CHAPTER IV

TERRORISM PERSISTS

Prime Minister V.P. Singh in his first address to the nation referred to the agony of Punjab and said "while separatism is no answer to our problems, there is an urgent need for a national endeavour to resolve the Punjab problem."

Mr V.P. Singh visited Amritsar in an open jeep on December 7, 1989, for a prayer for peace. He assured the Punjabis that his government would move fast to resolve the Punjab problem and restore peace and prosperity. It was a step for pacifying the Sikh psyche and it also showed the sincerity of the new government to solve the Punjab problem.

On December 7, 1989 Mr Nirmal Kumar Mukherji was appointed as the Governor of Punjab in place of Mr S.S. Ray which was the first demand of Akali leaders.

Parliamentary elections were held in Punjab, under National Front Government, for 13 seats. Out of these 13 seats, 9 were secured by Akali Dal(Mann) and its allies.

Parliament on December 29, 1989, unanimously passed 63rd amendment bill which replaced the 59th Constitutional amendment. The 59th amendment enabled the government to declare a state of emergency if the integrity
of the country is threatened by internal disturbances in the whole or any part of the Punjab. It ensured that fundamental freedoms guaranteed by Article 19 automatically get suspended in the event of a declaration of emergency in whole or any part of Punjab. The most dangerous aspect of this amendment was that Article 21 which confers the basic right to protection of life and liberty was made suspendable. The undoing of this amendment went a long way in restoring the confidence of the Sikhs in the democratic process.

All party rally in Ludhiana on January 11, 1990 was held but failed to evolve any consensus. The Central Government wanted to solve the problem of Punjab through negotiations but the problem was with whom to negotiate. So, what followed was the policy of drift. President's rule in Punjab was again extended for six months from May 11, 1990 to November 11, 1990 by 64th Constitutional amendment bill. Extention of the President’s rule was not the solution of Punjab problem. It was putting the problem in cold storage.

The Tribune in its editorial commented:

The most tragic aspect of the current Punjab situation is that in a matter of less than six months the National Front Government seems to have dissipated all advantageous factors ushered \(^1\) by the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections.

Nearly 4,500 militants including 121 hardcore ones were killed in 1,235 encounters during 1991 as compared to 2,400 in 746 encounters in 1990. Over 3000 civilians, including 487 securitymen were killed during the year as compared to 2350 in 1990.

Abortive attempts were made on the lives of the Union Home Minister, Mr Subodh Kant Sahay during his election campaign in Ludhiana and the then Director General of Police, Mr D.S. Mangat, also in Ludhiana. Dr Baldev Prakash, All India Vice-President of the Bharatiya Janata Party, was injured in a powerful bomb blast outside his clinic in Amritsar on November 15.

The Operation Rakshak-I was launched before the June 21 elections to instil confidence among the people and for creating a congenial atmosphere for holding free and fair elections. The army and para-military forces carried house to house searches in the border districts to flush out militants and rounded up many suspects.

The most important political development that made the most profound influence on the 1989 Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab was the emergence of the SAD (Mann). This faction of the Akali Dal had come into existence on February 5, 1987 as a result of the unity of various Akali factions. The suspicion that Badal wanted to get power in the State
through a secret understanding with the central leadership led to loss of the faith of the Sikh masses in that party. As a result the SAD (Mann) emerged as the real Akali Dal.

In Gurdaspur Parliamentary constituency, the Congress (I) which had won the elections in 1985 by polling 37.97 per cent votes, once again won in these elections by securing 40.51 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate Mrs Sukhbans Kaur Bhinder had been returned in 1980 and 1985 Lok Sabha elections from this constituency.

The candidate of the S.A.D. (Mann), Captain Chanan Singh Sidhu, who polled 26.34 per cent votes finished second in these elections. It may be noted that the S.A.D. (Longowal) candidate had secured 27.80 per cent votes in this constituency in 1985 elections. The failure of the SAD (Mann) to compete successfully with the Congress (I) was due to the division of the Sikh votes among the candidates of the Congress (I), the SAD (Mann) and the SAD (Badal). Moreover, the candidate of the party failed to get urban votes in general and Hindu votes in particular.

