

Revisiting Bachittar Natak; Guru Gobind Singh's Bani

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Abstract

Dasam Granth, (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਸਮ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ), the second holy scripture of Sikhs after Adi Granth is also referred to as Dasven Pad-shah Ka Granth or Bachitar Natak Granth. With its status as the most debated scripture of Sikhism, particularly with regards to its authorship and content, was composed by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of Sikhs. Scholars have examined various manuscripts and versions to assess their origins and historical context. The worship of Devi and Avtar, which contrasts with the central tenets of Sikhism as outlined in the Guru Granth Sahib and by Guru Gobind Singh, is also a topic of discussion among scholars. Dasam Bani comprises Jaap Sahib, Tav-Prasad Savaiye, Kabiyo Baach Benti Chaupai, & Ardas, alongside excerpts from Chandi di Var, forming an integral part of our daily prayers.

The present study attempts to examine and evaluate the significance of Dasam Granth for understanding Sikh history and identity with different strains and perspectives for the historical concerns regarding the writing of an invaluable scripture in the shifting paradigms of the history of Sikhs.

Keywords: Bachittar Natak Granth, Guru Gobind Singh, Sikhism and Sikh history.



Fig. 1: A frontispiece of a Dasam Granth manuscript from the early 19th century

Source: (The British Library)

Introduction

Adi Granth holds a supreme status in Sikhism which is equivalent to that of a Guru and the second most significant scripture is the Dasam Granth. Guru Granth Sahib is the final Guru, revered after Guru Gobind Singh, as per the Guru's command in Sikhism.

“Sab Sikan ko hokam hai Guru Manyo Granth” - Guru Gobind Singh¹

Dasam Granth or also referred as Dasven Padshah Ka Granth, associated to Guru Gobind Singh who is the writer and composer of this Granth. The genre of Dasam Granth is *Raso poetry*, or in simple terms meaning Martial poetry. The poetic expression of this Granth is in *Bir Ras* or *Vir Ras*, which evokes enthusiasm in the reader's mind. It evokes a valor spirit for the readers through martial components in the Dasam Bani. For example, the below given hymn from Dasam Granth, focuses on how one should live with courage and bravery.

Deh siva bar mohe eh-hey subh karman te kabhu na taro //
Na daro arr seo jab jaye laro nischey kar apni jit karo //
Arr Sikh ho apne he mann ko, eh laalach hou gun tau ucharo //
Jab aav ki audh nidan bane att he rann me tabh joojh maro //੨੩੧//

~ *By Guru Gobind Singh in DG, Chandi Charitar Ukat Bilas Ang 231*

The Khalsa should be prepared all the time to act in the most unbiased and just manner, and always to perform right and Gurmat deeds; not fear or even tremble a little when performing such actions; not shrink back and draw back a little when standing ahead of the enemy to guard the poor, the helpless and the needy of the world-never have any nervousness or anxiety from the righteous fight ahead.

Compositions of Dasam Granth were written mostly in Braj Bhasha, and some smaller compositions are composed in Persian, Hindi, and Punjabi. As a religious text, it enjoys secondary status in the Sikh religion. It encompasses four prominent categories of writings: Devotional texts, autobiographical texts, miscellaneous texts and a set of mythical stories and folktales.

Dasam Granth: Bani

The Dasam Granth is a comprehensive text featuring works like Jaap Sahib, Akal Ustat, and the Bachittar Natak, where Guru Gobind Singh narrates his family lineage and divine mission, as well as his battles. It includes parts of Devi Mahatmya from the Markandeya Purana, divided into Chandi Charitra I, II, and Chandi Ki Var, praising the Shakti, Durga. Additionally, the text features Gyan Prabodh for spiritual wisdom, and Chobis Avatar, which covers Vishnu's 24 incarnations. Warrior attributes are highlighted in Brahmavatar and Rudravatar. Other sections include hymns such as Shabad Hazare and Sawaiyas, along with Khalsa Mahima praising the Khalsa. The Shastar Naam Mala lists defensive weapons and speaks to the Creator's attributes. Tria Charitar illustrates various characteristics, focusing on women's deceit. Zafarnama contains letters to Emperor Aurangzeb, while Hikayats are poetic tales in Persian.

Historical Authentication

¹ Bhangu, R. S. (2008). *Prachin Panth Prakash*.

