

Turban Wallah

She washes turbans for a living. Only the best turbans from the richest families. Long, fine turbans made of brightly colored silk. She washes them in cold spring water that she collects - at its freshest - early in the morning. First, she adds a special ingredient. The fizzing caused by the denture tablet gently loosens the dust particles from the open and delicate silk fibres. Then she agitates the cloth in a second bowl of spring water. She never rubs them, never stresses them. She simply teases them clean. The final rinse includes some white vinegar to keep the colors bright and fresh.

She is in great demand as the best turban washer in the city. Tens of turbans each day, seven days a week. Hundreds, thousands of turbans. She recognizes some of them as they come back into her care time after time. Washing turbans is what she does. No other articles. Just turbans. Turban wallah.

She hangs them to dry on the many rows of closely strung washing lines behind her home. They dry quickly as she sits and watches them. She guards them because she would have to pay if any were lost or stolen. She folds the hanging turbans carefully, using the tension between the turban and the washing line to keep the silk smooth. She loves the colours, all the colours, crimson, green, yellow – she loves how they look against the rich chocolate-brown of her skin.

She spends her evenings delivering clean turbans, collecting dirty ones. Some clients pay her daily, some weekly. Some give her leftover rice, fruit or milk in addition to her money. These gifts of food are precious. As soon as she returns home the loan shark is waiting to take most of her cash.