

# POGONOTROPHY

## *and the joy of being 'beardiful'*

Dr. Sandeep Goyal on the bearded kin



The following article was written by Dr. Sandeep Goyal, MD, Rediffusion Brand Solutions, India's largest independent agency. It was published for Rediffusion's specialised consumer research and analysis wing called Rediffusion Consumer Lab (Red Lab).

This unit specialises in consumer understanding, consumer behaviour and trend spotting to come up with actionable business intelligence which can then lead to brand solutions.

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# Pogonotrophy and the joy of being 'beardiful'

-Dr. Sandeep Goyal

Lockdown Known for his penchant for rarely used English words, Shashi Tharoor, sent the Twitterati running for their dictionaries last week with another head scratcher – pogonotrophy—which means the growing or cultivation of a beard. Mr Tharoor used the word to take an apparent good-natured dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has allowed his beard to grow considerably longer during the past pandemic months, giving him almost a Rabindranath Tagore like look.

It is kind of coincidental, and somewhat surprising, that men's facial hair is suddenly the subject of much academic discussion, and attention too. In her recent book, Anthro-Vision, Gillian Tett, editor-at-large of the Financial Times, in fact, writes about how in the spring of 2020, she started noticing on video calls that many normally clean-shaven American and European men were sprouting beards, in sync with the Covid-19 lockdown. When asked why, the answers she got were, "I don't have time to shave" or "I am not in the office, so there is no point." To Ms Tett it did not make any sense: In the lockdown most men presumably had more free time anyway, and had every incentive to present a more professional "face", as on a zoom call your visage is actually in extreme close up and a scrubbed clean-shaven look would have been so much more impressive.

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It is interesting to note that half a century ago, an anthropologist named Victor Turner who worked in Africa, developed a concept known as "liminality" that helps perhaps to best explain the explosion of facial fuzz. Turner's theory posits that most cultures employ rituals and symbols to mark transition points, be they in the calendar (say a New Year), the start of a life cycle (entry to adulthood), or a big societal event (national independence). These are called "liminal" moments, named after "limens", meaning "doorway" in Latin. A common feature of liminals is that the usual symbolic order is inverted, in fact, presented in opposition to "normality", to mark a transition moment. When normally clean-shaven men suddenly sprouted beards during Covid-19, it seemed this was one such liminal symbol. Since beards were not "normal" for many professional men, sporting them signalled that they viewed the lockdown as abnormal – and, most crucially, transitional.



But the intriguing question is whether these fuzzy-faced financiers, professionals, lawyers and so on, actually explained their beards just quite in that manner? Symbols and rituals are powerful precisely because they reflect and reinforce cultural patterns of which we are (at best) most times only dimly aware.

Of late, I have noticed that almost every player in the Indian cricket team now sports a beard. Did they do it to emulate their eminently famous bearded captain, Virat Kohli? Or is there more to it? International research would have us believe that the more competition a primate has to deal with, the more flamboyant he tends to get. The hypothesis is that in big, multi-level societies, male primates have to develop more conspicuous “badges”. Distinct physical traits or manifestations like a beard help signal male authority, identity, rank, dominance and of course attractiveness. Feedback from the research clearly shows that men with beards are perceived as being more masculine and more dominant than barefaced men— “so it’s possible that male facial hair is also the outcome of inter-male competition”.

Distinctive facial hair – even just stubble – trigger traits like aggression, dominance, and maturity. The aggression part of the equation comes from the notion that beards are a sign of active testosterone in the body, and the brain thus recognises the beard as having the potential to exhibit aggression and exercise control. Now to sex appeal. Women like stubble. But they tend to favour heavy stubble over lighter stubble when it comes to overall attractiveness. Women find men with facial hair to be more masculine than those without. And there is an added bonus too: Men who are perceived as being more masculine, are also hailed as better providers. True or not, is a matter of perspective and interpretation.

Bearded men are also said to be more trusted. Yes. And the beard often commands more respect too. A beard makes men look wiser, older, more learned (and certainly more experienced) than their clean-shaven brethren. But in a job interview, clean shaven men seem to have an advantage when it comes to entry-level positions while a well-groomed beard may help when it comes to landing more executive-type positions. That’s perhaps because beards can help men to be perceived as mature, knowledgeable and dominant – and, hey, people tend to respect people like that, don’t they, especially in higher echelons?

Will the beard continue to be in vogue once WFH wraps up? Not easy to predict. In this pandemic time somehow started to be measured in days, weeks and beards! The urge to indulge in pogonotrophy may not have been universal, but it did prompt most men to appear somewhat macho and look “beardiful”.



