

The Relationship between Sri Dasam Granth and Bachittar Natak Granth

The Dasam Granth which was written by the tenth preceptor, Guru Gobind Singh is something which in recent times has seen much interest. The compositions within the Dasam Granth were written by Guru Gobind Singh between 1680 and 1705 in places like Anandpur and Paonta. The internal dating within the Sri Dasam Granth alludes to the locations and dates of compilation of various compositions of the Dasam Granth. We are very lucky as to have this information as we have no internal parameters within in the Guru Granth Sahib as to when the banis were written.

However recently there have been some misunderstandings on the various names of the Dasam Granth and I wanted to correct some of these based on manuscript evidence and analysis of Sikh literature. One of these includes the name of the Dasam Granth and it's relationship to the Bachitra Natak.

In order to do this it is imperative to look at the compositions which form the published version of the Dasam Granth ⁽¹⁾. This includes the following:

1.

Jaap

2.

Akal Ustat

3.

Bachitra Natak

4.

Chandi Charitra I

5.

Chandi Charitra II

6.

Chandi Di Var

7.

Gyan Prabodh

Chaubis Avtar

Up Avtar

Shabad Hazare

Swaiye

Khalsa Mehma

Shastra Nam Mala

Charitropakhyan

Zafarnama, Hikayat

However there are several other compositions within, which refer to them as being part of the Bachitra Natak Granth. We need to consider what is the Bachitra Natak Granth?

There is only one composition within the Granth which is termed the Bachitra Natak and this sometimes referred to as Apni Katha (My autobiography). This is an autobiographical account by Guru Gobind Singh explaining his lineage and vivid accounts of his battles ⁽²⁾. This composition is autobiographical because it is written in the first person, . iIf a Kavi or any other person was the author it would be apparent. This composition was completed prior to 1699 as the creation of the Khalsa is not cited within it. There are also other compositions which refer to them as being part of the Bachitra Natak Granth. These are as follows:

1.

Bachitra Natak (Apni Katha)

Chandi Charitra I

Chandi Charitra II

Chandi Di Var

Gyan Prabodh

Chaubis Avtar

We know that Ram Avtar was completed in 1698 as per the internal parameters within the Granth itself. The reference is as follows:

This Granth has been completed (and improved) in Vadi first in the month of Haar in the year 1755 Bikrami (July 1698); if there has remained any error in it, then kindly correct it ⁽³⁾.

It is quite clear that the compositions which form the Bachitra Natak Granth as such follow a specific or similar pattern. They Apni Katha compositions refer to the various Avatars that came to the earth; they were always selfish and did not pay heed to Akal Purkh. The description of the Avatars is reinterpreted to bring it in line with Sikh thought and philosophy. The descriptions of Chandi, Krishna, Ram and the other Avatars were written so that Apni Katha could be put in its proper context. Hence the composition Krishna Avatar gives the flaws of the Krishna and upholds the virtues of Kharag Singh. The character of Kharag Singh is promoted to be the epitome of the Khalsa and is heralded as the proto-type of the Khalsa. The heroic qualities of Chandi are promoted so the Hindu masses of the time could see that under the Mughal regime there was only one recourse that of Dharam Yudh or "war of righteousness. This could only be undertaken by showing the heroic properties of the Avatars and demoting the others aspects which were not in unison with Sikh thought.

From these compositions it may give the appearance that the Bachitra Natak is a separate Granth. It is separate in a sense that the above compositions form the

history and narration of the Avatars. However there is no original Pothi or manuscript written during the Guru period which bears the title Bachitra Natak Granth. There is however the title of Dasvein Patshah Ju Ka Granth or "Granth of the Tenth Master" which appears on one of the original manuscripts of the Dasam Granth ⁽⁴⁾. So the Bachitra Natak Granth is part of Dasam Granth but the DG is not the

Q. Is 'Bachittar Natak Granth' the old name of 'Sri Dasam Granth'?

Bachitra Natak Granth. so these two terms are non exclusive.

It is also pertinent to consider that the names that are given to the Dasam Granth are similar to the process of names given to the Guru Granth Sahib.

