CHAPTER V

DECLINE IN TERRORISM

In 1993, it was being felt that Beant Singh had succeeded in eliminating terrorism from Punjab in a period of one year's rule. Punjab had been burning for the last six or seven years. People did not come out of their homes after sunset. One year's rule of Beant Singh was a great success. People were moving about freely even late in the evening, not only in the cities but also in the villages. Terrorism had disappeared. For this great change, people described Beant Singh as the Messiah. Terrorism had affected not only social life in Punjab but had also shattered its economy.

At the time of the Jullunder Parliamentary byelection, Beant Singh had emerged as the Hero. At this time, people talked of voting for Beant Singh only and for nobody else. The Congress victory in the Jullunder election was a vote for Beant Singh.

The past was, now, being looked upon in its proper perspective. The Blue Star operation was the most tragic event in the history of Punjab. It was described, now, as a day of penance. It was described as a day of national shame.
On June 16, 1993 Lt. Col. H.S. Cheema (Retd.) wrote in a letter to the editor, the Tribune that the Operation Blue Star was "a national shame". "All of us should share the blame." He wrote:

While all kinds of weapons were being brought inside the Golden Temple complex and fortification made, everybody closed his eyes to it till the launching of the operation became inevitable. And when it actually happened, we either accused the Government or appreciated it for having saved the nation. The Sikhs in particular went through a great trauma, giving experience to it in various forms, including revolt by the most disciplined soldiers at the Sikh regimental centre. We only blamed each other for what was done. Introspection was completely missing. While blame can be shifted with the passage of time, the pain of this having happened will continue for ever, more so for those who have suffered personal loss. The only way to minimize this agony is to look inward. Let this day be spent in penance rather than observing it as a "ghallughara" day.

On May 1, 1994 six Akali factions floated a unified Shiromani Akali Dal. The aim of this Dal was the establishment of an autonomous state within the federal structure in the Indian Union. In case of non-fulfilment of this demand through peaceful and democratic means, the unified Akali Dal would be free to launch a struggle for the achievement of a sovereign Sikh state.


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It comprised Capt. Amarinder Singh, Mr Simranjit Singh Mann, Mr Surjit Singh Barnala, Col. Jasmer Singh, Mr Jagdev Singh Talwandi and Bhai Manjit Singh. New delegates were to be elected from the village, and district levels besides general delegates for electing the party president.

The party programme named as the Amritsar Declaration, was read by Col. Jasmer Singh Bala who stated,"the Akali Dal being champion of Punjabi culture based on Guru Granth Sahib reiterated its commitment for waging a struggle within democratic norms for the creation of such a separate region for the Sikhs, where they could enjoy a glow of freedom.

"The Akali Dal feels", he said,"that India is a sub-continent consisting of various nations and cultures, each one with distinct heritage. This sub-continent needs restructuring of its polity into a confederation of various cultures, so that each one could make effective development.

"If the Government of India failed to restructure Indian polity into a federal structure, the Akali Dal would be left with no other alternative, but to wage a struggle for a sovereign Sikh state."

On May 13,1994 Prem Bhatia reacted to the "Amritsar declaration" and said that it was a serious threat of setback in Punjab. In his words:

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OH, no! Not again! This mixture of an unpleasant shock and disbelief broadly summed up the public reactions within Punjab and outside to the threatened revival of political agitation by the "unified" Akali Dal of six factions implied in the "Amritsar declaration" earlier this month. The shock and disbelief arose from what appeared to be a reversal of the process of normalisation which was popularly believed to have already gone far enough to be viewed as almost accomplished. The efforts for Akali unity were welcome but not necessarily the objectives which the unity seemed to be aimed at.

The crucial question is whether the Akalis are looking for autonomy pure and simple or as a stepping stone to achieving power for the Sikh community. The "Amritsar declaration" has let the cat out of the bag by hinting at the goal of a Sikh State if the demand for autonomy is not conceded. Even as an exhibitionist threat, the signal is alarming.

Although attempts are already being made to soften the blow by explaining away the "Sikh State" concept, the moral has not been lost on the country at large. It is already being said in more than whispers that the Akali leopard has not changed its spots and we shall probably again start hearing noises about "Sikh rights" from Washington and New York. There is no doubt that, after setting for themselves the goal of unity and having started a search for a live issue over which to fight the Centre, the "unified" Akalis have begun badly by arousing suspicions about secessionism.

