

Lahore (Pakistan): Vigil in Memory of Salman Taseer Attacked by Armed Religious Fanatics

Monday 5 January 2015, by [TARIO Farooq](#) (Date first published: 5 January 2015).

Syeda Deep had sent me the message to attend the vigil in memory of Salman Taseer, former governor of Punjab murder by his own guard on 4th January 2011 when he tried to defend a working class Christian women accused of blasphemy.

While I was attending on the day a Lahore general body meeting of Awami Workers Party along Abid Hasan Minto, president AWP, I was reminded by Marvi Sirmed to be there at Liberty Chouck sharp at 5pm.

Syeda Deep and Marvi Sirmed are two long standing social and political activists and have led campaigns against spread of religious fundamentalism. Both have been threatened several times not by fanatics but also by intelligence agencies. We have worked closely on many occasions and I had great respect for these two brave unprecedented women.

I had already made up my mind to attend and announced in the end of meeting that if anyone wants to join me, two more including veteran trade union leader Bashir Zafar volunteered to come along.

It was always dangerous to be in such activities but we are used to it. I and Syeda Deep have been organizing Bhaghat Singh memorial meeting and a direct eye contact with religious fanatics who were there on many occasion to frighten us.

As we arrived at Liberty Chouck, there was handful of activist including Irfan Mufti of South Asian Partnership, Abdullah Malik advocate, Samson Salamat and Zafar Malik.

We decided to start the vigil in time and started lightening candles. I and Syeda Deep were sitting on the pavement and helping to light the candles. Rests were raising slogans against religious fundamentalism and Taliban. Few media live coverage vans were standing and a lot of photographs were being taken by print media photographers.

Very surprisingly, there was no police present around the place. Normally, any such event would be littered with police.

Few beard men came and stood next to me. Syeda Deep felt the danger. She asked me to enquire who are they. I asked another comrade to check and they told that they are with Tahir Ashrafi, a mullah known to speak against fundamentalists and that they are here to join us and Maulana would also be coming.

They started raising slogans along with us against religious fundamentalism.

Suddenly, from the back of mine where the portrait of Salaman Tasser was, a lot of noise was heard. As I looked back, few men with beard and one with a covering his face started attacking the portrait. A panic was the natural outcome. My instinct feeling was those few men with beard who posed as Tahir Ashrafi supporters have camouflaged and attacked.

I was pushed aside by one. We started dispersing as there was no way of resisting against armed men with AK 47, revolvers and sticks. We were only few dozen activists at the time of attack. I didn't go far and tried to assess the situation. The attackers were there for fifteen minutes.

When media persons told them not to attack them as they are from media, they didn't listen and beat them. They tried to kidnap Rai Shahnawaz, a senior journalist working for Express television. I know him for long time. His father is member of Awami Workers Party and long standing left activists. We recently met at AWP Murree Socialist School where he was accompanying his father. Rai Shahnawaz resisted and they were not able to take him with them but he got head injuries.

The fanatics attacked GEO and Capital television live coverage vans and broke one camera as well. Another camera man got his finger broken as result of the attack.

I saw Irfan Mufi chasing a motor cycle with three on the back and asking a police van to follow the attackers. I also ran towards them, but they were quick to leave. They were the last one to leave the place from the attackers.

Police van did not move and chased this motorcycle. We started to reassemble. We raised slogans against police inability to catch them or to reach the place in time. Gulberg police station is just two minutes walk from the scene.

More people started coming in. There were few hundreds. We raised slogans and were there for over one hour. Tahir Ashrafi also came in after the attack. He stole the show. All media was there. It has become a routine of Pakistan commercial media to give a lot of attention to these Mullahs. We were also interviewed but were not aired. But Mullah Ashrafi made headline in all the news channels after the incident.

I asked the comrades to go to police station to register a case. Seven of us including Madeeha Gohar, Marvi Sirred, Syeda Deep, Samson Salamat, Abdullah Malik and Zafar Malik became complainants and presented an application to register a case.

Till now, after 15 hours of the incident, we have not heard that a case is registered. Instead, we were asked to postpone a planned rally today by police. We have refused to postpone the rally today.

The fight against religious fundamentalism will go ahead despite all these fascists attacks.

Farooq Tariq