From Amritsar Parliamentary constituency, an independent candidate, Kirpal Singh, won the elections by getting 47.03 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate Raghunandan Lal Bhatia who had secured 48.99 per cent votes in 1985 and won the elections could not repeat that
performance. The percentage of votes polled by him declined to 25.76 in these elections. The B.J.P. finished third by polling 18.27 per cent votes. In Tarn Taran Parliamentary constituency, the SAD (Mann) candidate, Simranjit Singh Mann secured 89.15 per cent votes while the SAD (Longowal) had polled 55.35 per cent votes in 1985 elections. The Congress (I) candidate had to face a humiliating defeat. He could secure only 7.98 per cent votes while the candidate of the party had obtained 41.24 per cent votes in 1985 elections.

Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat was won by the Janata Dal candidate I.K. Gujral, who polled 48.10 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate Major Gen. Rajinder Singh Sparrow who had been elected in 1985 Lok Sabha elections by securing 50.77 per cent votes could get only 33.35 per cent votes.

The B.S.P. candidate Harbhajan Lakha won the election by polling 29.25 per cent votes from Phillaur (reserved) constituency. The SAD (Badal) candidate, Charanjit Singh, finished second by getting 27.88 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate, Sunder Singh, finished third by getting 27.74 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate, Kamal Chaudhry, was able to retain Hoshiarpur seat by polling 32.15 per cent votes which he had won in 1985 Lok Sabha elections by polling 47.90 per cent votes. The B.S.P. candidate Satnam Singh who had the support of the SAD (Mann) and the militants, could get only 19.72 per cent votes.
votes. The B.J.P. candidate Gardhara Singh finished fourth with 17.65 per cent votes.

In Ropar (reserved) Parliamentary constituency, the SAD (Mann) candidate Bimal Kaur Khalsa won the election by getting 60.37 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate, Raja Singh, finished second with 27.54 per cent votes. An Independent candidate, Atinderpal Singh won the Patiala Parliamentary constituency by securing 46.58 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate, Vinod Sharma secured 33.71 per cent votes. The SAD (Mann) candidate Rajinder Kaur Bulara won the election from Ludhiana Parliamentary constituency by securing 53.47 per cent votes. The constituency had been won by the SAD candidate, Mewa Singh in 1985 elections who had secured 48.23 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate Gurcharan Singh Galib got 33.46 per cent votes.

In Sangrur Parliamentary constituency, the SAD (Mann) candidate, Rajdev Singh won the election by securing 36.72 per cent votes. The seat had been won by the SAD candidate Balwant Singh, who had polled 53.30 per cent votes in 1985 elections. The CPI(M) candidate Chand Singh finished second by getting 20.88 per cent votes. The Congress (I) candidate Som Dutt finished third by securing 16.20 per cent votes.
The SAD (Mann) candidate - Sucha Singh who secured 53.18 per cent votes, was elected from Bathinda (reserved) Parliamentary constituency. The Congress (I) candidate, Gurdev Singh Gill who had been returned in 1985 elections by 31.27 per cent votes was able to get only 18.38 per cent votes. The CPI candidate, Makhan Singh, finished third with 15.73 per cent votes. The SAD Mann candidate, Jagdev Singh, won the elections by polling 48.63 per cent from Faridkot Parliamentary constituency. The Congress (I) candidate Harcharan Singh could get only 23.58 per cent votes.

Ferozepur Parliamentary seat was won by the SAD (Mann) backed Independent candidate Dhian Singh Mand who secured 30.88 per cent votes. It had been won by the Congress (I) candidate, Gurdial Singh Dhillon who had secured 37.98 per cent votes in 1985 elections. The Congress (I) candidate Jagmeet Singh finished second by getting 25.86 per cent votes. The Janata Dal candidate, Devi Lal, finished third and could secure only 18.80 per cent votes in spite of the support from the SAD (Badal). The B.S.P. candidate, Mohan Singh got fourth position by securing 16.99 per cent votes. The Congress (I) had to incur heavy losses in these elections. The number of seats won by it declined from 6 in 1985 Lok Sabha elections to 2 in 1989 Lok Sabha elections. The percentage of votes polled by it also came down from 41.53 in the earlier elections to 26.48 in these elections.
The SAD which had won 7 seats and polled 37.17 per cent votes in 1985 Lok Sabha elections had been fragmented into three factions before these elections, the SAD (Mann), the SAD (Badal) and the SAD (Longowal). The SAD (Mann) which had emerged as the real Akali Dal on the eve of these elections secured 6 seats and 29.18 per cent votes.

