dejah Thoris, a scientist at the forefront of discovery and innovation on her world.

Part IV

So how do these two traditions of Princess intersect and inform each other? What does the current state of Sikhism have to offer the powerhouse of Disney branding that at least one Sikh parents is afraid will consume his daughter's religious identity? I believe the answer to this lies in what we have already seen happens when ethnic Sikhism comes into contact with Western culture and becomes something new: the 3HO/Sikh Dharma movement.

One of the key differences between traditional Sikhism and Yogi Bhajan's interpretation of it for his Western audience is the explanation of kesh and the turban from a biological, energetic, New Age perspective: if hair is not kept long and up, for both men and women, the electrical impulses carried in the hair will be unbalanced.[45] This is very different from the original purpose of the turban, which was to create a distinct, war-like, royal identity in the midst of different sub-cultures and religions in ancient India. Grewal states that "to make their appearance warlike, it was necessary to wear kesh and turban and to adopt the name "Singh'"[46], while Singh Mann says it "bestowed on them a visible appearance generally associated with royalty."[47]

While the latter reason can be more universally applied to women in historic Sikh culture, the war-lik appearance is problematic even for Bhajan. According to Elsberg, Bhajan encouraged the turban for women in spite of also teaching that women should "attract, influence, and mould others rather than stride aggressively into the world. Women should not compete with or act like men."[48] But regardless of Bhajan's teachings, women of the 3HO have, over time, have appeared "to adjust Bhajan's ideas and their understanding of Sikhism to the needs and backgrounds of their audiences. […] when

45 Constance Elsberg, "By an Indirect Route: Women in 3HO/Sikh Dharma," in *Sikhism and Women*, ed by Doris Jakobsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 308.
46 J.S. Grewal, *Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition: History, Literature, and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 255.
47 Gurinder Singh Mann, *Religions of the World: Sikhism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004) 44.
48 Elsberg 311.

3HO teachers encounter objections they appropriately frame and soften their message."[49] This has enormous implications for how future generations of girls, reared in Disney Princess culture, either directly or indirectly, as its influence is very difficult to avoid, can take the often controversial messages taught to them by the early Princesses and reframe them to their own needs. Even Bhajan himself, "in time, accepted the reality of two-earner families in North America."[50] With his passing, and the inheritance of the Sikh Dharma movement by the women he had placed in supporting positions, these women "now seem to have stepped out of the background and into the foreground, and some are behaving like very tough businesswomen. […] they are defining power differently." They are also redefining the Sikh concept of warrior-saint our of the physical battlefield and more as "'someone who, when there's a problem, when there's pain or there's injustice, doesn't hesitate to take responsibility'."[51] By far the best example of this in moving over into ethnic Kaur identity is Balpreet Kaur, who has become the female face of ethnic Sikhism and Kaur identity in the last couple of years since the incident on Reddit. She is using the intrusiveness of the Internet and social media into our daily lives as a way to positively construct a baseline Kaur model that also unifies Sikh regardless of gender.

It should not be ignored, however, that long before Balpreet Kaur, the women of the 3HO were wearing turbans in public just like the men of their movement, for Elsberg points out that the "The Khalsa model of the saint-soldier rapidly became the ideal in Sikh Dharma, for both men and women."[52] Even if the line between Sikh Dharmas and ethnic Sikh is blurred, it is still there, and is has taken centuries for ethnic Sikh women to have the turbaned visibility that the 3HO has for the last thiry years. This is an example of how the Western world and modes of thought are having an effect on the Sikh diaspora. Sikh Dharma adherents tended to view their version of Sikhism as "universalistic, independent of Punjabi culture, and as an experiential religion in which beliefs and creeds mattered less

49 Elsberg 313.
50 Elsberg 314.
51 Elsberg 323.
52 Elsberg 309.

than a direct experience of God."[53]

Through the lessons learned from Disney learning what women want as opposed to telling them what they want, Sikh women (enthic or otherwise) can realize that, as Nikky Singh says, "new meanings of these symbols can create a new society for us."[54] While she is specifically referring to the five *K*s, the same argument could be made for the turban. Certainly the 3HO sees the turban as a crown that is for wearing by people of any gender, and Bhajan also argued for its biochemical properties as a preservation of energies flowing through the body. Neither of these reasons for turban-wearing are the exclusive purview of Sikh men or of Singh identity.