This paper aims to trace the earliest historical references to the Dasam Granth. **Kesar Singh Chibbar's work, "Bansavalinama"** composed in 1769, which is also known as **Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka** is the earliest documented evidence referencing the Dasam Granth. The text highlights the significance of the Dasam Granth, also referred to as Dasven Padshah ka Granth, emphasizing its historical relevance in Sikh literature.

On page 244 Kesar Singh explains the history of Guru-ship from Guru Nanak to the Guru Granth.

ਸੁਣੋ ਭਾਈ ਸਿਖੇ । ਐਸਾ ਸੰਤ ਬਾਬਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚੁ ਜਾਨੇ । ਦਮੇ ਮਹਲ ਇਕ ਬਾਬਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਜੀ ਪਛਾਨੇ ।
Listen Sikh Brothers! Recognize Baba Nanak as a true Saint, this is truth. In
the ten forms *10 Gurus*, recognize Baba Nanak in all of them.

ਦਸਵਾਂ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਗੱਦੀ ਗੁਰਿਆਈ ਦੀ ਗੁੰਬ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਦੇ ਹੈ ਗਿਆ ।
The tenth King has given the Guruship to the Granth Sahib.

ਬਿਨਾਂ ਗੁੰਬ ਕੋਈ ਹੋਰ ਨ ਜਾਣੇ, ਗੁੰਬ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਹੈਨਿ ਦੁਇ ਸਕੇ ਭਾਈ ।
Without the Granth there is nothing else, the **Granth Sahib has it's form in
two brothers.**

ਇਕ ਹੈ ਵਡਾ ਇਕ ਛੋਟਾ ਕਹਾਈ ।੨੬੫।

*Recognize One as larger brother, which is Adi Granth and one as smaller
brother, Dasam Granth.*

Scholars such as **Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi and Dr. Surinder Singh Kohli** have critically examined early references to the *Dasam Granth*, particularly focusing on **Kesar Singh Chhibber's *Bansavalinama***. They question the reliability of this source, noting inconsistencies in dates and events and consider this work to be untrue because **Chhibber himself** admitted that he had recorded hearsay rather than verifiable history accounts. **Chhibber** states that Guru Gobind Singh wrote a Granth called **Samundar Sagar**, which he later discarded by throwing it into a river. He also refers to certain papers (*sanchis*) lost in battles, sometimes naming the work *Avtar Leela*. However, he does not mention the Dasam Granth or its commonly associated texts like *Bachittar Natak*, *Chandi Charitar*, *Chandi di Var*, *Charitropakhyan*, or *Chaubis Avtar*.

He further asserts in his book **that Bhai Mani Singh prepared a Granth** in 1725 A.D. which included the Aad Granth's bani and the compositions that eventually became known as the Dasam Granth. What is noteworthy in Chhibber's whole book is that he describes Brahminical traditions in detail, besides the stories of demons, fairies, om, mantras, curses, etc. despite his knowledge that these things contradict Sikh gurus' teachings.

Both **Gian Singh & Sarup Das Bhalla** question Chhibber's narrative, Gian Singh does not mention any preparation or losing attempts at the *Samundar Sagar Granth* or the *sanchis* of *Avtar Leela* stories. He does not mention any such request by the Sikhs regarding the inclusion of his bani in the Aad Granth as well. Scholars continue a debate on who wrote the Dasam Granth, especially between Bhai Mani Singh and his role in composing it. This appears first in Bhai Santokh Singh in the mid-19th century. **Giani Gian Singh & Bhai Kahn Singh²** recount the narrative of Bhai Mani Singh compiling the Granth, yet they fail to provide any historical proof to substantiate this claim.

² Nabha, B. K., *A brief history of Sri Dasam Granth*.

The Dasam Granth's compilation was tied to **Sukha Singh and Mehtab Singh's mission** against Massa Ranghar, yet historical evidence for its compilation is lacking. A letter by Bhai Mani Singh referencing Charitropakhyan sent to Mataji, is dismissed also as a forgery. Other researchers, like **Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi**,³ have critiqued the letter and considered it unreliable due to several aspects which misdate with that era and inclusion of modern writing techniques, modern language, and modern materials.