It is quite a long lament about unfair deals, beginning with the reduction of the Punjabi-speaking State to the size of 12 districts, and ranging over the denial of Chandigarh as the new State's exclusive capital and the plan to share its river waters with Haryana, having already made a gift of the waters to
Rajasthan. The murder of over 3,000 Sikhs in the Delhi riots in 1984 remains a searing memory, especially as those guilty of killing, looting and burning have remained unpunished so far.

These are hard facts of perception and sentiment from which there cannot be an easy escape. The explanations given on behalf of Delhi have not satisfied those who feel aggrieved and this factor remains at the bottom of continuing dissatisfaction which the dissatisfied politicians in the community fully exploit. There is a hard core among the Akalis which can never be converted to take a softer line, but it is time the Centre gave more convincing answers to expressed and unexpressed Sikh grievances.

Kuldip Nayar wrote an article in the Tribune entitled 'The Blinkered Akali Dal' in which he condemned both the Akali extremists and the Congres leadership at the centre. He wrote:

Akali leaders have learnt nothing, forgotten nothing. They took a wrong turn in the beginning of the eighties (or was it earlier?) and landed themselves in wilderness. Instead of making efforts to retrieve themselves, they seem to be in danger of getting lost for ever.

Religiosity has been their polestar, no wonder, they have found no way out of dark, deep fanaticism in which they are groping. In a democratic society where people decide a nation's fate, factionalism does not carry a party too far. Mr Parkash Singh Badal, the only viable Akali leader, has realised it after sizing the country's mood and got out of the grip of religious syndrome.


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Mr Tohra has seldom acted above board. It was he who allowed the misuse of Akal Takht - the accumulation of arms at a place of religious authority before Operation Blue Star. Again it was he who blessed militancy, which brought no relief to the community and kept Punjab at tenterhooks.

Now he has primed the Amritsar resolution which goes even beyond the controversial Anandpur Sahib resolution. For the first time words like "confederation" and "homeland" have been used; they smack of secession.

Akali leaders made a mess of the resolution by their acts of omission and commission. The Congress party was able to spread the impression that the resolution was the means and secession was the end. So reprehensible has been the track record of the Akali Dal that the worst is expected from it. There is also a feeling that there is nothing final about what the party says.

For example, the party gave an undertaking to the Government of India that once the Punjabi Suba demand was conceded, the Sikhs' aspirations would have been met. But then came the Anandpur Sahib resolution. And now it is the Amritsar resolution.

Its proviso lets the cat out of the bag: "If the Hindustan government does not accept the demand for the creation of a confederation, then the Shiromani Akali Dal will be left with no option but to announce their demand for a separate and independent Sikh state." Once again the same bluff, the same bluster.

The Amritsar resolution has once again proved that the Akali Dal has never been able to differentiate the government
from the country. The first is returned to power for a fixed term; and it can be re-elected or thrown out if the voters so decide. The country is permanent, not changed either by the polls or by the fall or the rise of a ruling party.

It is good that Mr Badal has parted company with them and has come into the open to save the community from further ignominy. He will have to face many odds. But the way he has stood his ground indicates that he is prepared for it.

K.S.Duggal warned against the new threats of Communalism. He wrote that the battle against terrorism is only half won. In his words:

Thanks to the strategic skill of Mr K.P.S. Gill, the menace of militancy in Punjab is behind us. And yet the battle is only half won. The path ahead is no less arduous. We cannot afford to rest on our oars.

Punjab has to be insulated against the cancer of communalism; it has to stem the disaffection of disgruntled elements, curb the vulgar instincts of the rich released from the fear of instability, kidnapping and extortion, and cure the socio-economic distortions.

As long as the Punjabi Hindu does not shed his prejudice against Punjabi language and accept his mother tongue with open arms, the risk of communal tension will continue to prevail. It has been eating into the vitals of the communal fabric ever since the 1951 census. The problem can no longer be left to time to wear out. It has been subsiding to flare up again ever more viciously.

Visiting Punjab some time ago, an elderly peasant, while discussing with me the situation in the state, remarked, "Do you know we have few young men left in the villages; they have either been shot by the ultras or the security forces. We do not know whom we are going to give our young daughters in marriage."

Peace certainly has been brought to Punjab but normalcy will be restored when such distortions are eliminated.

Fortunately for Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal preferred the democratic and constitutional path instead of joining and following the Amritsar declaration of May 1, 1994. In the Punjab byelections to the Nakodar and Ajnala Assembly constituencies, the stakes were high both for the Congress and the Akali Dal. According to A.S. Prashar of the Tribune in his article:

A tough battle is shaping up between the Congress and Akali Dal (Badal) in the Nakodar and Ajnala Assembly constituencies in Punjab where byelections take place on May 26. It is more than just electoral arithmetic which is at stake for the Congress and Dal (B) in the two constituencies. The byelections will provide an opportunity for both sides to test their popularity with the electorate in the Doaba and Majha regions of the state. While Doaba is agriculturally rich and traditionally pro-Congress, Majha is regarded by the Akalis as their stronghold.

