

# Did Guru Gobind Singh write the Dasam Granth?

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The Dasam Granth is all rhymed poetry but in the controversy about it there is growing vitriolic diatribe.

"The debate was dormant – people quietly believed one way or the other," said Harbans Lal, president of Academy of Guru Granth Studies at Arlington, Texas. "This open fighting is relatively recent ... it started about 15 years ago. Now it's blowing up in everyone's face."

Last week, a man was stabbed when violence broke out at a Sikh temple in Brampton where Darshan Singh, a former, now-excommunicated head priest of Sikhs, was invited to speak. Singh, who lives in Brampton, is one of the most vocal critics of the Dasam Granth.

A scripture of Sikhism, it contains texts attributed to the tenth and the last Sikh guru, Gobind Singh, who lived in central India. They were compiled after the guru's death in 1708 by Mani Singh, one of his disciples. Singh took nine years to gather the guru's writings from various followers.

But there were different versions. From 1892 to 1897, Sikh scholars studied as many as 32 adaptations and prepared the Dasam Granth now under fire among some Sikhs. They believe it promotes sexual promiscuity, degrades women and also encourages use of intoxicants.

**MOST RELIGIOUS** scriptures are second-hand and passed down over centuries, and controversies about authenticity, authorship or importance are common. It's not clear how many pages or verses of the scripture are considered controversial. In September 2000, after a scholar, Virsa Singh, said his research indicated that Dasam Granth in its entirety was the tenth guru's work, the high priests issued an edict banning all debate on its authenticity.

But ten years on, the debate is still swirling.

Darshan Singh, who has brought the controversy to the forefront, maintains the Dasam Granth is inconsistent with Gobind Singh's other teachings and could not have been written by him.

"There is nothing to prove that Guru Gobind Singh wrote most of the verses," said Singh in an interview with the *Star*.

Dasam Granth – 1,428 pages long and mostly in Braj Bhasha, a dialect of Hindi spoken widely in many parts of India until the 19th century – contains multiple references to group sex that have riled some Sikhs. A part of the scripture talks about consuming intoxicants before sex to make it better, said Singh. He maintains some verses encourage people to have multiple sexual partners – including with immediate family members.

"It says there shouldn't be any boundaries. No guru would ever preach that," argued Singh.

Some verses in the Dasam Granth also freely talk about cutting hair, considered taboo for any practicing Sikh. "Hair is one of the important tenets of Sikhism, as said by the gurus," said Singh. "How could, then, Guru

Gobind Singh have anything to do with a verse where a woman talks about disguising her lover as another woman by cutting off the hair?"

Other verses say that women should not be trusted, said Singh, who has also been studying the scripture for years. "That's not what our gurus said. Each one of them preached gender equality."

There is some debate with regard to mention of gods and goddesses in the book – the Sikh gurus maintained there is only one God. Also, parts of the Dasam Granth appear to be contradictory to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs, considered living embodiment of the 10 gurus.

Lal, president of Academy of Guru Granth Studies at Arlington, Texas, said he's not "scholarly enough to say if parts of Dasam Granth have not been written by Guru Gobind Singh but I do believe that it's a part of Sikh literature and we should abstain from using language about it that hurts people."

**UNTIL THIS DEBATE** is settled, Sikhs should pay attention to the Guru Granth Sahib, he added. That book is a compilation of the teachings of all the gurus that is overwhelmingly accepted by Sikhs.

Sikh scholars argue that there's enormous respect for Gobind Singh on both sides and that is one reason for the debate. "One side doesn't want to challenge anything that Gobind Singh wrote because it means defying the guru himself," said Santbir Pannu, a young practicing Sikh in Toronto who has read large parts of the original Dasam Granth and most of the translations.

The other side believes the tenth guru's name should not be associated with a book whose philosophy is contrary to the gurus.

When it comes to scriptures, people get passionate very quickly, said Pannu.

But this controversy has gone on for too long, he thinks. "The Sikhs undertook a thorough in-depth investigation of the Dasam Granth and came to conclusions (in 1897). At that meeting, some compositions were deemed to be spurious. Something similar needs to be undertaken today, under the authority of the head priests," said Pannu.

Since the scripture is mostly in Braj Bhasha, a language no longer spoken, only its translations have been widely read. Many verses are long and mystical, and there is room for misinterpretation, said Lal.

But Darshan Singh has no such qualms. "I challenge you to read it and decide on your own if this could have been written by the guru," said Singh. "Read and decide. That's all."

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Interview with Prof. Darshan Singh Khalsa in Toronto Star

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