Furthermore, while 404 stories are accepted to be contained in the letter, it is put at 303. This section further argues that the letter was unavailable even up to the mid-20th century, thereby questioning the credibility of the letter. In addition, the inappropriate content of Charitropakhyan is such that it would hardly be sent to Mataji by Bhai Mani Singh. It rightly claims no evidence of even a single page of the Dasam Granth to be available historically up to the 18th or 19th century. Of course, it tries to set up that manuscripts of the Dasam Granth surfaced later and questions the authenticity of the so-called **Bir of Bhai Mani Singh**.

Different Birs:

Analysis of the different Birs, like Bhai Mani Singh Bir, Moti Bagh Bir, Sangrur Bir, and Patna Bir, points out many doubts over their historical validity and connection to Sikh spiritual culture. The **Bhai Mani Singh Bir**, bought by Raja Gulab Singh, whose history is said to have been looted during an attack upon Multan in 1818 AD, but there is no authentic evidence regarding the origin of this Bir. Internal analysis shows it has distortions, so it is written by a non-Sikh scribe who is not aware of Sikh tradition and has an inappropriate mix of Sikh and Puranic literature. Similarly, the origin of **Moti Bagh Bir** is not known, and its compilation must have been done at least a century after the time of Guru Gobind Singh. History of the **Sangrur Bir** begins during 1857, combining Gurbani with chapters of Dasam Granth, but its origins are ambiguous, and it reflects heretical mixing of doctrines.

As per **Dr Jaggi's analysis**⁴, **Patna Bir** is of no historical significance. He shows that the paper's condition and the letter's shape suggest a 19th-century origin.

In short, as per Dr Jaggi analysis he concludes that not one bir has historical worth, for the contents are incompletely contradictory and heretical.

Scholarly perspectives on Dasam Granth with focus on authorship controversy

As of now you will be able to get a picture where the Dasam Granth has faced long standing disputes about its authorship and authenticity. With lots of debates and controversy surrounding Dasam Granth and with many questions. Why has Guru included the stories of Avatars and Chandi Charitra which are associated with the Hindu faith? Is there any influence of Hinduism in the Sikh religion? Why has Guru included 404 stories about deceiving acts which are mostly targeted to women?

³ Jaggi, Rattan Singh: *Dasam Granth da Kartritav*, pp. 38-45.

⁴Jaggi, R. S. (1966). *Dasam Granth Da Kartritav*.

Sikhs to this day continue to debate whether it should be considered scripture or literature. The most controversial sources are the existence of Hindu gods and goddesses as well as graphic tales of illicit liaisons between men and women in the composition Charitropakhian. Many scholars have also questioned whether Guru Gobind Singh had authored this composition.⁵

Although traditionally much acceptance was given to **Bhai Mani Singh** for compiling the Dasam Granth, there is still much debate about its authorship. Debate about the whole of Dasam Granth goes as far back as the late 18th century and continues today, which covers a variety of data. There is general agreement that Jap, Akal Ustat with a few exceptions, and Swayyas are composed by Guru Gobind Singh.

Scholars like **Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi**⁶, argues that later parts of Dasam Granth is add on, and should not be considered as the bani of Guru Gobind Singh.

Scholars such as **Giani Gian Singh and Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha**⁷ have noted dual character of these texts, even as it can be emphasized that in a 10th Guru time there was no Bir to look towards as final. Another question in terms of authenticity and purpose arises in asking about the British who recorded and compiled these texts. Thus, the standard version of Dasam Granth today is made up after several revisions and many parts of the text differ from those of Sikh identity.

The scholarly perspectives of the paper will focus on the viewpoints of **Dr. D.P. Ashta and Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi**⁸. **Dharam Pal Ashta**⁹ believes that Dasam Granth should be considered as an important religious text in Sikhism, which has been composed under influence of Hindu traditions as that of Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads. He suggests that Guru Gobind Singh was inspired by Hindu philosophy. Scholars opposed Ashta's findings, stating that Ashta's conclusions have misrepresented Sikh theology as being too close to Hinduism, and he had ignored its distinctiveness. They believe that Ashta's interpretations are defective and biased and do not portray the proper teachings of Sikhism.

Guru Gobind Singh was as a multi-talented figure both a warrior and a saint, as well as a poet with a sharp sense of humor and a love for drama. He appeared as a multifaceted genius, a fighter, a holy figure, a poet, endowed with a sense of humor and a passion for drama, as shown in the tales of his life recounted by M.A. Macauliffe. He was the leading performer of his own life upon the Punjab stage.¹⁰

The Perspective of **Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi**¹¹ on the authorship of Dasam Granth has been portrayed as objective. His observations comprise; Material variations of numerous

⁵ Rinehart, R. (2011). *Debating the Dasam Granth*. Oxford University Press.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nabha, B. K., *A brief history of Sri Dasam Granth*.