The Congress won both seats in the Assembly elections held two years ago. Mr Umrao Singh who went on to become a minister in the Beant Singh Cabinet won in Nakodar while Mr Harcharan Singh, Speaker of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha was victorious in Ajnala. Mr Harcharan Singh's death last year caused the byelection in Ajnala while the election of Mr Umrao Singh to the Lok Sabha from Jalandhar last year caused the byelection in Nakodar. The Congress is, therefore, determined to retain both seats and the Chief Minister, Mr Beant Singh, has staked his personal prestige on them.

Having missed the bus in the 1992 Assembly elections, the Akali Dal (B) is determined to make a debut, even if belated, in the State Assembly. The Dal (B) tried its luck last year in the Jalandhar parliamentary byelection but failed, largely because the Akalis were a badly divided house and the Congress used a virtually unbeatable trump card of restoring peace and tranquillity in Punjab. That election also marked the formal return of the Akalis to the electoral politics after the boycott of the 1992 Assembly poll. Interestingly, the Akali factions are now blaming each other for the "wrong" decision to boycott the 1992 Assembly elections. The Dal (B) has blamed Mr Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the SGPC chief, for egging on the Akali factions to boycott the elections and handing the state over to the Congress on a platter.

Mr Parkash Singh Badal regards the byelections as an acid test to demonstrate his hold over the Sikh masses after he adroitly foiled an attempt by Mr Tohra and six other Akali factions to force him into a merger. But he faces a serious handicap.

Mr Badal is having to fight on two fronts. While on the one hand he is
fending off attacks from the Congress, on the other he is facing an onslaught from frustrated Mr Tohra who is accusing Mr Badal of dancing to the tune of the Centre by scuttling the move for Panthic unity.

From the Nakodar constituency, Amarjit Singh Samra of the Congress was elected. As reported in The Tribune dated May 30, 1994, the results were as follows:

Mr Amarjit Singh Samra defeated Mr Kuldeep Singh Wadala of the Akali Dal (Badal) his nearest rival, by a margin of 5210 votes. Mr Samra secured 37,526 votes against 32,316 by Mr Wadala. All the other 12 candidates lost their deposits.

Mr Wadala, the Akali warhorse from Doaba, who went down fighting in what had virtually developed into a Beant versus Badal contest, substantially increased his voting strength by 8629 in Nakodar segment from 23,687 votes polled by him in May, last year when he had lost to his cousin Mr Umrao Singh, in the Lok Sabha by-election from Jalandhar, to 32,316 this year. The Congress could, however, improve its vote tally only marginally by 380 votes to 37,526 from Mr Umrao Singh had polled in Nakodar segment last year.

Besides the Congress and Akali candidates, Mr Shingara Singh of the CPM polled 5995 votes to finish third. Of the total 81,580 votes polled by an electorate of

1,17,747, the remaining votes were polled by 14 independents, five of whom had retired in favour of the Congress candidate, and also accounted for by 1,369 votes found invalid.

The absence of the BJP candidate also to a small extent favoured the Congress. While Mr Balram Das Tandon of the BJP had polled 1566 votes in Nakodar segment in the Lok Sabha byelection last year, Mr Charan Das of the BJP had secured 2714 votes in the previous Assembly election in this constituency.

In the Ajnala byelections, Badal emerged as the hero. While the Congress has won the Nakodar seat, the poll verdict of Ajnala represented a definite setback to the ruling party which has been enjoying a winning streak ever since it came to power in February, 1992.

But perhaps the biggest loser of them all has been the Akali Dal (Amritsar) which did not fight the elections. A brainchild of the SGPC chief, Mr Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the Dal(A) leadership did everything possible to ensure that the Dal (Badal) did not win either of the seats. Mr Badal, thus had to fight on two fronts and it goes to his credit that despite all odds, he managed to humiliate both the enemies.
The Chief Minister, Mr Beant Singh, while analysing the factors which led to the defeat of his party in Ajnala, indicated that he was not unduly worried over the poll verdict. "The Congress may have lost the election but it is a victory for democracy", he said, pointing out that the parties which had boycotted the elections earlier and challenged the Constitution of India, had not only participated in the byelection but also won it besides swearing by the Constitution. "It is a good sign."