While Yogi Bhajan demonstrated an acceptance of combining traditions,[55] he also argued that "women's innate spiritual power had been eclipsed by American culture and institutions."[56] This feeling is still present today, as evidenced by Gurumustak Singh's fears about his daughter's development. With that said, the influx of the Disney Princess brand as an empowerment factor of something already happening, as opposed to an exploitation of women as merchandising tools cannot be underestimated, as made clear by Peggy Orenstein's examination of Princess culture in the New York Times Magazine.[57] The executive behind the branding of the Disney Princess line did not set out to manipulate little girls, but to capitalize on what he saw they were already doing: dressing up and "projecting themselves into the characters from the classic movies."[58] Empowerment comes in all forms, and just like the women of Sikh Dharma who "found it 'healing' to view herself as the grace of God"[59] an entire generation of girls, since 2000, has grown up being catered to by Disney, the powerhouse of Western

53 Elsberg 309.
54 Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, "The Five Ks and the Accoutrement of the Khalsa," in *The Birth of the Khalsa: A Feminist Re-Memory of Sikh Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005) 102.
55 Constance Elsberg, "By an Indirect Route: Women in 3HO/Sikh Dharma," in *Sikhism and Women*, ed by Doris Jakobsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 303.
56 Elsberg 305.
57 Peggy Orenstein, "What's Wrong With Cinderella?" *New York Times Magazine* (24 December 2006) <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/magazine/24princess.t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0> .
58 Orenstein.
59 Elsberg 306.

youth culture. Like the women of Sikh Dharma coming into their own once the oppressive influence of Bhajan has been removed, "it is one thing to participate in the construction of an alternative religion, which many women have done, and quite another to truly lead it and shape it, which few have done."[60]

This where the identity formation in the vein of the Disney Princess has value for Sikh women and girls. Koehler says that "Walt Disney […] helped a generation of America's youth find their own way of telling story and, through his unique brand of family entertainment, brought together the conservative and liberal facets of 1950s society."[61] And while his particualr brand of storytelling, with the first generation of princess, was limited to most social mores of his time, the lesson he taught children about the magic of storytelling and how it relates to our core humanity means that our youth are moving beyond the limits of the early Princesses. Koehler continues that the Disney model of story creation "developed a mythology that focused on the individual's freedom of choice and the transformative love that grows out of romance, family, and community."[62] Given the Sikh emphasis on sangha, this influence should be encouraged, not dismissed due to the complexity of source material. Just as Bhajan's perception of women was too confining for an entire generation, so has feminism obtained a grip on the Disney's concept of a Princess and forced it to expand into the modern Princesses of the 21st century, as already discussed: Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, Anna, and Elsa.

If Disney Princesses can hold to a unified identity while still embracing differences between themselves, why can't Sikh Kaur accomplish the same thing? Robin Rineheart, in her examination of goddess influences on Guru Gobind Singh, notes that the "*Apni Katha* goes on to criticize those who take pride in their specific religious garb and practices, or who believe that God can be confined to a particular text."[63] When Bhajan died, and critics were attacking Sikh Dharma for doing "the right things

60 Elsberg 324.
61 Koehler 20.
62 Koehler 21.
63 Robin Rineheart, "The Guru, The Goddess: The Dasam Granth and Its Implications for Constructions of Gender in Sikhism," in *Sikhism and Women*, ed. by Doris Jakobsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 46.

for the wrong reasons," some argued that if the driving force behind the decisions comes from meditating on the Name, which is ultimately the essence of being Sikh, then does it matter what the source reasons are?[64] If a Sikh Kaur, who is simply a female disciple of Guru Nanak, as defined earlier by Grewal, comes to her physical identity from her meditations on the Name and hearing the words of the Guru Granth Sahib, then who is to say that she is not offering up her own definition of Kaur to the world, and that the burden of that responsibility is now on the world to recognize her, and not the other way around?

In true reflexive fashion, then, the pure message of equality that is so central to Sikhism's original intent, both in the origin story of Guru Nanak and the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, is that the women are Sikhism are able to define themselves as people equal to men. The message Sikhism can offer Western Princess culture, and the fears of Western feminism, is that our girls are stronger than we think they are, and if given the space due them as equal creations to men in the eyes of the Guru, they will work out their identity for themselves instead of having it placed upon them.

64 Elsberg 308.

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