In March 1972, 16 States went to the polls, some after completing their full term and some like Punjab went for mid-term polls. On 11 March 1972, seven million voters in Punjab went to the polls for the third time in five years. Riding the 'Indira Wave', Congress got absolute majority in Punjab winning 66 seats, their allies Communists winning 11 seats (CPI-10 & CPM-1).\textsuperscript{228} The Sant Akali Dal got 24 seats and Independents winning 03 seats (See Table-9). Like Punjab, the Congress won 14 States out of the 16 States that went to the polls even storming the communist bastions of West Bengal and Tripura. On 17 March 1972, 10 member ministry under Giani Zail Singh was installed in Punjab.\textsuperscript{229} While Giani Zail Singh took over as Chief Minister of Punjab, Bansi Lal took up the reins of the government in the State of Haryana.\textsuperscript{230}

Giani Zail Singh as Chief Minister took to his socialistic programme immediately by enforcing ceilings on both farm lands and urban property. Giani Zail Singh government introduced the Punjab Land Reforms Bill (1972) in the Legislative Assembly on 14 December 1972, which was passed inspite of stiff Akali opposition, fixing land

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\textsuperscript{228} The Tribune, 14-18 March, 1972.
ceiling of *barani* land and land with assured irrigation. The land ceiling was reduced from 30 to 17.5 standard acres and attempts were made to re-distribute the surplus land among the tenants and the landless; Punjab Urban Ceiling Bill was passed in April 1973 in which every person not having a family and in the case of every family consisting of not more than five members, the urban property ceiling limit in Punjab would not exceed in value of Rs. 2.5 lakhs; providing a modest home for every family; schemes for the upliftment of the Harijans.²³¹

Table - 9
Punjab Vidhan Sabha Elections : 1972
(Total Seats : 104)²³²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Seats Conteste d</th>
<th>Seats Won</th>
<th>Percentage of Votes</th>
<th>Percentage of Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>42.84</td>
<td>63.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akali Dal</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27.65</td>
<td>23.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Sangh</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>9.62</td>
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<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress (U)</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swatantra</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akali Dal (G)</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²³² Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh.
Giani Zail Singh wanted to outclass Akalis in each and every sphere in proving that he was a better Sikh and could do more than what Akalis could have done. He organized *Kirtan darbars*, foundation stones of public buildings were laid with an *Ardaas* and state functions started with a Sikh ritual. He organized *Kar Sewa* at Golden Temple, Amritsar and himself participated in it with an unprecedented crowd of devotees, organized 'Maha Yatra' along the Guru Gobind Singh Marg from Anandpur Sahib to Talwandi Sabo. He inaugurated the 640 kms long Guru Gobind Singh Marg from Anandpur Sahib on 10 April 1973 with much fanfare.\textsuperscript{233} The procession which was about 21km long, included the descendants of the Tenth Guru’s horses who led the congregation; the historic Sikh weapons were taken back from Britain with a great deal of religious fervour,\textsuperscript{234} and it culminated at Gurdwara Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo on Baisakhi day 13 April 1973.\textsuperscript{235} He inaugurated hospitals, towns after the names of the Sikh Gurus and erected monuments to commemorate various historical events; declared Bhagat Singh’s mother, Vidyawati as 'Punjab Mata' and when she died on 1 June 1975 gave her a state funeral and himself lit the funeral pyre.\textsuperscript{236}

While Giani Zail Singh was following a socialistic agenda in Punjab, Indira Gandhi at the Centre was following an authoritarian
agenda. After securing absolute majority in the Lok Sabha in the 1971 fifth General Elections, Congress party at the Centre set out to do the unthinkable. It tried to introduce changes in the Constitution by Constitutional amendments under Article 368, as 24th Amendment restored to Parliament the power to amend Fundamental Rights. In 1973 in Keshavananda Bharti Case, the Supreme Court reversed its 1967 Golaknath ruling and upheld Parliament’s right to amend the Constitution, including the Fundamental Rights, but not the "basic structure or framework" of the Constitution.

On 26 April 1973, Mr. Ajit Nath Ray was sworn in as Chief Justice of India and few hours later three Supreme Court judges whom he had superseded- Justices J.M. Shelat, K.S. Hegde and A.N. Grover resigned from the Supreme Court in protest.237

Privy purses were abolished by the Executive Order, India conducted its first nuclear explosion on 18 May 1974, thus coming out of the shadow of the super powers. Against the totalitarian regime, the sarvodya leader Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly called J.P. started a movement which caught the imagination of the people. It was directed against the monopolization of political power and its unmitigated misuse. The elected representatives had been freely exploiting the country and its resources for their own enrichment. The Constitution had been turned upside down and the judiciary had been steeply downgraded. Authority increased and competence decreased leading to corruption. J.P.’s movement instilled confidence among the
people of India and awakened them to the sense of power in their hands.

Political lightning struck three times on 12 June 1975. First, D.P. Dhar, a member of Indira’s ‘Kashmiri mafia’ died. Second, the Janata Front- a five party coalition that included the followers of J.P. Narayan and Desai had defeated Congress in Gujarat assembly. The third fork of lightning was the most shattering. On 12 June 1975, in a momentous judgement, Mr. Justice Sinha of the Allahabad High Court set aside Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s election to Lok Sabha. She was unseated as she was held guilty of corrupt practices and was debarred from contesting any election under the Representation of the People’s Act for a period of six years. Mr. Raj Narain who lost to Mrs. Gandhi in Rae Bareli in 1971 had challenged her election on the charge that Mrs. Gandhi used the services of Mr. Yashpal Kapur to further her election prospects while he was still in Government service and she was found guilty of obtaining the assistance of various other U.P. Government officers to ensure the election victory.

On the morning of 25 June, Indira Gandhi after going through a huge pile of Intelligence reports in her study came to the conclusion that, ‘Some drastic emergent action is needed.’ On 26 June 1975, the President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Under Article 352, Clause 1, declared a state of Emergency, apparently to forestall

internal disturbances threatening the security of India. The Cabinet had recommended to the President for the declaration of emergency which was invoked by the President.\textsuperscript{241} It was the third time since Independence that the National Emergency had been declared. Under the National Emergency, all the Civil liberties were curtailed and the opposition decided to oppose the fascist tendencies of the Congress with Akalis launching 'Save Democracy' morcha in Punjab.\textsuperscript{242}

The arrests of the Opposition leaders including J.P. and Desai were made under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). Preventive detention had been a widely used tactic under British rule, which had left it as a legacy to independent India. Indira Gandhi had significantly enhanced detention powers through MISA and Defence of India legislations, enacted during the 1971 war with Pakistan. Censorship of Press was introduced and all the voices of protest were stifled. Less than a month after the Emergency was imposed, Parliament was convened to conduct only 'urgent and important government business' which were a series of bills introduced to amend the Constitution. The primary purpose of these amendments were to make the Emergency and Indira Gandhi invulnerable to the judiciary. On 1 August 1975 the 38\textsuperscript{th} Constitutional Amendment was passed which safeguarded the declaration of an internal emergency, President’s rule in the States and the promulgation of ordinances to