The Tribune editorial welcomed the return of Badal as the rallying point for the Akalis. The editorial said:

With the victory of Dr Rattan Singh in the Ajnala assembly election, Mr Parkash Singh Badal has bounced back to the centre-stage of Akali politics. The election result shows, at least temporarily, the validity of the exclusive politics of the former Punjab Chief Minister. He maintained the separate identity of the Akali Dal (B) when pro-militant and avowedly separatist Akali groups had chosen to form the Shiromani Akali Dal, Amritsar (SAD). Mixing religion with politics, the Akali Dal (Kabul), the Simranjit Singh Mann faction, the Manjit group, the Babbar set-up, the Talwandi group and the Panthic Dal dissolved their identities to form a common front. The inspiration of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee chief, Mr Gurcharan Singh Tohra, was clearly discernible in the "unity move". In fact, a limb of the Badal Dal broke away from its body and joined the SAD. Efforts were made to push Mr Badal to the wall and get him reprimanded by the Sikh clergy. Now the whole calculation of this deft politician seems to have acquired a
futuristic connotation. Those who wanted him condemned are hailing his wisdom in challenging the Congress at Nakodar and Ajnala. The Congress candidate, Mr Amarjit Singh Samra, managed to defeat Mr Kuldeep Singh Wadala of the Akali Dal (B) by a margin of 5210 votes. However, Ajnala upset the Congress applecart and Mr Rajbir Singh was defeated by a large number of votes - 10,564 to be exact.

The Tribune editorial reasserted:

Mr Parkash Singh Badal has emerged as the rallying point for the Akalis, and it is as well that he has sought the cooperation of all non-Congress parties to nudge the state towards a two-party system. How much his Akali Dal succeeds in enlisting the support of all Punjabis and thus laying claim to being an authentic regional party remains to be seen. Mr Badal and his faction looked like a non-starter during the closing days of April, just after the formation of the six-in-one Akali Dal (Amritsar). Since then, he has quickly and confidently crossed these hurdles.

During all this time and more particularly because of the decline of terrorism in Punjab, militants were trying to regroup. A report in the Tribune pointed out:

According to information gathered by intelligence agencies, Paramjit Singh Panjwar, a Pakistan-based militant, came to Punjab in the month of March and stayed here till the end of June. During his sojourn here, he is said to have had a number of meetings with militants who had been bailed out or were underground. He

wanted the dormant group to reactivate themselves so that big militant strikes could be undertaken in or outside Punjab. They also considered setting up suicide squads to kill top political leaders and destroy vital economic and industrial installations.

Half a dozen militant teams reported entered Punjab around the middle of May with the objective of indulging in large-scale violence in Punjab to coincide with the 10th anniversary of Operation Blue Star. These teams belonged to organisations like KCF, Babbar Khalsa and K.L.F. But strong security measures taken by the security forces thwarted their plans and they had to return to Pakistan without achieving their mission.

By October 1994, Panchayat and Zila Parishad elections were completed in Punjab. In an editorial, the Tribune was happy to write that democracy had won in Punjab. It said:

The results of the panchayat election in Punjab provide yet another live testimony to the fact that the writ of militancy has ceased to run in the state and that the worst phase of terrorism is now a part of history. This is not a hasty conclusion. Nor is it based on a hearsay. Seeing is believing. After a wobbly beginning, the democratic process in the state has been operational for the past two and a half years. It has occasionally been on a severe test. The panchayat poll was actually a real test for the democratic forces in Punjab and they have emerged clear winners amidst all sorts of doubts and apprehensions. The large-scale participation of the villagers in the polling process and the exercise of

their franchise freely and fearlessly show that democracy has come alive in Punjab. All that needs to be ensured now is its careful nurturing - not by making false promises but by making funds and other tools of development available at the grassroots.

The results of the panchayat samiti and zila parishad elections were conclusive. The Congress established its supremacy in 10 districts. It shared power with the Akali Dal owing allegiance to Mr Parkash Singh Badal in the district of Faridkot. The Akali Dal (Badal) again had a clear edge in the two districts of Amritsar and Mansa. In Fatehgarh Sahib, the winner was the Akali Dal (Amritsar). More than the final tally, what is important is the clear signals the panchayat poll gave to the people in Punjab as well as to the rest of the country. True, some fear might still be lurking in the minds of gun-totting militants and trigger-happy cops, but the writing on the wall is clear. The people have turned their back on terrorism and they would like to go along with the process of peace and development.

On October 27, 1994 prominent United Akali Dal leaders joined Dal (Amritsar). The Tribune News Service reported:

The United Akali Dal, or what is known as Akali Dal (Persidium), which owes allegiance to the Damdami

Taksal, received a big setback today when a majority of the leaders of the Dal announced their decision to join the Akali Dal (Amritsar).