⁸ Jaggi, Rattan Singh: *Dasam Granth da Karitartav*.

⁹ Ashta, Dharam Pal. 1959. *The Poetry of the Dasam Granth*. New Delhi: Arun Prakashan.

¹⁰ Singh, Pashaura. "FRAMING THE DASAM GRANTH DEBATE." *Sikh Formations* 11, no. 1–2 (April 30, 2015): 108–32.

¹¹ Jaggi, Rattan Singh: *Dasam Granth da Karitartav*.

manuscripts of the Dasam Granth. Evidence suggest that text compilation occurred after Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime. His analysis reveals that segments which are composed by the tenth guru appear to be forgeries. Specifies inconsistencies in the text, evidence of later interpolation, and not the word of the Guru. Substantial differences between the four extant manuscripts of Dasam Granth highlight that it is composed of varied compositions with no overarching theme. He further claims that lack of coherence and presence of different texts indicate that the book must have been written by more than one person. The existence of multiple manuscripts in Dasam Granth has also been used to contrast the content with other known writings of Guru Gobind Singh, outlining a difference in the ideology and practice.. The research study by Jaggi suggests that some sections of people carrying different perceptions regarding the religious belief system have written some portions of the Dasam Granth. Jaggi's interpretation is more balanced than Ashta's perspective, which lacks objectivity. Rinehart identifies several factors among Sikh authors during twentieth century, among others, those who either believed that Guru Gobind Singh indeed composed the entire text or those who ascribed some sections of the text to the guru while asserting they the majority has been written by unknown authors¹²

Banis of Tenth Guru

One more question which surrounds itself around debates is ‘Why is Guru Gobind Singh bani is not included in Guru Granth sahib?’ For the Khalsa panth guidelines were laid by the compositions of the Granth. Key works of the Granth are Jaap sahib, Tav parshad saviye and Benti Chaupai making them an integral part of Nintnem also referred as the daily prayers which were given to Khalsa panth as a guide to lead a better future to live thoughtfully. Keeping the faith intact these bani’s are read during the ceremony of Khande di Pahul or the Sikh initiation.¹³

S. No	Title of Bani	Native Script of the text	Description of the text
1.	Jaap sahib	ਜਾਪੁ ਸਾਹਿਬ	Jaap Sahib is a prayer and a hymn to the almighty God, presenting Him as 'transcendental' above caste, creed, and religion, but very much human from their humane attributes.

¹² Rhinehart, Debating the *Dasam Granth*(2011), *Oxford University Press*.

p.46

¹³ Gur Vichar. (2017, July 3). Giani Kulwant Singh – Why is Guru Gobind Singh’s Bani not in Sri Guru Granth Sahib? *Gur Vichar*.

2.	Akal Ustat	ਅਕਾਲ ਉਸਤਤਿ	Akaal Ustat rejects caste and feels that the unity of all human beings is a requirement and proclaims the all-inclusive viewpoint in referring to God as creator, preserver, and destroyer.
3.	Bachittar Natak	ਬਚਿੱਤਰ ਨਾਟਕ	It is a biographical treatise over the life of Guru Gobind Singh narrating about his bravery and strength in the court of tyranny to inspire a fearful society to regain its valor.
4.	Chaupai Sahib	ਚੌਪਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ	Chaupai Sahib depicts the struggle of the gods and wars between gods and demons; it is the search for acceptance through the mighty God and forsaking worldly fantasies.
5.	Zafarnama	ਜ਼ਫਰਨਾਮਾ	Zafarnama is a historical letter written to Emperor Aurangzeb. It is a protest injustice made by his generals who had broken the faith.

Revisiting Bachittar Natak

The Bachittar Natak, ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh, is a most significant work, reflecting his life history, genealogy, and spiritual mission. The work is found in sixteen chapters, and although titled a "drama," the work does not readily and traditionally take the form of a play. Here, the term "Natak" fits into the notion of Lila - the divine play of events surrounding Dasmesh Padshah's life.¹⁴

Central text of the book is '**Apni Katha**' which is written in first person, thus representing it as an autobiography. The poet, who introduces himself as the son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, starts with a narration of the lineage of the Guru, tracing his genealogy to the Sodhi clan. This lineage,

¹⁴ Rinehart, R. (2011). *Debating the Dasam Granth*. Oxford University Press.

which is recounted in both cosmic and historical modes of expression, invokes major mythological figures such as Vishnu and head figures from Hindu epics like Ram and Sita.