\textsuperscript{242} A.S. Narang, \textit{Storm Over the Sutlej}, Delhi, 1983,p.192.
put them beyond the reach of the Courts.\textsuperscript{243} Indira Gandhi used President’s rule to dismiss the non-congress governments that had just come to power in Gujarat and did the same in Tamil Nadu which was ruled by DMK. The 39\textsuperscript{th} Constitutional Amendment, which was passed on 10 August 1975, invalidated the Allahabad High Court judgement against Indira Gandhi and ‘the Question regarding elections of President, Vice-President, Prime Minister and Speaker of the Lok Sabha were taken out of the purview of the judiciary.’\textsuperscript{244} Thus, the Prime Minister was granted immunity from criminal and civil proceedings for offences committed before and during his or her term of office.

Surpassing them all was the 59 clause 42\textsuperscript{nd} Constitutional Amendment, which got President’s assent on 18 December 1976.\textsuperscript{245} Its most crucial point was that it gave Parliament the power to amend the previously unamendable ‘basic structure of the constitution’, thus undermining in the words of one analyst, ‘the very foundations of the political order established at independence’.\textsuperscript{246} Parliament was now authorized to change any feature of the government. It could now prevent or prohibit, any activity presumed to be 'anti-national' even if, in doing so infringed on the fundamental rights of political freedom and equality under the law. These constitutional amendments served only to strengthen the Centre’s coercive powers and provide a 'legal

\textsuperscript{244} D.D. Basu, \textit{Introduction to The Constitution of India}, p.438.
rationale for depriving dissidents of their political right'. This amendment was almost a complete revision of the Constitution and many material changes were incorporated.\textsuperscript{247}

The Year 1977 is important in the history of Indian polity. Firstly, Mrs. Gandhi decided to face the electorate by calling for sixth general election after the suspension of National Emergency. The opposition, which was led by Jayaprakash Narayan had mounted a campaign to highlight government corruption. In February 1976, Indira Gandhi postponed the upcoming general election and extended the Emergency.\textsuperscript{248} On 16 March 1977, India's sixth general election commenced. Janata Party (including Jagjivan Ram's Congress for Democracy) captured 299 seats and Congress only 153. Indira Gandhi herself was humiliatingly defeated in Rae Bareilly constituency by Raj Narain. Sanjay Gandhi lost in Amethi.\textsuperscript{249} On 23 March 1977, Morarji Desai was sworn in as the fourth- and first non-congress Prime Minister of India.\textsuperscript{250} For detail see Table No-10.

\textbf{Table - 10}  
\textit{Party Performance in Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab - 1977 (Total Seats - 13)\textsuperscript{251}}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats Won</th>
<th>Percentage of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akali Dal</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>40.57</td>
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</table>

\textsuperscript{248} Katherine Frank, \textit{Indira : The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi}, p. 400.  
\textsuperscript{249} Katherine Frank, \textit{Indira : The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi}, p. 413.  
\textsuperscript{250} Katherine Frank, \textit{Indira : The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi}, p.416.  
\textsuperscript{251} Election Commission of India, New Delhi.
Secondly, in June 1977 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections, Akali Dal alone won 58 out of 117 seats. Their alliance had secured 91 seats against 17 of the Congress. S. Parkash Singh Badal became Chief Minister with an overwhelming majority.252 Thirdly, In the year 1977 Kartar Singh was fatally injured in a road accident and subsequently after his death, Jarnail Singh, and not Kartar Singh’s son Amrik Singh succeeded to the leadership of Damdami Taksal.

Detail of Punjab Vidhan Sabha election of 1977 is given below,

Table - 11
Punjab Vidhan Sabha Election - 1977
(Total Seats - 117)253

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats Won</th>
<th>Percentage of Votes</th>
<th>Percentage of Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33.58</td>
<td>14.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akali Dal</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>49.57</td>
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<td>CPI</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>07</td>
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<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>6.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>9.92</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

253 Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh.
S. Parkash Singh Badal, after assuming office of Chief Minister declared that the Punjab economy was predominantly rural and the rural Punjab deserved greater attention; “The real Punjab lives in villages, and it is necessary that the benefits of our progress must percolate to the countryside and reach the needy people.”\textsuperscript{254} At the 18\textsuperscript{th} All-India Akali Conference at Ludhiana in October 1978, about 12 Resolutions were passed in the backdrop of the Anandpur Sahib Resolutions which were endorsed by the Shiromani Akali Dal. Most important resolution demanded a true ‘Federal Structure in India’ in which the fundamental rights of the religious and linguistic minorities are safeguarded, through the progressive decentralization of powers.\textsuperscript{255}

Although Indira Gandhi was out of power, Sanjay Gandhi, with an eye on the future, decided to damage Akali Dal’s dominance in the state. The former Chief Minister, Giani Zail Singh advised Sanjay Gandhi to split Sikh feeling by backing a newcomer who would defy the established Akali leadership. They zeroed on Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, head of Damdami Taksal at Chowk Mehta, near Amritsar. Bhindranwale was a fundamentalist, who wanted to purify Sikhism and return it to its orthodox, uncontaminated state. He acquired around him a large number of die-hard followers at Chowk

\textsuperscript{254} A.S. Narang, \textit{Storm Over the Sutlej}, Delhi, 1983, p. 197.
Mehta. Bhindranwale wanted a Cause and a Party to launch himself. The cause was provided by the Nirankaris in April 1978. The Party was formed in August 1978 when a council of five was formed in Chandigarh to fight the 'Nirankari onslaught on the Sikhs'. This small organization was called 'Dal Khalsa'. It was believed to have been financed and encouraged by some Congress leaders opposed to the Akali Dal coalition. Another organization which decided to avenge the killings at Amritsar by Nirankaris was ‘Akhand Kirtani Jatha’ headed by Bibi Amarjit Kaur, widow of Fauja Singh, an Agricultural Inspector who died in the Baisakhi 1978 clash. The hit squad of Akhand Kirtani Jatha was headed by Talwinder Singh.

