The Akal Takht, the highest seat of temporal power in the Sikh world, prior to Operation Blue Star (Right) What remains of the Akal Takht after the smoke and fires cleared (Photo courtesy of the Sikh Museum of History and Heritage)

FAKE NEWS & RELIGION: THE MAKING OF OPERATION BLUE STAR

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Project Description

This research will look at how the rhetoric, legal policy, and political correspondence between parties and their discourse with the wider national community was misinterpreted or misconstrued, leading to the horror of Operation Blue Star (OBS). Significant research into the topic has suggested several explanations for OBS: political debate, economic crisis, foreign intervention, religious persecution, and social distress to name just a few. However, this thesis will specifically examine how all the major parties involved misunderstood their opponent's stance on key issues, creating a snowball effect that resulted in the disaster of OBS. Those parties include the Shiromani Akali Dal, the Indian National Congress party, the Khalistan movement leaders, and the infamous Sikh preacher Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

Background

Sikh frustrations with the fallout of the 1947 Partition, economic circumstances of the Green Revolution, and the popular fundamentalist message of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale created a situation encouraging the anti-nationalist Khalistan movement, politically driven by the Shiromani Akali Dal in the 1970s. By 1984, government control in Punjab verged on collapse and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi felt it necessary to call for military action to remove Bhindranwale from the Akal Takht and stabilize the region.

Conclusion

The Akali Dal demanded more political autonomy than the central government was willing to afford. The Akali Dal advertised this refusal as a new means of despotism, targeting the Sikh community because they were a religious minority. Yet, the central government was willing to accept all their religious demands, only denying the economic ones that directly affected the consent of other Indian district governments and the political demands that asked for essentially sovereign nation-level autonomy. Bhindranwale mistook the refusal of all the demands as religious oppression to which he, as a prominent religious leader, needed to fight against. The anti-establishment sentiment Bhindranwale raised within the Sikh community, and the widespread violence in Punjab he may have inspired, in conjunction with the aggressive protests supported by the Akali Dal and other Khalistan groups concerned the central government of another Partition-level event and devastation to match.

Acknowledgements & References