The SAD (Mann) emerged as the dominant party in the State in these elections. As the militants had succeeded in acquiring a fairly broad base of support among the Sikhs in the State particularly in the districts of Amritsar, Ferozepur, Tarn Taran and Faridkot, they were able to mobilize support for the candidate of the SAD (Mann).

The SAD (Barnala) was able to secure only 1.26 per cent votes and as a result failed to get any seat in these Lok Sabha elections while the SAD had won 7 seats and polled 37.17 per cent votes in 1985 Lok Sabha elections from Punjab.

The failure of the centre to implement 'Punjab Accord' after the 1985 elections led to alienation of the Sikh community from the Congress (I). It also increased the strength of the militants. The factionalism in the SAD (Longowal) which resulted in the split of the party and the formation of the SAD (Badal) had significant implications for these elections. The reliance of the Barnala Government on the Congress (I) for survival after that split led to
almost total erosion of the support base of the SAD (Longowal). The SAD (Badal) was weakened because of the wavering stand of its leadership and its secret attempts to get power by bargaining with the Centre. The dismissal of Barnala Government also had a profound impact on these elections as it led to loss of credibility of the Congress (I) in the eyes of the Sikh masses. The increased activities of the militants on the one hand and the alleged State oppression on the other influenced the outcome of these elections.

These elections led to the defeat of the moderate elements among the Akalis and the victory of the militants among them. This is clear from the victory of the SAD (Mann) and the defeat of the SAD (Longowal) and the SAD (Badal). These elections also reflected a significant change from earlier elections. This is evident from the role of the militants in determining the outcome of the elections. Only the SAD (Mann) and the candidates supported by it were permitted by them to launch election campaign. Other political parties could not do so because of the fear of the militants. The voters were not able to exercise their franchise freely in the rural polling booths of most of the Parliamentary constituencies. These elections became a fight for ballot with the help of bullet.
Mr Chandra Shekhar took over as the eighth Prime Minister on 10 November, 1990. The Tribune in its editorial on November 14 said that the people of Punjab specially the Sikhs have no reason to dislike Mr Chandra Shekhar. He was among the earliest national leaders to unequivocally criticise Operation Blue Star in 1984.

The people of Punjab had great expectation from Chandra Shekhar. They wanted Mr Chandra Shekhar to hold midterm polls in Punjab. Mr Simranjit Singh Mann on November 19, 1990 demanded dissolution of the Lok Sabha and the holding of elections.

Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar said in Bombay on November 12, 1990 that election could be held in the State in another four to five months. To a question, he said there was no use blaming Pakistan for the problems in Punjab, no matter which Government came to power there. The real solution lay in holding elections and solving all the outstanding issues facing Punjab.

On November 21, 1990 the Governor of Punjab, Sh. Virendra Verma presented his formula to solve the problem of Punjab.

The Governor said if the water dispute between Punjab and Haryana remained unsolved, through negotiation, it should be referred to the Supreme Court. Mr Verma said,
the proposal contained three issues - a political solution to the problem, economic development of the state and suggestions to control the deteriorating law and order situation in the state.

Regretting the spurt in terrorist violence in the state, the Government said terrorism could not be contained by adopting a policy of "bullet for bullet".

On December 4, 1990 the five members panthic committee and its allied militant outfits served an ultimatum on the Punjab Government and autonomous organisations to switch over to Punjabi medium in all official work by December 10 or "face the consequences".

On November 26, 1990 Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar said: "Issues like Punjab could only be resolved through discussions and negotiations". He said his Government was willing to talk to anyone.

The Tribune wrote an editorial named "Wanted Policy Change":

A government operating in a policy vacuum often resorts to changing faces to create the illusion of action. Men of very high reputation such as, for instance, Mr Nirmal Mukherji, were victims of this process of providing cosmetic treatment to a deep-rooted disease. From the elected regime of Mr Surjit Singh Barnala to the imposed non-rule of Mr Virendra Verma, Punjab has seen nothing but a slide towards the decline and fall of established legal authority.

Lt. Gen. BKN Chibber, General Officer

Commanding said:

The Army will stay in Punjab as long as the people want it, and it was not an alien army fighting the nationals of the country but our own army out in the state to restore confidence and sense of security among people of Punjab.