On the Baisakhi of 1978, Bhindranwale and his followers clashed with the Nirankaris at Amritsar. The Sikh-Nirankari relations, in the latter half of the 20th century have remained strained, tense and at times violent. The tension between the Sikhs and a Nirankari sect which culminated in an armed clash at Amritsar on 13 April 1978 was neither new nor wholly unexpected. On 13 April 1951, Baisakhi Day, Amritsar itself was the scene of an ugly incident when the then Nirankari Chief, Baba Avtar Singh was holding a Satsang attended by about 200 followers of the faith. At that time Sikhs clashed with the Baba and the followers leaving many injured.256

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256 *The Tribune*, 14 April, 1951 p.1
Although the practice of keeping Guru Granth Sahib in the Nirankari congregation was discontinued from the Baisakhi Day of 1951, tensions of varying intensity have been occurring all these years at different places in Punjab, mainly in the districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur. Chowk Mehta, Amritsar was the scene of another clash which occurred on 15 September 1973. Yet another incident took place at Ludhiana on 23 September 1973, resulting in injuries to 85 persons as a result of a police lathi charge. On 17 September 1977\textsuperscript{257}, at Pathankot, a Nirankari congregation was stoned and the mission vehicles were damaged. A serious clash was reported from Ghuman in Gurdaspur district while at Qadian some uneasy movements were witnessed on 19 September 1977, when the Nirankaris complained of being attacked by some of their Sikh opponents. The incident at Qadian led thousands of Nirankaris hold a demonstration in front of the Punjab Secretariat at Chandigarh on 20 September 1977.

If we go into the genesis of the Nirankari movement, it was founded by Baba Dayal, who was born at Peshawar in 1783. Prof. Harbans Singh\textsuperscript{258}, writing about the Singh Sabha Movement observed, "Baba Dayal a saintly man, was a contemporary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He had cavilled at the shortcomings of the mighty and assailed the rites and observances undermining the Sikh faith. His main

\textsuperscript{257} The Tribune, 18 September, 1977 p.1
\textsuperscript{258} The Sikh Review, 1972.
targets were the worshippers of images against which he preached vigorously.

The Nirankaris ran into opposition first from Hindu Brahmins and, after Baba Dayal moved from Peshawar to Rawalpindi, from the Bedi descendants of Guru Nanak who had a large following in the district. The Nirankaris were ostracised by both the Hindus and the Sikhs and had to build their own places of worship. After Baba Dayal died on 30 January 1855, his mission was taken over by Baba Darbara Singh, the eldest of his three sons. Baba realized that Sikhism could be preserved, in all its purity, only by a complete break from a Brahmanical influence. He wanted a complete break with prevalent superstitions and meaningless rituals.

After India’s partition, the Nirankaris migrated to India leaving behind their main centre at Rawalpindi and more than 60 sub-centres in Pakistan. In India the founder of the ‘Sant Nirankari Mission’ was Baba Buta Singh who broke away from the Nirankaris in the 1930’s. This Sant Nirankari sub-sect led by Buta Singh gained a larger following than the parent body. Buta Singh was succeeded by Baba Avtar Singh. On Avtar Singh’s death in 1963, his son Baba Gurbachan Singh was installed as Guru.

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Baba Avtar Singh as the Guru of Sant Nirankaris, had composed his *Avtar Bani* and *Yug Pursh*. So Sant Nirankaris based their teachings on these two religious books. To orthodox Sikhs, both *Avtar Bani* and *Yug Pursh* undermined the sanctity of Guru Granth Sahib and contained unholy references to the Sikh Gurus. There was a constant demand from the Sikhs before the Government to proscribe both these books. The other major objection to the Sant Nirankaris was that the Nirankari chief had committed the cardinal sin of proclaiming himself a Guru in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. It was an article of Sikh faith that only the holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, was the ‘living’ embodiment of the ten gurus.\(^{261}\)

These acts of the Sant Nirankaris made them extremely unorthodox in the eyes of the Sikhs nurtured on the doctrines of the Singh Sabhas.\(^{262}\)

On the Baisakhi of 1978, the Nirankari Guru, Baba Gurbachan Singh held a congregation at Amritsar. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale regarded Baba Gurbachan Singh’s congregation in the holiest city of the Sikhs on the day when Guru Gobind Singh had instituted the Khalsa, as an affront to the entire Khalsa Panth. The Akali-Janata government could neither persuade the Sant Nirankaris from holding their annual congregation in some other city of Punjab nor took pre-emptive action against Bhindranwale to prevent him

disrupting it. The trouble started shortly after a huge procession of the Nirankaris wound its way through the city and terminated peacefully about 11.30 a.m. at the ‘B’ Block Railway Colony grounds where the Nirankaris were observing their ‘Manav Ekta Sammelan Day’.

At the nearby Manji Sahib Gurudwara, the Baisakhi festival was being celebrated in a big way with several Akali leaders addressing the congregation. At one point of time, the Revenue Minister, Mr. Jiwan Singh Umranangal, was asked by Sant Jarnail Singh and some of his followers to stop the Nirankari Sammelan which they felt was against the tenets of Sikhism. But Mr. Umranangal, considering the time, told them that the Nirankaris procession had ended and there was no need to do anything now. This however did not satisfy many and between 150 and 200 people headed for the Nirankari Sammelan grounds.

The anti-Nirankari Jatha marching towards the Nirankaris was intercepted by a police contingent. The Jatha had little difficulty in breaking through the police cordon. This was the signal for both sides to start throwing brickbats at each other. Sensing trouble, the Nirankaris had forearmed themselves with guns, firearms and sharp-edged weapons. In the scuffle that ensued lathis, swords, sharp-edged weapons were used and gunshots were fired from several directions. Seventeen persons were killed and more than 100 injured in the violent clash between two groups. According to unofficial reports, 8 persons died on the spot while the remaining succumbed to their

injuries in the hospital. Among the dead was Fauja Singh, an agricultural inspector of the Punjab Government.

Surprisingly, the Nirankaris Sammelan attended by about 1 Lakh people continued after the clash for about 3 hours and their religious head, Baba Gurbachan Singh addressed it. Giani Ajmer Singh, secretary of the Shiromani Akali Dal said, about 150 peaceful Sikhs with a high tradition of discipline and commanding great respect had gone to the Nirankari Sammelan to ‘request them not to say anything against the Sikh religion. The Nirankaris, he alleged, had retaliated causing, death and injuries. On learning about the violent clash, Punjab Chief Minister, S. Parkash Singh Badal and Akali Dal President, S. Jagdev Singh Talwandi rushed back from Bombay.

The clash catapulted Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to fame and as head of Damdami Taksal brought Damdami Taksal into sharp focus. The word ‘Taksal’ means mint and it is so used to describe the Sikh schools which preach the pure and unalloyed message of the Gurus. The Damdami Taksal is an influential school founded by one of the great heroes of Sikhism, Baba Deep Singh. The Damdami Taksal, he founded had been in the vanguard of the fight against Sikh apostasy for 200 years till the time Jarnail Singh joined it. It preaches strict adherence to Sikh principles and had strong faith in leading a puritan way of life.