They were led by Mr Dhian Singh Mand, former MP and member of the presidium of the United Akali Dal, along with a number of leaders of the Sikh Students Federation (Mehta Chawla) and the Punjab Human Rights Organisation (PHRO).

Mr Tohra said that in fact the real Akali Dal was the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar). Amritsar was simply the head-quarters of the Akali Dal.

The SGPC chief said that they had not drawn any hard and fast lines and they would welcome Mr Badal if he came to the fold of the Akal Takht. He said that person would be accepted as the leader as would be accepted by the Panth.

Mr Jagdev Singh Talwandi said Mr Badal should appear before Akal Takht, seek forgiveness and join the Akali Dal (Amristar). Mr Talwandi said that Mr Badal's objective of becoming Chief Minister would not be fulfilled if he continued to violate the Akal Takht.

On November 25, 1994, in a straight contest the nominee of the Akali Dal (Amristar), Mr G.S. Tohra was re-
elected President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) for the 21st term defeating the Akali Dal (Badal) candidate, Mr Prem Singh Lalpura, with a convincing margin of 38 votes.

Out of the 95 votes polled, Mr Tohra secured 66 while Mr Lalpura obtained 28. One vote was declared invalid. Mr Tohra's name was proposed by Mr Jagdev Singh Talwandi.

The House adopted nine resolutions demanding revocation of the TADA, holding of immediate elections to the SGPC House, demanding immediate release of Bhai Ranjit Singh, Jathedar of Akal Takht detained in Tihar jail, release of other Sikh detainees, punishment to the guilty of the November, 1984 riots, setting up of a separate desk in the Ministry of External Affairs to deal with the Sikh shrines in Pakistan and withdrawal of Punjab commandoes from Assam.

The Tribune commented editorially on Tohra's decisive win. It said:

The victory of Mr Gurcharan Singh Tohra as the SGPC president for the 21st time was never in doubt. He was expected to win even in the face of an open challenge to his leadership from the Akali Dal (Badal) nominee, Mr Prem Singh Lalpura. What is, however, significant is the big margin of his victory, though the fact that the SGPC presidentship was contested is in itself bound to set in a chain of events in the
months to come. Mr Tohra is a seasoned leader. He knows how to handle men, matters and issues in the volatile gurdwara politics. It speaks for his subtle craftsmanship that he has not only managed to survive but has thrived at the helm of SGPC affairs in all situations and against all odds. It is no small achievement that he could keep himself floating for over two decades, even during the most turbulent period in Punjab politics. Things are now changing. It is a sign of the changing times in gurdwara affairs that for the first time in several years Mr Tohra’s supremacy was challenged.10

The year 1994 was a period of peace for Punjab. Terrorism was not out but it had definitely declined. The credit goes to Beant Singh. After the assembly poll, the Beant Singh government organised elections to panchayats and municipal committees which drew into the electoral politics all Opposition parties, including the Akali Dal factions which had boycotted the assembly poll. The election results which generally went in favour of ruling Congress party served to legitimise the rule of the Beant Singh Ministry which till then was being ridiculed as a “10 per cent” government because of the low turn-out of voters during the assembly poll and the limited number of votes polled by the ruling party.

In the current year, the government held elections to panchayat samitis, zila parishads and nagar panchayats, thus marking the return in full of democracy right down to

the grassroot level in Punjab after a gap of nearly a decade. Although the Opposition parties alleged large-scale malpractices by the Congress, these were rejected by the Government.

Talking of 1994, B.G. Verghese, the eminent journalist reported in the Tribune:

"Revisiting Punjab after 15 months is an experience altogether different from merely reading about it. The turnaround has been remarkable. Militancy has been all but ended with residual elements on the run with no place to hide even in distant states as information comes flowing in. Most of the gangs and their leaders have been accounted for. Wasan Singh Zafarwal and some others are believed to be in Pakistan. A few others are reported trying to regroup, some via Bangkok, to link up with disaffected groups in the Northeast or elsewhere if possible.

"Fear has gone. Migrants are returning. The flight of capital has been reversed. Confidence has been restored. People move around freely and social life has been resumed. Security bandobust is still evident but there is no tension..."

Verghese further suggested that in order to win the peace in Punjab, it is necessary to solve the Punjab
problem. For a solution of the Punjab problem, his recommendations were: "The old formulae, never the best, with expediency playing a large part in their formulation, can be discarded for more pragmatic and promising options. Psychological healing will be helped by an appropriate expression of collective regret by government and Parliament over Blue Star and the killings in Delhi and elsewhere which, disgracefully, have gone unpunished."