He said Pakistan was aware of the military might of India and as such wanted a low cost war by encouraging "Militancy" in the border state.

On April 20, 1991, the Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, announced that elections to the Lok Sabha and State assemblies would be held simultaneously in Punjab.

On June 22, 1991 the Election Commission postponed the Punjab poll scheduled for 22 June 1991 to September 25, saying free and fair elections could not be conducted in the State in the prevailing situation.

The Chief Election Commissioner Mr T.N. Seshan, who took the decision at 2.10 a.m. on 21 June 1991 said: "It is entirely my decision to defer the Assembly and Lok Sabha poll in Punjab."

In 1991 Parliamentary elections, the Congress won because of the sympathy wave caused by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao took over as Prime Minister. Prime Minister, Mr Rao announced Parliamentary and


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Assembly elections to be held in Punjab in mid of February 1992. Finally in January, Election Commission decided the date of elections, i.e., February 19, 1992, for 13 Lok Sabha and 117 Assembly seats.

The villagers were either afraid of the militants or they did not respond to the election campaign of Congress party. In fact during the campaign there was very little interest and the voter was not ready to join election campaign of any political party.

Each candidate of a recognised party was given 30 police men. In 1991 the Congress party had boycotted the election on the plea that the law and order situation is not good in Punjab, so fair elections are not possible. In 1992 the Akalis had boycotted the elections on the same ground.

There are many factions in the Akali party. Some of these factions are Akali Dal (B), Akali Dal (M), Akali Dal (L), Akali Dal (Baba), Akali Dal (Master Tara Singh), Akali Dal (Kabul), Akali Dal (Rajdev) and Akali Dal (Pherumal). During the elections two more Akali Dals were added Akali Dal(S) founded by Sukhijinder Singh and Akali Dal (T) founded by Jagdev Singh Talwandi. There are also five Panthic Committees. These are:

1. Headed by Dr Sohan Singh
2. Headed by Zafarwal
3. Headed by Manochahal
4. Headed by Usmanwale
5. Headed by Babbar.

There are many students organisations. They are led by Manjit, Mehta Chawla, Bittur and Bittoo.

The various factions of the Akali Dal, the various Panthic Committees and various Students Organisations were not able to come together to fight the elections. Some of them particularly, the more militants one, were against the elections any way. The others knew that their victory in the elections was not certain.

They believed that if they refused to participate in the elections, the Congress Government in the Centre would not hold the elections. They were also prepared to disrupt the elections, if the Centre decided to hold elections in Punjab.

In November 1991 Operation Rakshak-II was launched. After this operation the law and order situation in Punjab improved. The opposition parties wanted the Central Government to have political solution for Punjab. But the Government said political solution to Punjab problem would come after the elections. The Akali Dal leader Badal wanted a political solution for Punjab before the elections.

Mr Badal said, "In the absence of bold step to remove the agony in Sikh minds, elections would be futile
and meaningless exercise and lead to no lasting peace in the State..."

He said that the only way to instil confidence in the minds of the people was not the deployment of the Army but the removal of their genuine grievances. Mr Badal said that unless a comprehensive political solution to the Punjab problem, touching psychological, economic and geographical issues, was made it would be impossible to restore lasting peace, elections or no elections.

There was big movement of troops in Punjab before the election. The Army had worked out logistics to render what commanders call "useful support to the civil authority to first create proper atmosphere for a free and fair poll and later help installation of an elected Government." There was deployment of nearly 2 lakh men in the State including different types such as 50,000 men from the Army, 55,000 policemen, 20,000 Home Guards, 1500 Special Protection Officers and 390 companies of para-military organisations.

Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao proposed an amendment to the Constitution and the Representation of People's Act to bar parties or individuals preaching secession from contesting election. But this move did not take off in the face of strong opposition from various Akali Dal factions and also some national political parties.

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All the Akali parties in a statement said that without finding a permanent solution to the Punjab problem, elections in Punjab are meaningless. The Centre is conspiring to install a puppet government and we shall not be party to this nefarious game.

People were afraid that the Army will go away after the elections and militants will take their revenge on those who will cast their votes after the Army had left. Therefore, the Home Minister gave an assurance that the Army will stay in Punjab after the elections. The Central Government assured the people of Punjab that the Rajiv-Longowal accord will be implemented after the elections whether the Congress party returns to power or not.