266 Mark Tully & Satish Jacob: *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle*, p. 53.
Jarnail Singh soon became the favourite of the head of the Taksal, Kartar Singh Bhindranwale. On assuming the status of ‘Sant’ or Saint and as head of Damdami Taksal, he became more virulent in his attack on the Nirankaris till the clash of 1978 took place in which 13 of his followers were dead. The anti-Nirankari sentiments were wipped up at the Bhog Ceremony on 22 April, 1978 which was attended by thousands of Sikhs from all walks of life, in which 13 slain Sikhs were declared martyrs.

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale addressing himself to Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, Mr. Gurcharan Singh and Mr. Jagdev Singh Talwandi said "You asked for time to give us justice and we shall wait. Please take care that the time is not wasted". Further addressing the congregation he said, "If the leaders showed any weakness and we did not get justice, I shall be the first to offer myself for the sacrifice".267

As a preventive measure, there was locking up of Nirankari Bhawans by the police all over the state and no permission was granted to the Nirankaris to hold their weekly congregations. The officers in the bureaucracy with Nirankari leanings were targetted which resulted in lot of resentment against the Government.

On 7 October 1978, the Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai said that he had categorically instructed the Punjab Government to provide all necessary safeguards to the Nirankaris and other religious minorities in the State and guarantee them full freedom of worship.

and right of religious discourse. The Prime Minister further stated that 
"Nobody should be allowed to stop the congregations of any sect or 
allowed to interfere in the religious beliefs of others". 268 The freedom of 
worship is guaranteed by the Constitution. The Constitutional 
position stated that it was the case for a judicial probe. It was said on 
the behalf of the Nirankari sect that they are a peaceful, law abiding 
people, that they harm nobody. They follow their own chosen path, do 
not interfere with people of other faiths and would like to be left alone. 
And pointed accusing finger at the Akali Government headed by S. 
Parkash Singh Badal.

In order to instill confidence among the Nirankaris, the Union 
Government gave them the permission to hold their Nirankari 
Samagam in New Delhi. On 4 November 1978, the three day Nirankari 
Samagam started on the India Gate lawns under tight police 
security. 269 The Nirankaris fortified their tented township and 
congregation 'shamiana' with a nine foot high wall of steel corrugated 
sheets. A big posse of the armed constabulary and the CRPF was 
posted all around the venue. The atmosphere was particularly tense, 
after the violence at the previous two congregations at Amritsar and 
Kanpur and especially by the protest call given by Mr. Jaswant Singh 
Sethi, President of the Delhi Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee. The 
protest march was to start from Gurudwara Bangla Sahib in the wake 
of the burning of Guru Granth Sahib at a Delhi Gurudwara and

268 The Tribune, 8 October 1978.  
269 Hindustan Times, 5 November 1978.
permission given to the Nirankaris to hold their annual congregation ignoring Sikh sentiments.

On 5 November 1978, curfew was clamped on several areas adjoining Gurudwara Bangla Sahib following pitched battles between the Akalis and the police which took a toll of three lives. About 100 persons, including 50 policemen were injured. Among those killed was Jathedar Avtar Singh Kohli, President of the Delhi State Akali Dal (Jathedar Santokh Singh group). The tension reached to such a level that on 7 November, 1978 the Union Agriculture and Irrigation Minister, Mr. Surjit Singh Barnala and the Minister of State for Education, Mr. Dhanna Singh Gulshan resigned from the Union Cabinet.

Once again the Constitutional clause which guarantees every citizen of the country the right to profess, practice and propagate the faith of his choice was invoked. The issue of Sikh-Nirankari clash was much more than one of law and order. "It involved the right of a group of citizens--howsoever controversial their faith and public image--to free worship as long as they remained peaceful and abided by the prescribed regulations." 

New strains of tension developed when the Akali Dal Government had allowed the case against the Nirankaris, who were accused of killing Sikhs during the Amritsar clash, to be transferred to a Court in the neighboring state of Haryana and it even more

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270 The Tribune, 6 November 1978.
infuriated the hardliners when the Haryana Court found them not guilty. Earlier the Nirankaris had pleaded that they would not get justice from a Punjab Court. The tension between the Sikhs and the Nirankaris continued to simmer and on 19 March, 1979, an unsuccessful attempt was made on the Nirankari Baba’s life when he was on his way to Durg in Madhya Pradesh. The final stage in the tension was reached when on 24 April 1980, the head of the Nirankari religious sect, Baba Gurbachan Singh and his body guard Mr. Pratap Singh, were shot dead at Gurbachan Niwas in Nirankari Colony in North Delhi. This was followed by a phase of accusations and counter-accusations with simmering discontent and disbelief on the side of Nirankaris and the Sikhs. Baba Gurbachan Singh was followed by his son, Baba Hardev Singh as successor to head the Nirankari Sect. Baba Hardev Singh wrote a letter to the Jathedar of the Akal Takht towards the end of 1981 that he and his followers had deep regard for the Sikh Gurus, that they were never disrespectful towards the traditions and practices of Sikhism, and that they regarded the Guru Granth Sahib as a revelation from God. He expressed his willingness to expunge objectionable passages from the *Avtar Bani* and *Yug Pursh* by mutual agreement.\(^{272}\)

As Bhindranwale’s strength grew, so did his ambition and as his ambition grew, so did his autonomy. In 1980, he actively campaigned for Congress and Congress won 63 seats and Akalis and their

communist allies won only 51. The Congress Legislature Party leader, Darbara Singh became Chief Minister of Punjab. For detail see Table-12.

Table - 12

Punjab Vidhan Sabha Elections : 1980
(Total Seats - 117)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats Won</th>
<th>Percentage of votes</th>
<th>Percentage of Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>45.19</td>
<td>53.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akali Dal</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26.69</td>
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<td>Independents</td>
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|He had to deal with a situation marked by increasing militancy and sectarian polarization. To make matters worse for him, his arch-rival, Giani Zail Singh as Home Minister of India was granting support to Sant Bhindranwale. Sh. Darbara Singh as Chief Minister of Punjab and Giani Zail Singh as Home Minister of India suited Mrs. Gandhi’s policy of Checks and Balances. In India, the politicians at the Centre could survive, either under the patronage of the Gandhi family or if they wish to command some independent influence in Delhi then they

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273 The Tribune, 5-8 June, 1980.
275 Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh.
need to nurture their home constituency or home State through their protégé. In this case, both Darbara Singh and Giani Zail Singh were arch-rivals was too well known and to keep them under check, both were given plum posts. But Giani Zail Singh managed to outsmart Sh. Darbara Singh by killing two birds with one stone. He proposed Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to Sanjay Gandhi for the grand design of the Congress to de-stabilize the Akalis in Punjab and at the same time created troubles for his bête noire, Darbara Singh as Chief Minister, by promoting, supporting and protecting Bhindranwale as the Union Home Minister. This is amply clear on the basis of support extended in three prominent murders. These three murders during Mrs. Gandhi’s first year back in office highlighted the tensions within the ranks of the Congress Party and brought Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to the forefront of Punjab politics.

