

Pakistan Left Cultural Festival: We won the match, The Faiz Man Mela Story

Monday 16 February 2015, by [TARIO Farooq](#) (Date first published: 16 February 2015).

This year two days celebrations of Faiz 104th birthday were dedicated to Peshawar martyrs. Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984) was a prominent left-wing intellectual, revolutionary poet, and one of the most regarded poets of the Urdu language (he also wrote poetry in the Punjabi language). Marxist, he was member of the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM).

Cricket in India and Pakistan is like football in Europe. When Pakistan and India play a match, streets are deserted. If it is a world cup match between the two, there is more emotions involved. Yesterday on Sunday 15th February, it was such a day.

We were advised again and again to postpone the proposed Faiz Aman Mela on the same day and time as the match. It was just a coincidence that the two were taking place at the same time. We were not crazy adventurist activists to do it consciously. However it was too late to change the event.

Our response was to double the mobilisation efforts. We put up 10,000 posters all over Lahore. It was good to see some of LEFT posters on the city walls normally full of religious posters. Flexes with event advertisement were hanged at important roads of Lahore and all that without permission of the local administration. We could not afford to pay. However, the Lahore administration showed some respect towards Faiz and did not remove our flexes; we were banking on it and were proved right to some extent.

Our two days celebrations of Faiz 104th birthday were dedicated to Peshawar martyrs. On 14th February our seminar, "Faiz, class struggle and religious extremism" was not with a fully packed Alhumra Hall, however decent participation did not frustrate us. All roads leading to Alhumra Hall on main Mall Road were blocked by police after the religious parties brought thousands to protest against caricatures, an effort by fanatics to rebuild their lost grounds after Pashawer school children massacre by Taliban.

Abid Hasan Minto chaired the seminar while Timur Rehman, Jawad Ahmad, Furrukh Suhail Goindi, Dr Saadet Saeed, Dr Ali Hashmi (grand son of Faiz Ahmad Faiz) and Nighat Saeed Khan spoke on the occasion. It was great debate to counter effectively the rising challenge of religious fundamentalism.

Our event on 15th February 2015 was main worrying point. I had opposed all the suggestions to postpone or delay the event. I had some confidence that we can make this event successful if we are able to convey our message to all supporters and friends. Even my son commented just two days

earlier that you are making a mistake, “no one will come, and they will all watch the match”. I told him “let us see”.

Commercial media was 24 hours on the Pakistan India cricket match. All the hidden chauvinism of some liberal commentators was also witnessed.

A sudden auto lock on my car with most of event related items inside at 9am on Sunday morning was not a “good omen”. However, I never believed in these non senses. We found a car mechanic to fix it.

When the first working class family from Pakistan Mint workers union arrived at 12 pm at the Open Air Theater, I was relieved of the pressure. Here was a blind woman with her husband and two children with already cooked lunch packed in a plastic bag and some oranges. I knew the family for long time. We hugged and that was the beginning of the arrivals of the ordinary people of Lahore and surrounding areas to this hill top cultural place built by Bhutto in the seventies. The party had begun.

We had planned to start the drama “heer” by Huma Safdar at one pm. A day earlier, I got a call from newlywed comrade Hashim Bin Rashid, “are we starting in time? What about the cricket match?” I told him “yes in time and be there in time”. His partner Sarah Kazmi was a lead singer in “Heer” drama, the great love story of Punjab.

It was only a half an hour delay to start the Faiz Aman Mela, organized by a committee on the same name, a sort of platform for different left groups, radical individuals, social movements and organizations. The Open Theater had a capacity of over 2 to 3000. It was already half full.

For the first time, we had three segment of the event, Drama, Moshaira and songs. Salima Hashmi, daughter of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, one of the great radical left poets in the Indian subcontinent, suggested including the item. She offered to sponsor the cost of the drama that mean only the travel and other minor expenditure. There is no commercialism in Faiz Aman Mela. All are working on volunteer basis.