The elections were held under conditions of fear and terror because the Akalis had decided to boycott the elections and terrorists had asked the voters not to come out of their homes. Even then 25% voting did take place. There was very little voting in the villages. But there was sufficient voting in the urban areas. As many as 300 villages did not vote at all.

The main reason for Congress success was low turnout of voters and the boycott of the elections by the major Akali parties.
The Kabul Singh faction of the Akali Dal led by Arminder Singh did contest the elections. He won unopposed from Samana in Patiala District. But his party's performance was very poor.

In the Assembly elections, out of a total of 117 seats, Congress secured 87 seats but BJP secured only 6 seats. In fact BJP emerged as the second party securing 9 seats. Akali Dal (Kabul) got only 3 seats whereas CPI got 5 seats and CPI(M) got only one seat. Independents won on 6 seats.

In the 13 Lok Sabha seats, Congress also secured 12 seats in the Parliament and BSP got one seat.

The Sikh rejected the Akali Dal(Kabul) because they described this Akali Dal as Sarkari Akali Dal. It was expected that at least, the Janata Dal will get the Sikh support. But the JD performed very badly except in Moga Assembly constituency where its candidate lost to Congress by only 4 votes.

Punjab has 70 rural Assembly constituencies, 18 semi-urban constituencies and 20 urban constituencies. In 70 rural constituencies the voting was 3 to 15% of the total. In 18 semi-urban seats the voting was between 15 and 20% and in 29 urban seats it was 35% to 45%.
Out of 1.31 crore votes only about 32 lakh people cast their vote. This means that the Congress could claim to have secured only 29 lakh votes out of a total of 1.31 crore. Those who voted for Congress party were people, who had the courage against the terrorists by coming out of their homes and casting votes. They were also the people who believed that Congress being the ruling party at the Centre would be in a better position to handle the situation in the State. We agree with the editorial of Hindustan Times. It says:

The successful completion of the elections in a way is a rebuff to the militants, who had spared no efforts to disrupt them. Given the tactics of intimidation, they had employed, the overall polling percentage was bound to be low. It is also of significance that the authorities could conduct the polls in, by and large, a peaceful manner.

The Congress victory in Punjab assured a working majority for the Congress in the Parliament. The Congress required 267 seats in the Lok Sabha which has a total strength of 544 seats plus 11 vacancies. With the Congress victory in Punjab it had around 244 seats counting its own seats and the seats of its allied like the AIADMK (11 seats), Indian Union Muslim League (2 seats), Kerala Congress

(Mani) group (one seat), Janata Dal-G (one seat) and the United Communist Party of India (one seat). Now the total seats became around 260. But, even now the Congress Government did not have a clear simple majority in the Lok Sabha. However, it gave the Rao Government a new confidence to work out its manipulations.

The Beant Singh government was installed on February 25, 1992. The Congress decided to rule Punjab all alone, and did not invite any other party to join the Government.

The six Panthic organisations which boycotted the elections, said, their struggle would continue and they would not recognise any puppet government elected through a farcical election in which an overwhelming majority of the population had not participated. They added that the new government will lack political legitimacy and moral authority to rule the State. The Communist Party of India alleged massive rigging by the Congress to get absolute majority in this election. Communist Party of India (Marxist) said, the poll results will not solve any problem in the State. The Janata Dal leader and former Union Minister Mr Mufti Mohammad Syeed accused the centre of manipulating the Assembly and Parliamentary elections and of having divided the people on communal lines.
Prem Singh Chandumajra called upon the Governor not to install the Congress government. According to him and the other Akali leaders, the Congress government would only mean a puppet and minority government. He said that 90% of the voters did not take part in the polls and wanted cancellation of the election. As against the opposition parties, the Congress leaders all over the country welcomed the victory of Congress under the leadership of Mr Beant Singh. Sh. Beant Singh described their victory as a victory of secular forces.

Panthic leaders called the boycott as a "peaceful, democratic and bloodless revolution" brought about by the people of the State and a clear verdict against 45 years of "betrayal, step-motherly treatment and the recent repression let loose against the Sikhs".

They said it was an expression of the political aspirations of the Sikhs: that they want to live with honour and coercion would not make them submit to the government's will.

Punjab election was a pleasant surprise for two reasons – firstly the event had passed off without serious mishap, secondly that nearly 25% of the electorate had come out to vote for the Assembly by risking their lives – if not on the day of election, then may be later.

