

Tale of the beard and moustache

A secret I am about to divulge taking great risk on my own beard. Dear ladies, when men accuse you of spending hours before the mirror, ask them how long they actually take to be satisfied with the trimming of their moustache and beard in an expensive salon. If you can watch some of them from a secret corner you will discover that those men would look at the mirror a hundred times to finally say it's ok. Before exiting through the door they would stoop once more to look at the facial hair in the mirror and say voila! Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot would take hours to wax his prized possession, his moustache with two ends pointing upward in perfect symmetry. Salvador Dali loved his iconic moustache more than he loved himself. A French Cut for a French man has to be perfect to lend credit to the name. A man with a funny looking goatee remains blissfully unperturbed by the giggles of beautiful ladies around. English cricketer of the last century WG Grace was famous for his chest long beard, which a biographer described as, "a colossus of the game, WG's beard had the thickness of a wombat, badger or wolverine carcass."

In the pre-razor days men had no other option but to let the beard grow at its will. Masculinity was messy indeed with full-length facial hair flowing uncontrollably side-ways and downward. The itch became unbearable at times when in cold countries getting a decent wash was next to impossible. The overgrown moustache would cover the upper lip and make drinking beer a stinky affair.

Finally, when iron was discovered about 3,500 years ago and cutting devices like



scissors, razors, blades etc., were crafted from iron, first thing men did was cut off the beard in its entirety or trim it down to some acceptable level. Beards on the faces of men started to change shape and size prominently from the Victorian era thereby heralding a new fashion or style for those men who could afford paying the barber

the asking price for the service. Ladies from the upper crusts in society began to openly appreciate a nicely designed beard on a man and this caused more and more men to run to the barber shop to make them look appealing to the ladies. Men endured many cuts and jabs of the razor and scissor on their faces to look hand-

some and fashionable.

Beards acquired many names and synonyms over the centuries. Some of them are bristles, brush, fuzz, goatee, French cut, stubble, Five-o-Clock Shadow and Santa Claus. Beards often get personified if the wearer becomes a celebrity. Let's take for example Rabindranath Tagore. Anyone copying his style would be told that he has 'Rabindrik' beard. Now, imagine a clean shaven Tagore! Impossible! Similarly Lenin, Karl Marx and Tolstoy sported their own brand of beards.

Can you imagine that in the last century many people preferred to wear a moustache inspired by the style of none other than Hitler. Good Heavens! This style seems to have gone out of fashion. In the recent times it has become difficult to separate non-religious and religious beards. Except for the Buddhists, all men, especially preachers of other religions grow different shades and sizes of beards to accentuate their religiosity before the common mortals who look up to them for salvation.

There are beard haters in men too. I know some men who cannot stand the slightest hint of a beard, like the 5-o-Clock Shadow. They would shave twice a day to look clean even if they do not go out in the evening. Such men would buy all sorts of safety razors, blades, foam, after shave lotion etc., to make shaving a daily ritual. Sherlock Homes was a clean shaven man while Watson would not part with his moustache.

So, to be(ard) or not to be(ard)? That is the question.

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