It was our match with a cricket match. Pakistani cricket team was putting up a hard fight against a massive total of over 300 runs by Indian team, and match was becoming more interesting. However, there was a never stop flow of Faiz lovers climbing up to the main open space. By the end of a great show by Huma Safdar team that went over one and half hour, the hall was almost full. There was a lot of clap for the young artists of the drama.

Radical Moshaira was a routine segment of the Mela. However, there was more input by this time by Anjman Taraqi Pasan Musanfeen (Progressive Writers Association) who invited some of great poets of Pakistan to the event.

Outside the main hall, there were three book stalls. And several groups were distributing their leaflets and their literature. Our subsidized tea (Rupees 10 only) was a great hit. We sold over 600 cups with gratis tea to our artists, security police and event management members. Our subsidized Sabzi Beryani (Rupees 30) was finished within first hour. There were also commercial stalls selling drinks and tea, only soft one, and also many vendors making a good for the day.

Moshaira was appreciated very much. Dr Khalid Javed Jan conducted the segment, he has written some of the great radical poems including “Main Baghi Houn” (I am a rebel), chaired by known poet Aslam Gurdaspuri, over 20 poets recited their revolutionary poetry with dedication to Pashawer martyrs. It was a peak time. But peak time never ended till the end of the event at 8pm. The hall was overflowing.

I was told that outside, there is no parking place around one kilometer of the venue. Hundreds of motor cycles and cars were parked with great difficulty in finding the space.

It was consistent arrival and departure of the peoples. More were coming in than those leaving. A real atmosphere of festivity in the background of fear was witnessed.

We had to make several personal appearances to police and administration officials and finally succeeded in receiving the official permission to hold the event. The administration was rightly hesitating to grant permission at the time when religious fanatics were all out in carrying out terrorist activities. We had made special measures of security with check posts and so on. Our volunteers were making all efforts along the police officials to make a fear free atmosphere.

Laal Band and Jawad Ahmad, Anait Abid and Adeel Burki were our main artists for the last segment. We should have finished by 6pm as planned but we could not.

Laal Band and Jawad Ahmad were at their best. They both made all efforts to present some of the great poetry of Faiz in a way loved by over 4000 present. Jawad Ahmad also presented a case for Socialism in his talk before his singing. We had the great presence of Jupiter, who had provided us their services of sound system. Jupiter was and is an informal academy for many singers making at the top of Pakistan hot chart. Jawad Ahmad is one of them.

I was asked by the committee to make a political presentation, the only political speech of the event. I raised the issue of religious fanatic challenge and a need to fight back. It went ok and I could see a great love in many eyes who were clapping while I was speaking.

Saira Banu and Shazia Khan was the co host of the whole event. Shazia Khan, a social activist, is general secretary of Awami Workers Party Lahore and Saira Banu is member of AWP. Both young women activist did a good job in making the whole event successful.

We had won the match although unfortunately Pakistan had lost the match. There some compensation for all those who turned up after the match to the venue.

Organizing Faiz Aman Mela is a passion for me personally since 1992. However we do it to build the lost Left traditions. We do a process of meeting of several groups without any inch of traditional left sectarianism. That has won us a great credibility.

The first task to begin organizing the Mela is collecting funds. I normally write a finance appeal and send to all friends. With few telephone calls and visits, we collected over 300,000 Rupees to organize the whole two days event. Ahumra Hall and Punjab Arts Council provided us the space free of cost. A last minute finance gap was filled by few call of Furrukh Sohail Goindi, a friend of mine since 1986, when I returned to Pakistan from 8 years of exile. He has built a massive publication centre called Jumhoori Publication (Democratic Publications).

I personally spent almost two weeks in organizing this event with full cooperation of AWP and other Left activists. However it was worthwhile. We succeeded to some extent in motivating many for progressive ideas and broke some of skepticism, "left is dead, not much can be done" we proved the left is not dead and something can be done in the back ground of the most dark period for the growth of Left ideas.

Thank you friends: for making donations and coming to the event.

Farooq Tariq