"A readjustment of federal relationships with a restoration and even strengthening of states' rights is essentially something that should be considered across the board through a properly constituted inter-state council on the basis of the Sarkaria Commission's recommendations. Two other major problems remain: the future of Chandigarh and the allocation of river waters. The mistake has been to view these as "Punjab" problems. They obviously concern Haryana too and also northwest India as a whole. Seen in this larger context, more rational and viable solutions can be envisaged."

However, peace in Punjab had a price. A free hand was given to the police and some amount of state terrorism did come into existence. In an article in the Times of India, K.F. Rustamji wrote that it was 'peace at the cost of human rights'. He pointed out:
The standard order to the police is "Do what you like. You must stop it, or you will be transferred". No police officer need ask what this implies. He knows that it means that you are permitted to arrest, detain, use TADA, do anything more, pollute records, but, the result must be such that the politician can claim before the people that he has saved them. This is the way in which some of the finest police forces of the land have been ruined. When will we be able to see that legality and human rights are necessary to maintain the discipline of the police and the equilibrium of a democracy?

The terrorists were now at a low ebb. Wassan Singh Zaffarwal admitted that "we failed to make our movement a mass movement". Wassan Singh Zaffarwal. The name rings bells in everyone's ears, at least in Punjab. He is the head of the first Panthic Committee of January, 1986, one of the three controversial ones announced in the past decade. He is also chief of the Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) and a 'mukh sevadar' (main worker) of the Khalistan Mukti Fauj. A proclaimed offender with a reward of Rs. 50,000 on his head, Wassan Singh is said to have been involved in several killings.

Jagjit Singh Chauhan talked of his frustration in a more clever way by saying that 'Movement has just begun'.

The Tribune reporter Reeta Sharma having had an interview with Chauhan reported:

Jagjit Singh Chauhan is the person who coined the word, "Khalistan" sometime in 1977. He also founded "National Council of Khalistan" in 1979 with the active support of Balbir Singh Sandhu, which had openly operated till 1984 from Guru Nanak Nivas in the Golden Temple complex. The currency and passport of "Khalistan" was also improvised by Dr Chauhan himself.

He traced the roots of violence in Punjab to "suppression of people's voice". However, today he considers peace as a "strong foundation for the movement of Khalistan". He does not think that his movement has failed. "In fact it has now begun with the return of peace in Punjab."

In March 1995, K.P.S. Gill asserted that militancy would not return. He said:

There are still some 30 odd hardcore terrorists at large who are making attempts to re-group, though on a low key. They are lying low and are no longer keen on soft targets.

Referring to the recent kidnapping of Mr Rajinder Mirdha, son of senior Congress leader Ram Niwas Mirdha at Jaipur, the Punjab Police Director-General said: -

The very fact that the acting chief of "Khalistan Liberation Force" himself had to personally take part in the "adventure", shows that the pressure is yielding results.

Mr Gill was confident that militancy would not return to Punjab. "Political uncertainty helps militants to spread their net. Now that political stability has been restored, militants cannot get the support they enjoyed once ". He, however, did not rule out the possibility of an odd incident, saying "there is no dearth of money and weapons supply to them ". Any political instability would revive militancy, he cautioned.

The work of the Punjab Police was indeed commendable in many ways. The rescue operation carried out to save Rajendra Mirdha was indeed neat. The Tribune in its editorial said:

In the abduction case of Mr Rajendra Mirdha, son of former Union Minister Ram Niwas Mirdha, the police has recorded a signal victory. In a neat operation, it has not only rescued him unharmed but also eliminated Navneet Singh Kandiyan, the acting chief of the Khalistan Liberation Force.

The episode underlines once again that it will be wrong to presume that Punjab-rooted terrorism is really dead. It still lives, albeit at the subterranean level, and it will be suicidal to lower one's guards.

We must also realise that terrorism was contained at a great human cost. Punjab, under Gill, was like a Police State. The Tribune in its editorial condemned the Punjab Police by writing:

Peace has returned to Punjab; peaceful ways have not. At least not for the men in Khaki. For them "police raj" is very much in force. These lawkeepers operate well beyond the reach of the supposedly long arms of law. Terror tactics learnt over centuries have been honed to perfection during the terrorism days and the self-styled restorers of peace have yet to switch themselves back to the civilised mode.

