

# The Role of the Press in Punjab in Identity Formation amongst the Sikhs, 1905.

Sukhbinder Singh Sandhu (120352267)

s.s.sandhu3@ncl.ac.uk

BA History

Supervisor: Dr Samiksha Sehrawat



## Introduction

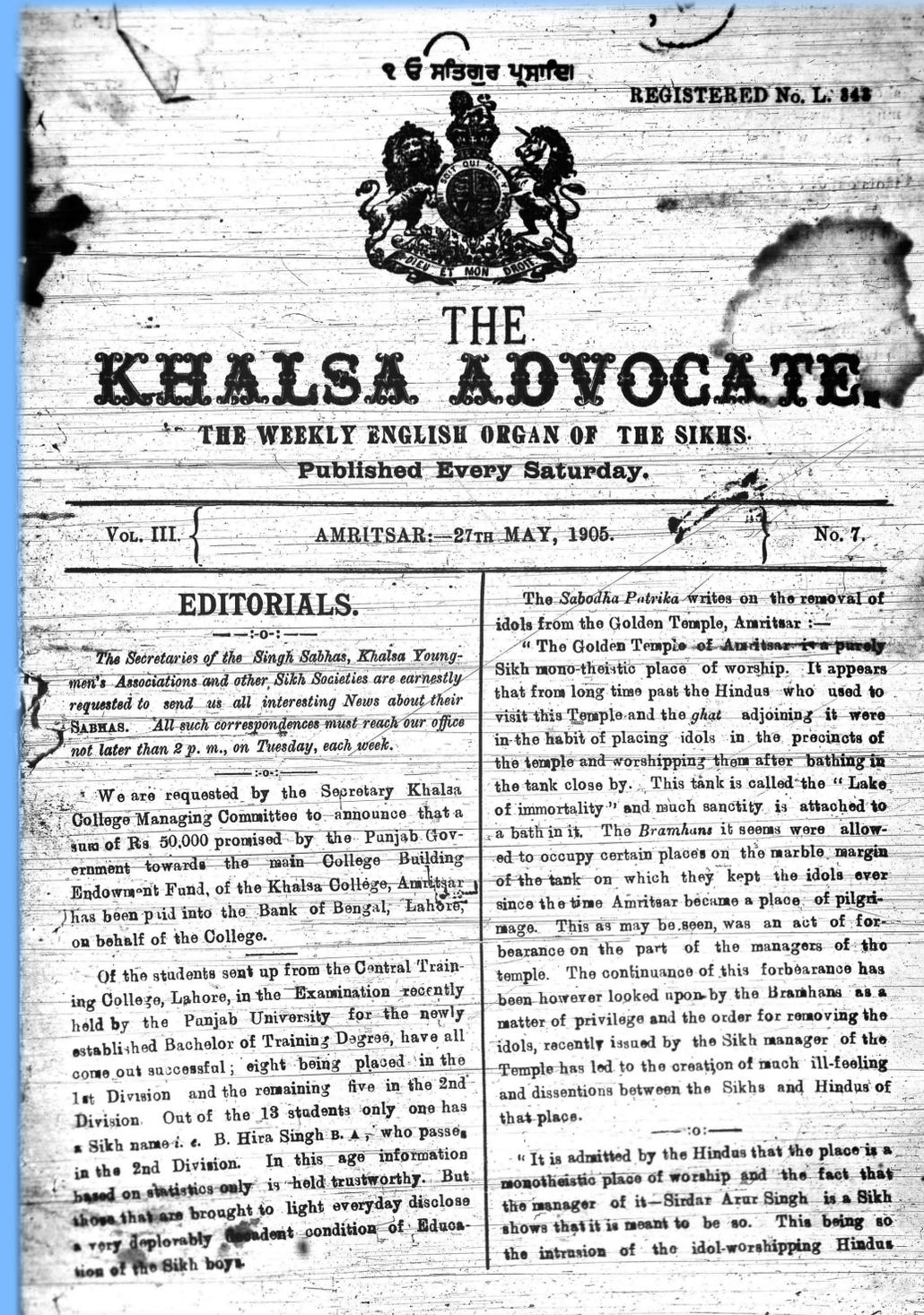
- The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was as a time when communitarian consciousness was heightening in Punjab.
- In 1873 Sikh intellectuals and elites founded a socio-religious reform movement known as the Sri Guru Singh Sabha.
- The Singh Sabha movement used both the affirmation of a homogenous Sikh identity and the demarcation of religious boundaries, in order to claim a 'distinct space of the Sikhs' within the religious framework of India.

## Aims

- To assess the role played by newspapers in the propagation of a homogenous Sikh identity.

## Research

- The removal of idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple by Arur Singh the manager of the temple in May 1905 was chosen as a case study.
- 60 articles from four newspapers printed between May and September 1905 were used namely; *The Khalsa Advocate*, *The Tribune*, *Khalsa Samachar*, and *Punjab*.



## Conclusions

- Over 70% of the articles discussed the doctrinal boundaries Sikhism and Hinduism, with particular focus on the topic of idol worship as a defining factor of religious identity.
- These articles indicate that the press created a space where the demarcation of religious boundaries could be contested publicly.
- This distancing from the Hindu faith was a key feature of printed work by the Singh Sabha with an influential text published by Kahn Singh Nabha in 1897 entitled *Hum Hindu Nahin* meaning 'We are not Hindus'.
- The concern for laying claim to religious spaces can be seen as a precursor to the of the Gurdwara reform movements led by Singh Sabha activists in the 1920s.
- An article from *The Hindu* newspaper of 2003 entitled 'Are Sikhs Hindus?' illustrates the contemporary significance of this debate.

## References & Further Reading

- Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1991).
- Bal, Gurpreet, 'Construction of Gender and Religious Identities in the First Punjabi Novel "Sundari"', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41: 32, (2006), 3528-3534.
- Mandair, Arvind-Pal Singh, *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
- Nabha, Kahn Singh, *Hum Hindu Nahin* (Amritsar: Singh Sabha Shatabadi Committee, 1897).
- Oberoi, Harjot, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