The Bachitra Natak Granth, Dasven Patshah Ka Granth, Dasam Granth and Dasam Guru Granth mean the same thing just as Pothi Sahib, Granth Ji, Adi Granth and Guru Granth Sahib means the same thing. Interestingly some 18th Century Dasam Granth recensions bear the title of Granth Ji which is the name that was given to Guru Granth recensions as well. This is because the Dasam Granth was seen as continuity of the Guru Granth Sahib.

If we look at 18th Century we see that the composition Bachitra Natak is cited in many if not all the pieces of literature of the time. This includes Gur Sobha or "Radiance of the Sun", by Kavi Sainapat whose work is completely based around the battles of the Guru Gobind Singh mentioned in the Bachitra Natak. There is no mention of the Dasam Granth being called Bachitra Natak Granth in this text.

In Koer Singh's, Gurbilas Patshah Dasvin (1754), the author quotes from the Bachitra Natak, and again there is no mention of the Bachitra Natak Granth being the name given to the Guru's compositions. In the Keshar Singh Chibbar's Bansavlinama Dasan Patshahian Ka, (1769) quotes many time from the Bachitra Natak and gives us valuable information on the status of the Dasam Granth. He does not once refer to the Dasam Granth as the Bachitra Natak Granth.

Looking at the collection of the Rahitnamas as well, we see the mention of the Dasam Granth compositions including the Bachitra Natak quoted within these "codes of conduct". This includes the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama and again there is no mention of the Bachitra Natak being a separate Granth. In the Rahitnama of Bhai Desa Singh, the creation and compilation of the Dasam Granth is mentioned. The composition Bachitra Natak is alluded to in the following way, "Then I composed Bachitra Natak, in which I described the history of the Sodhi Family" (5).

Even the first English translation of the Bachitra Natak undertaken at the end of the 18th Century by Dr Leyden states that this forms a larger part of the "Dasven Patshah Ka Granth" (6). ([Click here to see the picture of the 1698 beerh](#))

In each piece of literature the compositions of Dasam Granth are referred to as being undisputable being written by Guru Gobind Singh. In face of this clear examination of the primary and first hand accounts of the Guru and the Dasam Granth the Bachitra Natak is not the original name of the Dasam Granth. The several compositions which form the Bachitra Natak Granth were written to put the composition Apni Katha in its proper place when recounting the tales of the Avatars. If Apni Katha was not written it would not be clear why the Chaubis Avatar and the tales of Chandi were written. In various parts of the translation and transliteration of the Avatars the Guru makes explicit comments of how Sikh theology fits in and around these compositions. That is why we see thate some of comments within Ram Avatar elevated for use in the Rehras (7).

Hence 'Bachitra Natak Granth' is a misnomer for 'Dasam Granth'.

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The original name for the writings of the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh remains as it was during the time of Guru Sahib, Dasven Patshah Ka Granth, (The Granth of the Tenth Master).

(1) The published version does not contain additional compositions which are read by the Akali Nihangs, the Damdami Taksal and even the Namdharis. These include Uggardanti, Chandi di Astotar etc.

(2) Some writers had tried to claim that the creation of the Khalsa is not mentioned in the Bachitra Natak and hence the composition is flawed. This is because they have not considered the dating of the composition. Interestingly Kavi Sainapat writing in 1711 who bases his whole Gur Sobha on the Bachitra Natak fails to mention this pivotal moment. This does not show that his description is flawed on the contrary he must thought the creation of the Khalsa was an assumed fact. Another alleged omission is that the martyrdom of Guru Arjan is not mentioned in the Bachitra Natak hence it being flawed. If we are to use this methodology we can ask why Bhai Gurdas whose work is considered the "key to Gurbani" did no mention this fact in his Vars either. In both cases this omission does not diminish the importance of the work.

(3) Ram Avatar, Sri Dasam Granth.

(4) On the Patna Sahib recension of the Dasam Granth dated 1698, the colophon tells us that the Granth is , "Dasven Patshah Ka Granth".

(5) Rahitnama quoted in, Singh, Trilochan and Singh, Anurag, A brief account of Life and works of Guru Gobind Singh, (2002), p 42

(6) Folio 182. This text is kept at the British Library, held under the McKenzie Collection., Eur MSS Mack xl.

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(7) The concluding Swaiya and Dohra from Ram Avatar are recited in the Reh Ras path.

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