Thinking about growing a beard of your own?  
Here are a few pieces of trivia that'll make you want  
to start growing one now,  
And make you a beard wizard, maybe!



### **It's what the doctors once ordered!**

In the Victorian era, doctors prescribed beards to prevent illness. Back then, doctors reasoned that a thick beard could act as a filter that would help to trap harmful particles before entering the body through the mouth.

### **Climb up the social hierarchy**

A study published in Behavioural Ecology has found that beards can influence people's perceptions of a man's social status. The study researched women from two different cultures. Results showed that regardless of cultural background, the women perceived the men with beards as having an elevated social status from their clean-shaven counterparts.



### **Beards keep Jellyfish away!**

If you ever find yourself preparing for a long-distance competitive swim, consider growing a beard for maximum protection. The first man to cycle, swim, and run the entire length of Great Britain, Sean Conway, kept a beard to stop jellyfish from stinging his face while he was in the water.

## **The million-dollar beard!**

Billy Gibbons and Dusty Hill from the band ZZ Top have turned down offers of \$1 million to shave off their beards. Gibbons has reported that the famous razor brand, Gillette, offered this significant amount of money both of these men to shave off their iconic beards for a promotional event, but both men turned down the offer and opted to keep their beloved beards instead.



## **Why should boys have all the fun?**

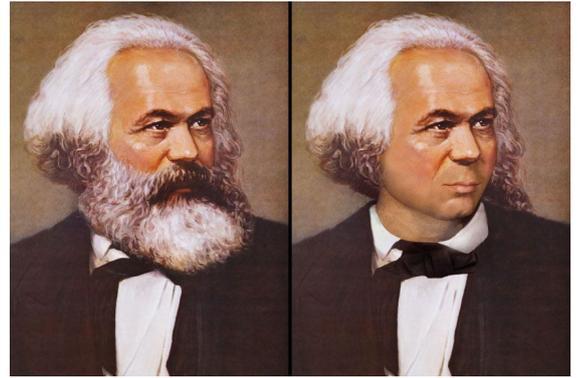
In September 2015, Harnaam Kaur received the distinguished title of being the youngest female with a full beard. While her beard may be impressive, what makes Kaur even more inspiring is her work as an activist for promoting body-confidence.

## **It can make you popular with the ladies!**

A recent study has suggested that women prefer men with full beards and heavy stubble to men who are more clean-shaven. Appearing more attractive is the perfect excuse to skip shaving for at least one more day.



# Keeping a beard is also the best way to pay homage to the greatest men in history!



It's the mark of excellence!

One can't always emulate the work for the great historical figures that left their mark on the world. But their beard styles are up for grabs! Their beard styles are so distinguished that one can name the personality just by looking at their beards!

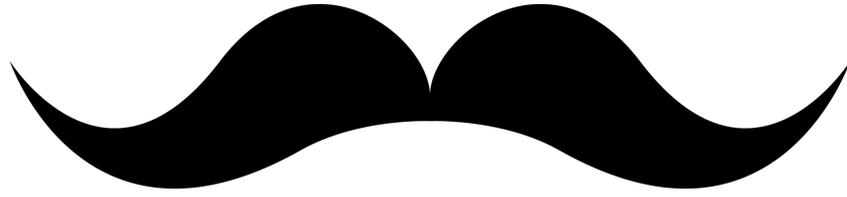
Karl Marx! An economist, political theorist, philosopher, historian, socialist, an allrounder. Most importantly, a bearded man.

Although he is mostly uttered with the name Monalisa, Leonardo da Vinci was another allrounder who could do everything with equal expertise. He was a painter, scientist, architect, writer, historian and what not. Leonardo da Vinci also had a long and smooth beard.

Charles Spencer Chaplin - the man with the ability to make you cry with a laughter. He became famous for his identical character 'the Tramp.' This character wore a unique moustache right under the nose which become more popular for this unique style.

Salvador Dali, a surrealist hailing from Spain. An artist who could go beyond his time, he painted some striking and peculiar images for which he gained huge popularity. Salvador Dali is equally known for his moustache. He used to have a well-groomed and waxed moustache that grew long at the edge.

This list will be incomplete without the inclusion of the great Abraham Lincoln, the first president to wear a beard in the history of America. Lincoln's beard has a name and is known as the chinstrap beard. This man represented the White House, became so popular, and lifted his beard style as a top one. Since then, chinstrap has become a brand of the beards. Quick trivia: Whilst running for office, Abraham Lincoln was actually beardless. The now-famous chinstrap wasn't in place until he received a letter from an 11-year-old girl telling him to "grow some whiskers" because she thought his face was too thin. He took her advice, grew the beard, won the election and the rest is history.



*Moochein ho toh inke jaisi ho!*

