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Punjab's Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Amendment Bill 2026 – Up to Life Imprisonment for Sacrilege

19 April 2026

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Punjab's Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Amendment Bill 2026 — Up to Life Imprisonment for Sacrilege

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WHY IN NEWS

The Punjab Governor has granted assent to the **Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Bill, 2026** ('Satkar' meaning respect/reverence in Punjabi) — legislation prescribing enhanced imprisonment and fines for acts of desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib, the eternal living Guru of Sikhism. The bill strengthens Punjab's existing legal framework on sacrilege and reflects the political and religious sensitivity of scripture desecration cases in the state.

BACKGROUND — SACRILEGE CONTROVERSY IN PUNJAB

The desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib has been a deeply charged political issue in Punjab for over a decade. The 2015 Bargari sacrilege incidents — in which torn pages of the Guru Granth Sahib were found on roads in Faridkot district — triggered widespread protests, police firing (Behbal Kalan and Kotkapura), and political upheaval that contributed to the 2017 fall of the Akali Dal government.

Legislative Timeline

YEAR	DEVELOPMENT
2016	Punjab Assembly passes first amendment to Section 295A IPC — prescribing life imprisonment for sacrilege; President's assent withheld
2018	Second attempt; similar fate
2023–24	AAP government revives legislative effort
2026	Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Respect (Amendment) Bill, 2026 — receives Governor's assent

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE 2026 BILL

Punishment Structure

OFFENCE	PUNISHMENT
Direct act of sacrilege	7 years to 20 years imprisonment + fine ₹2–10 lakh
Conspiracy to commit sacrilege	10 years to life imprisonment + fine ₹5–25 lakh + property confiscation
Scope	Any act of 'beadbi' (desecration/disrespect) of the Guru Granth Sahib

Constitutional and Legal Context

The legislation sits at the intersection of several constitutional provisions:

Article 25 — Freedom of Religion

Every person has the right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, and health. State can regulate secular activities associated with religion.

Article 26 — Religious Denomination Rights

Religious denominations can manage their own religious affairs and property.

Section 295A, IPC (now BNS Section 302)

Deliberately outraging religious feelings — **punishable with up to 3 years imprisonment** (pre-amendment). Punjab's bill creates a specific, enhanced punishment for Guru Granth Sahib desecration beyond the general Section 295A.

Governor's Assent — Federal Dimension

State bills on subjects touching criminal law (List III — Concurrent List, Entry 1) require Presidential assent if they modify Central legislation. Earlier Punjab sacrilege bills failed to get Presidential assent. The 2026 bill receiving the **Governor's assent** (rather than being sent for Presidential consideration) suggests it has been carefully drafted to avoid this trap — possibly as an addition to state law rather than an amendment to IPC provisions.

POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- AAP government's priority:** The Aam Aadmi Party came to power in Punjab in 2022 partly on the promise of justice in the sacrilege cases. The Bill's passage represents fulfilment of a key electoral commitment.
- Sikh community sentiment:** The Akal Takht — the supreme temporal seat of Sikhism — has long demanded stronger legal protection for the Guru Granth Sahib.

- **Concerns about misuse:** Critics argue overly broad sacrilege laws could be misused to suppress dissent or target minorities.

THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB — BRIEF NOTE

The **Guru Granth Sahib** (also called Adi Granth) is the sacred scripture of Sikhism and is regarded as the eternal living Guru — not merely a book. It was compiled by **Guru Arjan Dev Ji (5th Guru)** in 1604 CE and given its final form by **Guru Gobind Singh Ji (10th Guru)** in 1708 CE, who declared it the permanent successor Guru. It is written in Gurmukhi script and contains hymns (Gurbani) by Sikh Gurus, as well as compositions by Hindu Bhakti saints and Muslim Sufi poets — reflecting Sikhism’s inclusive theological character.

UPSC RELEVANCE

*Freedom of religion (Articles 25-28), Governor’s role in state legislation, Concurrent List and Presidential assent, federalism. **GS1 — Indian Society:** Religious pluralism, minority rights, communal harmony.*

Key Questions it Raises:

- ❶ Can a state prescribe harsher punishment than Central law for religious offences? (Concurrent List, doctrine of repugnancy — Article 254)
- ❷ How does the Governor’s discretion work on bills with religious dimensions?
- ❸ What is the balance between religious protection laws and freedom of expression?

FACTS CORNER

Bill: Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Respect (Amendment) Bill, 2026

Punishment: Life imprisonment + fine up to ₹25 lakh

Background: 2015 Bargari sacrilege incidents triggered political crisis

Section 295A (IPC/BNS): Outraging religious feelings — up to 3 years imprisonment (general law)

Guru Granth Sahib: Compiled 1604 CE by Guru Arjan Dev Ji; finalised 1708 CE by Guru Gobind Singh Ji

Akal Takht: Highest temporal seat of Sikhism; located at the Golden Temple, Amritsar

Article 254: Law repugnancy — if state law conflicts with Central law on Concurrent List, Central law prevails; but Presidential assent can save state law

Punjab's ruling party: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), in power since 2022

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