In January and again in February, 1995 Akali Dal (Badal) publicly rejected the Amristar declaration of May 1, 1994 which demanded an independent Sikh State. In place of that Badal called for a true federal structure. In this manner, the Akalis joined the national main-stream and Badal re-emerged as the hero of the Jat Sikhs. He demonstrated his relevance, strength and leadership in the Gidderbaha byelection. The Tribune, in its editorial commented:

After a ding-dong electoral battle where the fortune was almost evenly balanced, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) candidate, Mr Manpreet Singh, has finally emerged triumphant in the prestigious Gidderbaha byelection. The margin of the SAD victory is narrow. But in electoral arithmetic what finally counts is victory even if it is by one vote. To that extent, Mr Parkash Singh Badal's party has every reason to feel elated at the outcome of the byelection tussle where the rival parties had indulged in every political trick and lavishly used their money power - beyond the visible eye of Mr T.N. Seshan - to tilt the scales in their favour.

For Mr Badal, the victory in Gidderbaha is more than symbolic. It definitely puts him one up vis-a-vis other Akali factions which

are desperately craving for the electorate’s attention. There is, of course, not an iota of doubt about Mr Badal’s place in the Akali set-up. A seasoned leader with a mass base, he is adept at the art of political management and manoeuvrings.

The decline of terrorism having become definite, political issues and problems re-surfaced in Punjab. The Tribune wrote an editorial on the SYL feud. It said:

The Punjab Chief Minister, Mr Beant Singh has stated, using a political form of categorical imperative, that his government would not undertake the construction of the canal. The arrangements, legality, tribunal award, initiation of work and expenses involving the SYL dispensation belonged to the bygone Akali era with which the present Congress Chief Minister would not concern himself. He would, however, not mind getting into the controversy regarding the person who accepted money from Haryana for the SYL canal land. It was not Giani Zail Singh but Mr Parkash Singh Badal, he would assert. Mr Surjit Singh Barnala, as Chief Minister, launched the construction. The present government had rejected the Eradi Tribunal award on the sharing of the Ravi-Beas waters between Punjab and Haryana. The maximum extent to which he could go was to have a fresh look at the issue and to make “a de novo division” of the river waters.

P.P.S. Gill elaborated on how and why SYL was a live issue again. He wrote:

Just when things seem to quieten down in this region, there are political ripples in the

disputed, undistributed river waters, hot surface winds across territorial issues and a babble of confusing voices on the language controversy. Why have the seemingly dormant and redundant issues which had slipped from the public consciousness have surged back on top of the political agenda both in Punjab and Haryana.

What has been going on in Haryana has forced Punjab to adopt an equally rigid stand on the three contentious issues by raking these up recently. In Haryana elections are round the corner and Mr Bhajan Lal is on record saying a decision to go to the polls along with the Lok Sabha elections or separately would be taken on "merit" and in view of the "exigency of the situation". In Punjab, Assembly elections are two years hence.

In an article in the Tribune, Reeta Sharma presented a clause by clause 10-year balance sheet of the Punjab accord.

Here is a clause by clause 10-year balance sheet of Punjab accord:

Clause I: Compensation to innocent persons killed: As per the accord any innocent killed in any agitation after August 1, 1982, was to be paid compensation along with ex-gratia. Besides, compensation for damaged property was also to be paid.

An attempt was made by the Barnala Government to give financial and other kinds of relief like government houses and jobs to the aforesaid victims. However it was more of an ad hoc, chaotic and haphazard effort. This was primarily because the scheme lacked appropriate indentification and proper listing of victims and the properties

damaged. A number of cases falling under this clause are still pending in courts.

Clause II: Army recruitment: The Punjab accord made a general observation in this clause, skirting the apprehensions of Sikhs, who were threatened with the reduction in future recruitment to the Army.

Clause III: Inquiry into the November incidents: Under the Punjab accord the jurisdiction of the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission was extended beyond Delhi to include Bokaro and Kanpur riots as well. While few of the guilty have been convicted, a large number of cases are still pending in courts.

Clause IV: Rehabilitation of those discharged from the Army: Again it was the Barnala Government which helped to rehabilitate a few. However during President's rule, and thereafter all such cases were allowed to gather dust.

Clause V: All-India Gurdwara Act: Under the Punjab accord, the Union Government had agreed to formulate an all-India gurdwara Bill. The SGPC had been regularly passing resolutions on formulating an All-India Gurdwara Act. However, on the part of the central government it had been a stale rehetoric of statements like "under consideration". Since gurdwaras are not only fertile ground for Akali politics but also the backbone for the growth of Sikh leadership, it has never suited any ruling party at the Centre to allow them to unite under one all-India Act.

