

Findings Format for Examination

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Topic of Research: The Dasam Granth and Transition in Sikh History (1658CE-1748CE)

Findings

This thesis establishes that the Dasam Granth is not only a contested scripture within Sikh tradition but a foundational text for understanding the dynamic evolution of Sikh identity, religious thought, and community formation during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Across five interconnected chapters, this study critically engages with the literary, historical, philosophical, and political dimensions of the Dasam Granth, framing it as a central source for re-examining the shifting Sikh self-perception before and after the formation of the Khalsa in 1699. The first chapter presents a historical outline of the Dasam Granth, illustrating how the compilation—traditionally attributed to Guru Gobind Singh—became a site of both reverence and controversy. By locating the text within the broader spectrum of Sikh literary tradition, the chapter argues for its significance in shaping early Sikh memory and resistance narratives. Rather than viewing the text solely as a theological or poetic contribution, it underscores its role in encoding political and martial values that became essential for the community during Mughal decline.

The second chapter, "Contextualizing Eighteenth-Century Literary Sources: Exploring Community Narratives in the Context of the Dasam Granth," deepens this exploration by situating the Dasam Granth within the broader literary culture of early modern Punjab. Drawing from Purnima Dhavan's observations on gurbilās literature and Muzaffar Alam's political analysis of post-Aurangzeb Mughal India, this chapter highlights how literary production intersected with shifting social alliances, political patronage, and communal memory. Dhavan's insight that these texts resist static religious categorization underscores the multiplicity of identities and devotional practices that shaped early Sikh consciousness. The Dasam Granth, therefore, served not just as scripture but also as a communal archive—one shaped by both devotional intimacy and political urgency.

The third chapter focuses on the shifting dynamics of Sikh-Mughal relations through a close examination of texts such as Dabistān-i-Mazāhib, Muntakhab-ul-Lubāb, Ahkām-i-‘Ālamgīrī, and Akhbārāt-i-Darbār-i-Mu‘allā, among others. By tracing the narratives surrounding Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution and the public theological debates that followed, this chapter examines the rise of Sikh public philosophy—an intellectual and spiritual discourse forged in confrontation

with state power. The chapter contends that the evolution of Sikh identity during this period cannot be understood solely through the lens of Mughal oppression, but rather through a dialectic process where Sikh thinkers actively shaped alternative models of sovereignty, ethics, and memory. This is particularly evident in the tension between two ideals: the householder-sovereign and the householder-ascetic. The triumph of the former reflects a collective shift towards political agency, which the Dasam Granth articulates through its celebration of righteous violence and divine justice.

In the fourth chapter, "Guru Gobind Singh: An Insight into His Life and the Significance of the Dasam Granth," the thesis presents the Dasam Granth as the ideological interior of the Sikh tradition, complementing the structural transformation seen with the formation of the Khalsa. The chapter closely examines early autobiographical texts attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, analyzing how they narrativize his divine mission, challenges to authority, and the rationale behind institutionalizing the Khalsa. These sources—produced amid socio-political upheaval—demonstrate that Guru Gobind Singh's vision of spiritual and political sovereignty was deeply influenced by shakti traditions, especially the invocation of the goddess as a force of divine violence against injustice. These philosophical foundations were not merely theological abstractions but direct interventions in a volatile political landscape. The Dasam Granth thus served as a vessel to legitimize resistance and assert a distinctive Sikh worldview that defied Mughal imperial ideology.

The fifth and final chapter, "The Dasam Granth: History, Historicity, and Historiography," engages with contemporary debates on the text's authorship, authority, and place in the Sikh canon. Harjot Oberoi's observation that the Dasam Granth, once central to Sikh rituals, lost its dominance by the early twentieth century, underscores the text's contested legacy. This chapter argues that historiographical disagreements should not overshadow the Dasam Granth's pivotal role in shaping Sikh political theology and social imagination. The challenge of pinpointing the exact moment and conditions of its compilation reflects the fluidity of literary practices in the pre-modern era. However, despite this uncertainty, eighteenth-century sources consistently highlight Guru Gobind Singh's court as a hub of poetic patronage and ideological production.

The thesis concludes that the Dasam Granth is best understood not as a purely religious scripture but as a multidimensional text that contributed significantly to Sikh political ideology, collective memory, and social formation. Its literary variety—ranging from mythological epics and philosophical discourses to martial poetry—helped articulate a cohesive Sikh worldview during a time of profound historical change. The text encapsulated the struggle against Mughal hegemony, internal philosophical debates, and the need for a coherent public identity. It was instrumental in redefining Sikhism as both a spiritual path and a political movement.