Majority of these voters were Hindus who had showed a greater faith in Congress as a protector of their overall interests than the BJP.

Beant Singh was the 17th Chief Minister of Punjab. He declared that the first and the foremost priority of his government was to establish peace, law and order.

Before 1992 the turn-out of voters for the Lok Sabha elections was always about 60% as against this, it was only 27% in 1992. Similarly, the turn-out in the Assembly elections in 1979 was 65.4%. It was 64.3% in 1980 and 67.5% in 1985 as against this it was only 27% in 1992.

After joining as Chief Minister of Punjab Mr Beant Singh gave the call "forgive and forget". He said that it was true that the Sikhs were hurt in 1984 riots, but he said that we should not forget that Hindus were also badly injured because there was a series of murders of innocent people; violence must be condemned whether of Sikhs or Hindus. Mr Beant Singh decided that he would fight violence and militancy. Actually he decided he is an old man and he has to die anyway. He believed it is better to die for a cause than to die in sleep.

Even the worst opponents of Mr Beant Singh agreed
that he led a single-minded campaign against the militant outfits. Many terrorists were killed.

Mr Beant Singh was not confronted by Akali leaders in the Assembly nor Akali MLAs in various constituencies. There was no Akali voice heard in Parliament. This is one major reason why Mr Beant Singh could launch an all-out attack on militant outfits without fear of a counter-attack.

After six months of its government, Beant Singh Government carried out municipal elections in Punjab. Mr Beant Singh also promised that after the municipal elections, panchayat elections would also be held in Punjab. Mr Beant Singh wanted municipal elections in Punjab in order to have legitimacy for his government in Punjab. It was said that he had secured only 10% of the valid votes polled in the February Assembly elections. The municipal elections in Punjab held in September 1992 were politically much more active than the Assembly elections, held in February. The amount of fear was much less. Even some of the Akalis took interest in these elections. Beant Singh claimed that in the municipal elections he had secured mandate in 17 municipal committees. The opposition parties had allegations that the official machinery was abused in these elections. What is important about the municipal elections is not the fact that the Congress party had won in these elections but the very fact that elections have been held without fear, that the
large number of people had participated in it and that the law and order situation had improved in Punjab.

Panchayat elections were held successfully which further marginalised the faction-ridden Akalis. The panchayat elections have been successful in more ways than one. Firstly, the large turn-out to a large extent legitimised the Congress Government in the State. This party came to power with merely 10 per cent votes as the rural populace had boycotted the Assembly elections. Secondly, the violence-free elections and the large voter turn-out amply demonstrated that normalcy is fast returning in the State. And thirdly, the negligible influence of militants both in the form of their sponsored candidates and their impossibility in influencing the electorate indicated the changing mood as well as the extent to which the terrorists have been decimated in Punjab. 6

Panchayat elections were held in January, 1993, after a gap of almost ten years. The near total absence of violence and fear during the polls, can safely be interpreted that it was mandate for peace and specifically, a vote against fundamentalism and terrorism.

Unlike the Assembly elections in February, 1992, when the people responded in a big way to a call for boycott given by the militant organisations and the Akali groups, this time the participation of people was more than 80 per cent. Only 62 per cent had participated in last panchayat elections held in 1983. The higher turn-out can be attributed to the faith of people in the administration.

During the eight days of polling, 11,636 gram panchayats were elected in four phases. There was unanimous choice for panches and sarpanches in 2,512 gram panchayats. So in all 11,636 sarpanches and 55,102 panches were elected in the first instance. Of these, only about 15 per cent (9,376) were women.

The study reveals that the literacy level of sarpanches is comparatively higher than the panches. It is noticed that a good percentage of the elected members was in the age group of 31-40 years.

Elections to panchayats were not held on party lines, but major political parties actively participated in these polls. That is why Chief Minister Beant Singh claimed that over 70 per cent of Congress candidates and their supporters were elected. He, therefore, maintained that the voters had faith in the ideologies and developmental
programmes of the Congress. But Parkash Singh Badal had his own analysis. For him, the verdict was against state repression and he too claimed to have won 60 per cent of panchayats despite obstacles created by the government.