On 24 April 1980, the head of the Nirankari religious sect, Baba Gurbachan Singh Nirankari and his personal bodyguard were shot dead at 10.30 pm on their way home to the mission headquarters in the Nirankari Colony in North Delhi. Bhindranwale was a suspect but Giani Zail Singh as Home Minister told the Parliament in 1980 that Sant Bhindranwale had no hand in the murder of the Nirankari Baba, thus giving the Sant a clean chit. Giani Zail Singh completely refuted the police version of Bhindranwale’s involvement;

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Darbara Singh, then Chief Minister of Punjab, also did not find it necessary to proceed against him.277 This increased the prestige of Sant Bhindranwale and he became more vitriolic in his attacks. Bhindranwale announced that the killer of the Nirankari Guru deserved to be honoured at the Akal Takht and that he would weigh the killers in gold if they come to him. These remarks embarrassed Giani Zail Singh but he decided to ignore them.278

On 9 September 1981, Lala Jagat Narain, former Rajya Sabha member and editor and proprietor of the *Hind Samachar* group of newspapers, was shot dead near Adian village when he was returning home from Ludhiana in his car.279 His influential daily, the *Punjab Kesari*, was bitterly critical of Bhindranwale and sided with the Nirankaris. It openly denounced Bhindranwale and his acts. Lala Jagat Narain was present at the Nirankari congregation on 13 April

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277 Arun Shourie, a distinguished journalist and later chief editor of ‘The Indian Express’ wrote in the issue of 10 July, 1981, “though the CBI has solved the murder case of the Nirankari Guru, Baba Gurbachan Singh, and his aide last year, it is almost certain that the killers will never be arrested because they are alleged to be in the protection of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, in the Amritsar District of Punjab. Besides, the state police is not prepared to involve itself in the case by arresting the culprits”.

"Repeated pleas by the Lt. Governor of Delhi to the Punjab Chief Minister, Darbara Singh, and the letters written by the Director of CBI to the Punjab Government for help have been of no avail. The present Lt. Governor of Delhi, Mr. S.L. Khurana has again written to the Punjab Chief Minister, pleading for the arrest of the suspects. The director of CBI also wrote to the State Government about 10 days ago, urging it to help the CBI by arresting the culprits and taking away their arms. But the state government has not even acknowledged the letter. The CBI has almost completed the investigations and 11 persons who are suspected in this case have been declared as proclaimed offenders…” Quoted in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 17-23 June, 1984, p. 11.

278 Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle*, p. 66.

1978 and had given evidence in support of Sant Nirankaris before a
special commission. In hard hitting editorials, he himself had
argued that the Hindus in Punjab were living in fear of ever getting
justice from a government and police force who, he claimed were
siding with Bhindranwale against the Nirankaris in the investigations
into the attack on the Nirankari convention. There is no doubt that
Lala Jagat Narain’s papers played a role in fanning the flames of
communal hatred between the Hindus and Sikhs.

Sant Bhindranwale was again a suspect, as he was a year and
a half earlier. It was difficult for Home Minister to defend him openly.
In line with his strict policy on religious communalism, the Chief
Minister, Darbara Singh decided to arrest Bhindranwale. Almost four
days after the murder of Jagat Narain, All India Radio announced that
a warrant for Bhindranwale’s arrest had been issued. Bhindranwale at
that time was in Chunoa Kalan in Haryana busy in his preaching.
When the Punjab Police arrived in Chunoa Kalan to arrest him, they
found that he had already left. How Bhindranwale got wind of the
news of his arrest warrant and imminent police raiding him without
Government support. The Chief Minister of Haryana, Bhajan Lal at
that time wanted to endear himself to the leaders of the Congress
party at the Centre because he along with his entire government
switched loyalties to the Congress and was the only Janta

280 J.S. Grewal, The New Cambridge History of India II 3, The Sikhs of the Punjab,
281 Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle, p. 66.
Government in any State which was spared when Indira Gandhi came to power in 1980. In his effort to ingratiate the Congress leaders, especially the Home Minister, he provided a government car and a safe passage to Bhindranwale from Chunoa Kalan in Hissar district to his headquarters at Chowk Mehta, some 200 miles away. In great hurry, Bhindranwale left the van carrying copies of his religious discourses at Chunoa Kalan, which were reportedly set on fire by the Punjab Police in frustration. Bhindranwale was always accompanied by a secretary wherever he preached, whose job was to copy down every word he said so that it could be recorded for posterity. It were the immortal words of Bhindranwale which went up in flames at Chunoa Kalan and Sant Bhindranwale never forgave the Government for that. He used to refer to the incident in all his diatribes against the government.

On 15 September 1981, the Akali Dal (L) leadership asked Sant Bhindranwale to submit himself to law. At his headquarters at Gurdwara Gurdarshon Parkash, Chowk Mehta, Sant Jarnail Singh chose to offer himself for arrest on 20 September 1981. He said that he would surrender to the police in the afternoon, after he and other Sikh leaders like Sant Harchand Singh Longowal and Jathedar Tohra had addressed the religious congregation. Before his arrest, Bhindranwale preached a fiery sermon against the Punjab

282 Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, Amritsar : Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle, p.68.
284 The Tribune, 21 September, 1981.
Government and described the situation as a battle between ‘good and evil’ and that he was offering himself for arrest to clear ‘all possible doubts’ and to uphold the highest traditions of the Sikh faith. As soon as Bhindranwale was arrested, it led to clashes in which 8 persons were killed. Angry protest demonstrations against his imprisonment broke out all over the Punjab. On 29 September 1981, nine days after Bhindranwale was arrested, two Sikhs activists of Dal Khalsa, hijacked an Indian Airlines plane to Lahore. This was indicative of the resentment among the Sikhs.285

On 14 October 1981, Giani Zail Singh told the Parliament in Delhi that there was no evidence that Bhindranwale was involved in the murder of the newspaper proprietor, Lala Jagat Narain and thus the Government took the decision to release Bhindranwale. It is argued that Zail Singh intervened to get Bhindranwale released in the hope that the violence his arrest had sparked off would stop but all the hopes were belied the very next day after his release.286,287 On 16 October 1981, an IAS officer Niranjan Singh was shot at in the precincts of Punjab Civil Secretariat, Chandigarh. Mr. Niranjan Singh was one of the ‘Seven Stars’ of the Sant Nirankari Mission. However

286 Mark Tully & Satish Jacob : *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*, p. 69.
his brother, Surinder Singh, a Nirankari preacher and an armed guard died on the spot. 288

Not only the Union Home Minister but even Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi had actually ordered the Sant’s release. Santokh Singh, President of the Delhi Gurudwara Management Committee himself went and pleaded with Mrs. Gandhi for Bhindranwale’s release, threatening that it would not be possible to keep the Delhi Gurudwara Management Committee loyal to the Congress, if Bhindranwale was not freed. 289 Bhindranwale’s release was the turning point in his life. He entered prison a provincial charlatan but emerged as a national hero. He was now seen as a hero who had challenged and defeated the Indian Government. Bhindranwale himself said, "The government has done more for me in one week than I could have achieved in years". 290

Ironically, both Giani Zail Singh and Akalis were keen for the release of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. The Congress leaders were still counting on Sant Bhindranwale is clear when the third murder took place.