Clause VI: Disposal of pending cases: Under this clause the Armed Forces Special Powers Act was withdrawn through a gazette notification.

Clause VII: Territorial claims: As per the Punjab accord, the Capital Project area of Chandigarh was to be handed over to Punjab
along with Punjabi-speaking areas, on January 26, 1986. Simultaneously Hindi-speaking areas attached to Chandigarh were to be transferred to Haryana. Besides, in lieu of Chandigarh as such, specific Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab as determined by a Commission were to go to Haryana.

However as a follow-up of this clause of the Punjab accord, all the three, the Mathew Commission, the Venkataramiah Commission and the Desai Commission, for some reason or the other, could make no headway in this regard. Both the states have been refusing to accept the recommendations of one commission or the other. Unfortunately public money was allowed to go down the drain in constituting commission after commission, despite a clear note – the commission's findings will be binding on both states.

Clause VIII: Centre-state relations: The Shiromani Akali Dal stood by the 1978 Anandpur Sahib resolution. In reference to Centre-state relations, it was referred to the Sarkaria Commission. That was because of the Akalis' insistence that the resolution was not secessionist but within the framework of the Constitution, seeking a true federal characteristic of a unitary constitution. The Sarkaria Commission had submitted its report to the Centre and the issue continues to hang fire.

Clause IX: Sharing of river waters: The Punjab accord categorically stated that the farmers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan will continue to draw water not less than what they were drawing from the Ravi-Beas system as on July 1, 1985. Besides, the waters used for consumptive purposes were to remain unaffected. However, quantum of this particular usage claimed was to be verified by the tribunal.

The claims of Punjab and Haryana regarding the share of the remaining water were to be referred for adjudication to a tribunal to be presided over by a Supreme Court Judge. This
tribunal was to take the decision within six months which was to be binding on both states. The construction of the SYL canal was to continue and was to be completed by August 15, 1986.

The tribunals' award was never gazetted. Haryana adheres to the demand to implement the Eradi Tribunal award in letter and spirit.

Construction of the SYL remains as elusive as ever. The project has passed through rough weather, first on account of agitation and dharna by villages whose land was acquired for this purpose. Then came the gruesome killing of 30 labourers in May 1988, working at SYL. The work was resumed but was halted in July 1990 with the killing of Chief Engineer (Construction), Mr M.L. Sekhri and Superintending Engineer, A.S. Aulakh.

On August 31, 1995 a human bomb killed Beant Singh. P.P.S. Gill of the Tribune wrote an article entitled 'Fallout of the blast that was' and in this, he presented a review of events and achievements during 1995. He wrote:

The year 1995 has only one day, not 365; that day is August 31, when a "human bomb" exploded killing more than the Chief Minister, Mr Beant Singh; the blast shook the faith of the people in the return of normalcy in Punjab.

The much flaunted peace lies shattered in pieces. The assassination also exposes the gaping holes in the political functioning of the state. Punjab, as the top leadership of every hue realises, lacks dynamic political cadre to take the state forward. The state, as such, can only provide some funds and a blueprint for economic development. To use these as a lever it needs political
leadership and will. Punjab seems to have neither.

This partly is also the responsibility of the central leadership, which all these years has made no attempt to understand and deal with the Punjabi (Sikh) psyche. Providing verbal balm or the healing touch is not enough. That alone will not help. The "core" issues remain untouched. The central leadership seems to have neither the inclination nor the time for Punjab. When there is no in-depth analysis of why and how of what has happened and who did that, no permanent solutions are possible.

The present Chief Minister, Mr Harcharan Singh Brar, who took over in the aftermath of the shattering blast, has limited opportunity and options and very little time. A lot remains to be done and more to be undone to consolidate the gains of the given situation ushered in by his predecessor. There looms a large shadow of the gun over the state.  

Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's April 20 visit to Ludhiana and Ranjit Sagar Dam (Thein hydro-electric project) and his debt relief announcement has given the state government a fresh breather. Not fully out of the woods, its finances have improved but a crunch is not ruled out given the requirements of quick consolidation for economic uplift and waste for spending.

The creation of new districts, sub-divisions and sub tehsils and redrawing the revenue map of Punjab generated a lot of heat, resulting in agitations for either "zila banao" or "zila bachao".

The floods in the state have also put a strain on the financial resources. The state's physical needs in terms of roads and bridges demand attention.

Mr Brar is fighting against "corruption". He has promised a "clean", "transparent" administration to the people. Given the merit available among the MLAs, Mr Brar has limited choice for inclusion in his Council of Ministers. But what has started in 1995 should hopefully see proper implementation in 1996, which is again an election year.