Whatever their claims, it was definitely a victory of the democratic process over the forces of secession. The spectacular participation of rural folks in the polls was an indication that the people were fed up with violence and strongly desired the return of normal democratic functioning.7

The Times of India in its editorial welcomed the outcome of the Panchayat election results in Punjab but also warned:

The reasonably satisfactory showing by the Congress in both the Zila Parishad and panchayat samiti polls in Punjab should prove to be a shot in the arm for the beleaguered Chief Minister. But Mr Beant Singh cannot really rest on his laurels because the voting figures show that the Congress gains have more to do with Akali disunity than with the party’s own popularity. However, it is significant that the Congress has not fared too badly in the rural areas, traditionally the constituency of the Akalis. Had the latter not been divided, however, the chief minister, bogged down by internal dissidence and charges of inaction relating to his

wayward kith and kin, might have been in greater trouble. While there is not real threat to his position from the dissidents yet, he is clearly finding it increasingly difficult to fend off charges of corruption, nepotism and administrative inefficiency which had their inevitable impact on the election campaign. Allegations that the government has become a law into itself and has chosen to look the other way in the face of police excesses have caused it no little harm. The recent byelections where the Ajanala seat went to the Akali Dal (Badal) suggested that the goodwill gained by the Congress by bringing peace to the State was beginning to diminish.

In 1993, there was a different kind of Punjab. It was a Punjab having less obsession with terrorism and fear. The problem of Punjab had not yet been solved. However, people in Punjab were no longer paralysed.

The demand for Khalistan was raised in Punjab but it never enjoyed wide support. Not more than one per cent of the population of Punjab ever talked about this. However, the demand was a political stunt. It was used, politically by different people, for different reasons. Amrik Singh argued in an article in the Tribune that:

It suited Indira Gandhi's political strategy to spread the impression that those who were agitating in Punjab really wanted to secede from India. Though some people always wanted to do so, they never represented even remotely more than a mere fringe of public opinion in the state. The real issue was: How many stood for secession? Even though

8. Times of India, September 1, 1994.
their proportion was not very large, all means at the disposal of the Modern State were used to disseminate and strengthen this impression... Apart from its projection in the media, the Congress Party projected it day in and day out.

Sh. Paramjit Singh Gill S.S.P. of Majitha Police District carried out a study on terrorism in his district. He found that militancy and terrorism was confined to the districts of certain zones and villages from where top-ranking militants hailed. Out of 650 villages in Majitha, militants were active in not more than 125 villages.

During the period January 1, 1989 to December 31, 1990 of the 279 people killed 261 were males. As many as 159 were Sikhs, 119 were Hindus and one was Christian. Most of the killings were aimed at creating a communal divide. However, the majority of sufferers was of the Sikhs.

Sikhs also had to face extortions and looting in the rural areas. Women from Sikh families in the rural areas had to suffer humiliation at the hands of the militants and they did not dare even complain to the police. Sikhs were forced to provide shelter to the militants. They were sandwiched between the militants and the security forces.

The greatest achievement of Beant Singh government was that it took serious steps to deal with the problem of law and order in Punjab. Even the worst opponents of Mr Beant Singh agreed that he led a single-minded campaign against the militant outfits. Many terrorists were killed. However, what is important is not the number of terrorists which have been killed but real difference is that there was a qualitative difference in the security atmosphere of Punjab under Beant Singh.

V.N. Narayanan wrote in the Tribune an article 'Punjab is secure, is it solvent?'. In this article, he established how Punjab had secured security and gave the credit for this to Beant Singh and K.P.S. Gill. In his words:

In March, 1992, I was at the same dinner table with Mr K.P.S. Gill along with a few British MPs at a reception hosted by the Governor. Like all others around the state and the country I too believed, and was telling the visitors, that terrorism in Punjab would have a long lease of life and the newly installed government of Mr Beant Singh would not last even six months. Mr Gill intervened and said the Beant Singh government would last its five-year term and militant violence would be brought under control in six months. He offered a Rs. 500 wager and I accepted - for me it was a sureshot and not a gamble. Today, I am proud to have already lost one half of this bet and would heartily like to lose the other half too. As the Congress government enters its third year, I have no
doubt at all that, barring natural disasters. Mr Beant Singh would last out his five-year term and it is in the larger national interest and that of Punjab that he does so. I say this with the full realisation that the Beant Singh government with its profligacy and unconcern for public money has converted Punjab into a over-subsidised, security-obsessed monster. The movement towards insolvency seems to be not so much a consequence of government actions as an undeclared state policy.