Santokh Singh, the man who had pleaded for Bhindranwale’s release was shot dead in Delhi on 21 December 1981 by a rival Sikh politician. On receiving the news, Mrs. Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Giani Zail Singh rushed to the hospital where his body had been taken. Bhindranwale was also close to Santokh Singh, who was

288 *The Tribune*, 17 October, 1981.
289 Mark Tully & Satish Jacob : *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle*, pp. 70-71.
290 Mark Tully & Satish Jacob : *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle*, p. 71.
present in the Gurudwara Gurdarshan Parkash, Chowk Mehta, when Bhindranwale surrendered to the police. When Sant Bhindranwale went to Delhi for the bhog ceremony, Buta Singh, the Union Minister for Sports and Parliamentary Affairs as well as Home Minister, Giani Zail Singh greeted him with customary veneration. Rajiv Gandhi also agreed to attend the memorial ceremonies for Santokh Singh, knowing fully well that Bhindranwale would be there.

Bhindranwale made a triumphal tours of the capital and Bombay demonstrating his huge popularity among the Sikhs living outside Punjab. It was Darbara Singh's turn to accuse Zail Singh of deliberately refusing to apprehend Bhindranwale and his truck loads of armed followers, most of whom carried fire arms without licences.291 Although Bhindranwale had fallen out with the Congress, the Congress had not yet fallen out with him. Inspite of Bhindranwale’s insulting remarks about his dyed beard, Zail Singh still thought that Bhindranwale might be useful to him. But a new bidder for the Sant's support had already entered the ring, the Akali Dal.

When he returned to Punjab, Bhindranwale stepped up his disruptive activities. The arrests on 19 July 1982 of his close associates Amrik Singh and Thara Singh on charges of attempted murder, left no doubt in Bhindranwale's mind of the things to come.

He sensed that by now both Giani Zail Singh and Chief Minister Darbara Singh were eager to disown him and prove their loyalty to the Central Government by advocating that stronger measures be taken against him. Bhindranwale openly denounced them as, “Indira’s touts- these Sikhs fill their stomachs by licking the dust off Indira’s chappals.”

On Akali Dal’s invitation, Sant Bhindranwale moved out from Chowk Mehta to Guru Nanak Niwas, into Room Number 47, which according to Sant Bhindranwale was a safe haven than his headquarters at Chowk Mehta. After securing himself in the Guru Nanak Niwas, Bhindranwale launched a morcha or movement to demand the release of Amrik Singh and his associate. But the morcha was not a great success.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister met the Akali leaders in Parliament House on 16 October 1981. It was the day after Akali Dal’s number one political demand was met with the release of Sant Bhindranwale from prison. In December 1981, Mrs. Gandhi announced another Water award and asked the Chief Minister, Darbara Singh to withdraw the case which the Akali Dal Government in Punjab had filed in the Supreme Court. The Second round of talks resumed with Mrs Gandhi in April 1982. But this time Mrs. Gandhi was at her most frosty. According to one of the negotiators, Mr. Balwant Singh, all that the Prime Minister would offer was

‘unspecified alternative ways of making up the loss of water.’ The breakdown of the talks was described as watershed because it was the last time the Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi played a direct role in the negotiations with the Akali Dal. Kuldip Nayar commented on this breakdown that, “From that day onwards the distance between the government and the Akalis began to increase. And like a Greek tragedy both sides relentlessly slipped into a situation that spelt disaster.”

Sant Longowal launched the ‘Nahar Roko’ or ‘Stop the Canal’ agitation to step up the pressure on the Centre but it could not sway the people in the eastern Punjab. So, both the Akali Dal’s ‘Nahar Roko’ morcha and Bhindranwale’s morcha received a lukewarm response from the masses. Both of them got together and merged their morchas and re-launched it. So, on 4 August 1982, in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Longowal announced the ‘Dharam Yudh’ morcha or the ‘Righteous War’ for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Sant Bhindranwale accepted Sant Longowal as dictator of the Dharam Yudh (Righteous War) morcha and joined him. The new morcha was a grand success. Jathas from all parts of Punjab would come to Golden Temple and after paying obeisance would court arrest. Within two months, the jails were full and so were all the make shift prisons set up in the government buildings.

295 The Tribune, 4-5 August, 1982.
On 11 September 1982, 34 members of a jatha were killed when the bus carrying these volunteers, who had courted arrest and were being taken to jail crashed with a train at an unmanned railway crossing near Amritsar. Both, Bhindranwale and Longowal pointed to the Police conspiracy of deliberately killing the volunteers and declared them as martyrs.\(^{296}\)

On 10 October 1982, a massive protest was organized by the Akali Dal on the streets of Delhi carrying the ashes of the martyrs. The Centre ordered the release of Akali volunteers from the jails and sent S. Swaran Singh as a special envoy to re-open negotiations with the Akali Dal. The settlement was reached at by both parties and drawn up by Harkishen Singh Surjeet and Swaran Singh, acting on behalf of Mrs. Gandhi on 3 November 1982. It was agreed that the settlement would be announced in the Parliament the next day. The announcement made in the Parliament was at variance with what had been agreed to by the Akali Dal and they promptly denounced it as a betrayal of trust. Swaran Singh commented, "This is neither the language of the statement nor the spirit".\(^{297}\) After the statement in the Parliament and failure of talks, the Akalis announced their plan to agitate at the time of the Asian Games in New Delhi.

\(^{296}\) Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar : Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*, p. 82.
On 14 November 1982, an attempt was made by Farooq Abdullah, former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, when he met the Akali leaders in Amritsar and Mrs. Gandhi two days later. He commented, "I think by the grace of God, there is hope of settlement and something good might come out of it."