The ripple of dharma, the righteous duty of rulers, is consistently threaded through the fabric of Bachittar Natak. The story tries to portray the Sikh Gurus' ancestry as rulers who held themselves to their Kshatriyas duties through sacrifice and warfare to uphold the cosmic order. However, more specific still is the **warrior-saint role of Guru Gobind Singh**, as the cleric begins by calling in the sword in Chapter One, wherein he asks for divine assistance in completing his task. This emphasis on dharma and the sacred war against injustice emphasizes the double role of the Guru as a spiritual leader and protector of the faith.

Further chapter notes the "**Description of the Poet's Lineage**," that goes into a far greater description of the cosmic origins of the world and then links the Guru's ancestry to those cosmic events and places the Sodhi line in a divinized history. Drawing directly from the Hindu mythological narration of the story of the creation of the world, battles between gods and demons, and the final triumph of good over evil, the symbolic narratives are woven throughout the epic accounts of his life. Within this cosmic framework, Guru Gobind Singh was part of the larger tradition of divine kingship where the kings are answerable for the task of supporting justice and righteousness in society.

The latter chapters of the book narrate the stories of the conflicts within the Sodhi clan and tell of the battles that defined the ancestry of the Sikh Gurus. Within these stories, their predecessors are personified as rulers acting according to the classical Indian theory of the four yugas, or cosmic ages, in which time moves linearly, the world grows worse with each age, and dharma declines steadily. The story illustrates the idea that the Sikh Gurus appeared during the Kaliyuga's dark times, in which Guru Gobind Singh played a significant role in restoring justice and morality.

Even though battles are an often-repeated theme in the book, they are also elaborately described using imagery and metaphor. The battles between good and bad are quite often described to be seen on par with battles of gods with demons. This theme highlights that there needs to be physical combat for dharma to prevail.

Despite his divine mission, Guru Gobind Singh continuously denies the claims of him being the Supreme Lord, and instead considers himself only a servant of God. This makes him less boastful and proud, attaining the humility that should be expected of the Sikh leader, while within the same breath differentiating the Sikh tradition from any other religious movement-which might raise their leaders to godhead.

Thus, The Bachittar Natak is more than a biography: it places the Guru Gobind Singh within a large cosmic and historical drama. It expresses his mission to defend dharma as a representative consciousness of both spiritual insight and martial expertise, while underlining the divine character of leadership.

Conclusion

The paper focused on how Dasam Granth is a unique and vast text which is itself an especially important historical source for Sikhs. Though it surrounds itself with controversies but still

holds a significant role in the lives of Sikhs and its role in Sikh Rehat Maryada for daily prayers, the Sikh Panth asserts that only Sri Guru Granth Sahib has the status of the universal Guru in Sikhism.

Guru Nanak, who is attributed as the first gurus of Sikhs was the first individual to set up the foundations of Sikhism in 15th century. The word 'Sikh' means a disciple who is a learner his or her whole life. The transition of a **Sikh to the Khalsa** happened by the establishment of Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Formation of Khalsa Panth is a key event in the Sikh history. The tenth guru started the Sikh baptism ceremony or called '*Khande Batte di Pahul.*' With this ceremony a Sikh transformation into a Khalsa who is then considered as an Amrit Dhari. In other words, the transformation of Sant-to-Sant Sipāhī.¹⁵

In 1708, before his passing, Guru Gobind Singh designated the Adi Granth as the spiritual guru of Sikhs, giving it the name '**Guru Granth Sahib**' and ended putting the line of succession of human gurus. In Sikh religion, Adi Granth holds a prominent position with respect to the Sikh religion and values associated with it, composed by fifth gurus of Sikhs Guru Arjan Dev.

Thus, the goal ought to be to avoid controversy and not to create controversy. In this way, the words of Sikh literature remain pure, free from interference or misunderstanding. The Sikh community should uphold a unified path guided by the teachings of the Adi Granth, ensuring that the rich spiritual heritage of Sikhism flourishes across generations.

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