But, the miracle first. How did it happen? How did Punjab which Mr Julio Ribeiro left in a state of "war without end" (the title of a book on terrorism that he flaunted before audiences everywhere), swiftly turn itself into an area of assured security and normal living for the people? A state which seemed destined to suffer blood and gore for decades to come, which saw human toll progress from ten a month in 1986 to 10 a day in 1991 took less than seven months to ensure that the terrorist was dead and gone or gone into hiding. How?

Uncharitable people attribute it to luck. Mr Beant Singh was luckily that he came to power at a time when public sympathy for the militants was at its lowest and the boys with the gun or AK-47 were seen by the masses not as heroes and saviours of the Panth but as brutal killers, rapists, extortioners and, yes, livers of the "good life" without commitment to any "cause" or ideology. He was lucky that the major Akali factions committed the folly of not contesting the February,1992 poll. He was lucky to have Mr Gill as his Director-General of Police. He was lucky not to have Punjabi Home Ministers at the Centre playing games of numbers. He was lucky, well, in many other ways.

Lucky, yes, but it was the luck of the brave. At the height of the Punjab violence, all senior Congress leaders and most Akali leaders voluntarily exiled themselves from the state, fleeting into it for brief hours.
before fleeing out. Mr Beant Singh not only stayed put in Punjab keeping alive a rag-tag party with neither leaders nor followers. The other day he surprised me by disclosing that the Congress suffered the heaviest casualties at the hands of terrorists. More than 1600 Congressmen, according to him, were killed by terrorists in the 10 years between 1982 and 1992. And he was always there to commiserate with the victims' families. 10

Narsayanan tells us how, before the Beant Singh-K.P.S. Gill team started their anti-terrorist operation, terrorism had already been struck by the Law of Diminishing Returns. In his words:

When the Congress government took over, militancy was literally at the end of its tether. Its fright power was substantial but its strike power had diminished equally substantially. In a sense, that was inevitable. According to KPS Gill, the terrorists had done everything to alienate the people who, seven years ago thought that the "boys" were the pride of the Sikh community. Not only was the law of diminishing returns in operation but the self-defeating nature of a prolonged violent campaign was already showing.

Citing the reasons, he says:

First and foremost of all, the killers were literally on the run, having lost all the sanctuaries which gave them protection and sustenance. Pakistan's loss of interest in Punjab and shifting of attention to Kashmir had meant that there was no safe asylum across the border for the militant. The strong presence of the army along the border made border crossing almost impossible. The

huge security force guarding the gurdwaras had rendered the shrines out of bounds for the militants. For a time, the killers took refuge in farm houses on the fringes of rural Punjab and enjoyed the hospitality of the community. But soon, by their own bestial behaviour - they killed their hosts, expropriated their funds, raped the women and generally behaved heinously - they made themselves hated objects in the villages. Fresh recruitment to militancy was rapidly declining while the old ranks were getting depleted, thanks to the intensified police offensive.

Second, in the absence of an ideology (Khalistan) or a symbol (Bhindranwale) terrorism got reduced to pure killing and other crimes. It soon became a self-defeating movement as no cause seemed achievable even after so many years of struggle and so large a human toll. By 1991 end, both Dr Sohan Singh (Panthic Committee) and Gurbachan Singh Manochahal (BTKF Chief) conceded to their friends and to Indian official that the movement had collapsed.

The militants brought the end upon themselves by overzealous campaigning. In two years - 1989 and 1990 - they had issued 31 codes of conduct containing do's and don'ts for every segment of society in Punjab. From school children, farmers, academics, lawyers, journalists, shopkeepers, newspaper agents and hawkers to bureaucrats and policemen, everybody had to bear the brunt of militant-imposed codes of conduct. Besides terror, the codes were more oppressive to the people than what the government or the police did. Ironically enough, the militants applied the codes ruthlessly to the very people who were seen as their constituency - the Sikhs of rural and urban Punjab. Had the militant leadership been wise, it would have drawn the right lessons from the short-lived "social reform" movement of 1986-87. Banning smoking
and liquor drinking and imposing dress codes on women, instead of endearing the militants to the community, had the opposite effect. Soon, the Sikhs started muttering: Who are these kids to tell us not to drink or smoke.