On 18 November 1982, the Akali leaders met the members of the Cabinet Committee at the residence of P.C. Alexander, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister. Harkishan Singh Surjeet was also present. In the evening an accord was reached. "It was decided that the Akali leaders, accompanied by Amarinder Singh, Congress(I) MP and the Union Home Secretary, TN Chaturvedi, would leave for Amritsar by a special plane at 8.30pm. Chaturvedi would read out the decision to the Akali Dal President at Amritsar and by midnight the announcement of an accord should be made. Balwant Singh spoke to Sant Longowal on phone from Kapurthala House and got his approval. The Akali leaders vacated their rooms and were waiting for the Home secretary who was to take them to the airport. When they did not get any information till 9pm, Amarinder Singh contacted the Prime Minister’s house where the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet was meeting and he was told that there was some hitch."

The Centre wanted that Delhi which was hosting the Asian Games should pass off peacefully without the threat of agitation by
the Akali Dal. Mrs. Gandhi’s son, Rajiv Gandhi had entered politics and despite his efforts, he badly needed an achievement to his name, which the successful conduct of the Asian Games in Delhi could get him one. In this venture, the Haryana Chief Minister, Bhajan Lal, once again lost no opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to Mrs. Gandhi. The Police were ordered to throw a cordon around Delhi and to prevent the Akali demonstrators from reaching Delhi via Haryana. No one was spared the attention of the Haryana Police. Among those who were humiliated were Army officers in uniform and Congress Members of Parliament. For the first time, the Sikhs as a community experienced religious discrimination. The treatment meted at the Asian Games and the repeated failure of talks, twice in the month of November 1982, marked the start of the split between Bhindranwale and the Akali leaders, a split which was to lead to the total isolation of Longowal and his colleagues. Kuldip Nayar observed that the Sikhs felt humiliated not as individuals but as members of a community. “From that day their feeling of alienation has been increasing”

On 24 January 1983, Tripartite talks started with the Akalis, the Opposition and the Cabinet Committee members participating. Much progress was made with the Akalis agreeable to the transfer of 17 Hindi speaking areas to Haryana. But the Government

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298 Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar : Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle*, p. 88.
representatives did not budge an inch from their stand of accepting the January 1970 award in toto, which was that Chandigarh would go to Punjab only if Abohar and Fazilka went to Haryana. Against this background, on 27 February 1983, Mrs. Gandhi went to Gurdwara Bangla Sahib and announced the acceptance of three religious demands of the Akalis which were indicative of political opportunism. On 20 April 1983, again an agreement was reached, only the modalities of the implementation were to be worked out, when again the talks broke.

The Akalis did not want to part with Abohar and Fazilka tehsils, which were neither Hindi speaking nor contiguous, in lieu of Chandigarh. However, they were ready to part with the Hindi speaking areas contiguous to Chandigarh, which was unacceptable to the Congress. Mrs. Gandhi was infuriated by the fact that on 30 June 1983, a meeting of the Opposition parties in New Delhi, including the Akalis, had reached a consensus on the Punjab solution without the Congress representatives. She rejected the consensus and in a state of mental outburst on 21 July 1983 said, "Can I give Haryana’s land to Punjab? Is it my land?" Thus, she gave approval to a bonafide claim of Haryana on Abohar and Fazilka tehsils. Harkishan Singh Surjeet remarked that, "Three times in six months an agreement was reached

and three times the Prime Minister backed out. Each time the interests of the Hindus of Haryana weighed more heavily with her than a settlement with the Sikhs."\(^{301}\) Even I.K. Gujral remarked as late as 6 May, 1984, “It is ironical but true that on each time the final approval was denied in the name of the prime minister."\(^{302}\)

The number of violent incidents had begun to increase steadily as Bhindranwale was on collision course with the Central Government. On 25 April 1983, A.S. Atwal, Deputy Inspector General of Police was shot dead at the main entrance of the Golden Temple as he was emerging after having paid his obeisance. DIG Atwal was a controversial, unusually active and an independent minded policeman, who had planted one of his agents among Bhindranwale’s followers. Atwal had been warned not to enter the Golden Temple but he on his own walked into the trap laid out by Bhindranwale. The murder of a senior police officer in broad daylight caused a national outcry.

Chief Minister Darbara Singh lamented that he consistently told the Central Government that the Guru Nanak Niwas was not a part of the Golden Temple complex, that the police should be sent in there but Darbara Singh’s old rival Giani Zail Singh, who had been elected President of India was afraid that it would inflame Sikh sentiments. Though the situation in the Punjab was spiralling out of control, Delhi was still intent on keeping Sikhs in the state divided and also on playing the ‘Hindu card’ in the rest of the country.

\(^{301}\) Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle, p. 91.
\(^{302}\) Abida Samiuddin (ed.), The Punjab Crisis: Challenge and Response, p. 238.
It was a disastrous course of action, practically as well as morally. Among many others, the journalist Inder Malhotra and the historian Bipan Chandra- both of whose political and historical vision was acute- tried to persuade Indira to negotiate with the dissidents in the Punjab. Katherine Frank commented that, ‘She had repeatedly withdrawn from negotiations in the past because she thought it politically expedient not to reach a settlement. She was wrong.’

The Central Government made a disastrous mistake by not entering the Guru Nanak Niwas and arresting Bhindranwale after the murder of DIG Atwal. Sant Longowal and the Akali Dal trinity must also bear their share of the blame. Had Longowal told the Government that he did not regard the Guru Nanak Niwas as a sacred place, the Government would have had no reason to fear Sikhs reaction to the arrest of Bhindranwale. But Longowal got no support from Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the SGPC Chief who controlled the complex. According to Tohra’s confidant, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, the SGPC President feared that the other two members of the Akali Dal trinity, Sant Longowal and Mr. Badal were getting together to oust him and so he still needed Bhindranwale as an ally.

The murder of Atwal and the failure of the Government to do anything about it spread panic throughout the State. Inevitably, the public felt that if the government was so weak it could not take action against the murderers of a police officer as senior as Atwal, it certainly would not be able to do anything to protect them. This was the time when stories of Bhindranwale’s hit list started circulating. Thus, he

was strengthening his grip over the rest of the Punjab. As the legend of the hit list grew, so did Bhindranwale’s influence among the people of Punjab. They came to him to solve their problems instead of going to the Courts or to the administration. The rich also used to come to Bhindranwale for favours and paid for the dispute resolution.

On the night of 5 October 1983, Sikhs hijacked a bus in Kapurthala District, separated the Hindu passengers from the Sikhs and shot the Hindus. Six Hindus died and one was seriously injured. The bus was travelling from Amritsar to Delhi on National Highway Number One. It sent shock waves in the entire country. The next day, on 6 October, Mrs. Gandhi suspended the government of Darbara Singh and imposed President’s Rule in Punjab. It was a difficult decision to take because it meant admitting that her own party had failed to rule Punjab. ‘By ousting Singh, she had removed the only Sikh authority in the State prepared to take a hard line with Bhindranwale.’

The President’s rule could not quell the escalating lawlessness and violence and thus failed. Two weeks after it was imposed, the Calcutta- Kashmir Express train was derailed while passing through the State. 19 people died and 129 were injured. On 18 November 1983, another bus was hijacked and four Hindu passengers shot dead. Bhindranwale regarded Darbara Singh’s downfall as a personal triumph and became even more intemperate in his

305 Mark Tully & Satish Jacob, Title of Chapter 9, ‘President’s Rule Fails’, *Amritsar : Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle*, p. 107.
utterances. Every morning Sant Bhindranwale preached anti-India and anti-Hindu sermons. Bhindranwale also had a message for the Prime Minister, ‘Peace and violence are from the same root. We are like a matchstick that is made of wood and is cold. But when you strike, it flames.’

Bhindranwale attacked Mrs. Gandhi, calling her disparagingly, ‘the Brahmin’s daughter’ and commented on the slavery of the Sikhs, ‘I shall tell you how we are slaves in our own country. If a Hindu dies there is an inquiry. If a Sikh dies there is no inquiry........If a Hindu is killed it is not excusable but if a Sikh is killed the inquiry is scuttled.’

Khushwant Singh also describes Bhindranwale as no great orator, but his rough, rustic vocabulary was full of disparaging references to Hindus as *dhotian wale* (dhoti wearers), *topian wale* (cap wearers); and references to Mrs. Gandhi as *Bahmani* (Brahmin woman), *Panditan di dhee* (daughter of pandits) went down well with his audiences. He acquired the charisma of an acerbic-tongued saint-warrior.

On the one side was Sant Longowal representing the less vociferous majority and wanting more provincial autonomy, true federal structure within the Union of India based upon the Anandpur Sahib Resolutions. On the other side was Bhindranwale and equally violent Babbar Khalsa and Akhand Kirtani Jatha, fired with the common ideology of establishing a separate Sikh State. M.J. Akbar analysed this situation as, “What the moderate Akalis really wanted was a ‘victory’ over Delhi which would enable them to take the

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309 Mark Tully & Satish Jacob: *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle*, p. 112.
initiative away from the extremists by restoring their credibility as ‘champions of the Sikhs’. He went on to say, "Even a blind government in Delhi could have seen that and offered a way out."  

“The central government not only was unwilling to make significant concessions to the moderate Akalis, which would reinforce their credibility in relation to more extremist groups, but its leaders refused to take action against Bhindranwale and other groups.”

Sant Bhindranwale moved from the Guru Nanak Niwas to the Akal Takht with his retinue of gunmen on 15 December 1983. It happened with the tacit approval of SGPC Chief, G.S. Tohra though Sant Longowal opposed this idea. Once inside Akal Takht they began to accumulate arms and fortify the Akal Takht.

On 7 February 1984, on the eve of the Punjab bandh called by the Akali Dal, the Prime Minister met 14 Opposition leaders at short notice and decided to invite the Akalis to resume the tripartite talks. On 8 February 1984, the Akalis organized a bandh to demonstrate their strength and their trust in non-violent agitation. It was a success. On 14-15 February 1984, the tripartite talks were held but were never concluded as violence broke out following a call

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for a *bandh* in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh by the Hindu Suraksha Samiti.\(^{316}\)

To contain the situation the Central Government declared whole of Punjab a disturbed area, giving the police even wider powers of arrest. The National Security Act was also amended, allowing police to hold people for a year without bringing them before a court. The vast powers made no difference to Bhindranwale because of the inability of the government to sum up the political will to force them to do so.

On 28 March, 1984, Harbans Singh Manchanda, the pro-Congress President of the Delhi Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee was assassinated in Delhi. On 2 April, the day the new powers were given to the police, Harbans Lal Khanna, the BJP leader was shot dead in Amritsar. And 8 persons were killed during his funeral procession on the day following. On 3 April, 1984, there was the killing of V.N. Tiwari, a professor of Punjabi who was a Congress (I) Member of Parliament. He was shot in his house in Chandigarh. Then came another attack which showed the whole of India that no special powers could help the Government or the police and that Bhindranwale was above the law.

On 12 May 1984, Ramesh Chander, the son and successor of Lala Jagat Narain and editor of the Hind Samachar group was murdered in his office in Jalandhar.\(^{317}\) The Government’s failure to protect a target as prominent as Ramesh Chander was a near fatal blow to India’s confidence in Mrs. Gandhi’s ability to control Punjab.


On 2 June 1984 the Janata leader Om Parkash Bagga was killed. From 4 August 1982, when the Akali morcha was started upto 3 June 1984, there were over 1200 violent incidents in which 410 persons were killed and more than 1180 injured. From 1 January 1984 to 3 June 1984, there were over 775 violent incidents in which 298 persons were killed and more than 525 injured.\(^{318}\)

The contingency plans were being made for a military routing of Bhindranwale and his retinue of men from Golden Temple in Amritsar. This was the brain child of Rajiv Gandhi, Arun Nehru and Arun Singh who drew up the invasion blueprint. In January 1984, Indira stood up in Parliament and accused Pakistan of aiding Sikhs in the Punjab. Then, the Home Minister, P.C.Sethi stood up and reassured the house that force would not be used in Amritsar, since Sethi had no inkling of the invasion Rajiv and his team were planning. Neither was Giani Zail Singh, who hitherto had been so closely involved in policy making in the Punjab. Giani Zail Singh claimed that he was not informed of the invasion plan until the end of May 1984.\(^{319}\)

Katherine Frank described the situation in February 1984 as, ‘In order to keep the Hindu vote, Indira knew that the ‘Punjab problem’ had to be resolved......If she had to resort to military action, she knew that conditions in the State had to deteriorate further before she would be justified in sending in the army.’\(^{320}\) Indira Gandhi finally gave approval for action after making up her mind in April 1984. On 23 May, Sant Longowal declared that a morcha for non-cooperation


would start on 3 June 1984. Indira Gandhi sent her emissaries for a negotiated settlement to which the Akali leaders were open to discuss but it soon became clear that Sant Bhindranwale would settle for nothing less than a separate Sikh State. On the night of 3 June the Punjab was cut off from the rest of the country and movement inside the State brought to a standstill to prevent an uprising. The crucial Army action in the Golden Temple complex was over before the night fall of 6 June 1984. It is said that the action from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came ‘too late’ and it proved to be ‘too much’.\footnote{For Text of Anandpur Sahib Resolutions. List of Violent Incidents in Punjab. Text of Negotiated Settlement, Text of Broadcast of Indira Gandhi. Government of India, \textit{White Paper on the Punjab Agitation}, New Delhi, 1984.}