

In Remembrance

Shafqat Tanvir Mirza (1932-2012)

Shafqat Tanvir Mirza, a senior Pakistani journalist, writer and newspaper columnist passed away in Lahore on November 20, 2012. He had been suffering from lung cancer since the beginning of 2012.

With his demise, the movement for the promotion of Punjabi language in Pakistan has lost its most vocal advocate. Throughout his long career as one of the senior most Urdu and English journalists in Pakistan, where Punjabi is not taught in schools and Punjabi journalism is nonexistent, Shafqat Tanvir Mirza never wavered in his unfashionable and uncompromising stand in support of the Punjabi language. He distinguished himself in scholarly circles in Pakistan as an outstanding research scholar of the Punjabi language and became known as an encyclopaedia of Punjabi language, literature, culture and Punjab history. He used his highly respected credentials as a journalist and intellectual for his untiring promotion of the Punjabi language. For the past two decades, his weekly columns 'Punjabi Themes' and 'Punjabi Books' in the leading Pakistani English newspaper, *Dawn*, were the most forceful voices for the defence and promotion of the Punjabi language. Except for his weekly columns in *Dawn*, it was rare to hear even a few whispers in support of Punjabi language in the Pakistani media. During the last couple of years of his life, he was engaged in strongly opposing the People's Party government's plan to split the Punjab province and carve out a Saraiki province in south Punjab. The void created by the death of Shafqat Tanvir Mirza will be deeply felt by Punjabi activists in Pakistan for a long time to come.

Shafqat Tanvir Mirza was born on February 6, 1932 at Domeli, district Jhelum. He began his school education in Chakwal and later moved around with his family to different parts of Punjab, attending schools in Khushab, Wazirabad, Bahawalpur and Campbellpur. He graduated from Gordon College, Rawalpindi.

He started his life long career in journalism with an Urdu-language newspaper *Tameer* in 1949, while he was still a student in Gordon College, and he continued to work as a journalist until almost the end of his life. He joined Radio Pakistan in 1956 but was fired from his job after he raised his voice against General Ayub Khan's martial law in 1958. After that he worked for the *Civil and Military Gazette* until it was closed in 1964. He then joined the *Daily Imroze* which was the leading Urdu newspaper of that time. The *Daily Imroze* and *Pakistan Times* were run by the National Press Trust and some of the leading journalists and writers of Pakistan were associated with the National Press Trust newspapers. Here Shafqat Tanvir Mirza became part of a group of

luminaries that included Chiragh Hasan Hasrat, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Addullah Malik, Hamid Akhter, Mannu Bhai, Zaheer Baber and many others.

In 1970 Shafqat Tanvir Mirza launched the Pakistan People's Party's newspaper *Mussawat* with Manno Bhai and Hanif Ramey but after a few years, he moved back to *Daily Imroze*. In 1978, he was fired from *Daily Imroze* and was put behind bars for opposing General Zia's military government. He was arrested multiple times for his campaigns for freedom of speech and protests against military regimes. He spent his jail time in Central Jail, Karachi, Kot Lakhpat, Lahore and Central Jail, Bahawalpur. His wife was also arrested for protesting against the death sentence of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and spent some time with him at the Central Jail, Karachi. He worked for *Nawa-i-Waqt* for a while and regularly wrote for the left leaning weekly journal *Viewpoint* during General Zia's regime. After General Zia's death, he rejoined *Daily Imroze* and he was its editor when it was closed down in 1991. Since then he was a regular columnist for *Dawn*.

Shafqat Tanvir Mirza was a prolific writer. Besides writing several books in Punjabi, Urdu and English on Punjabi literature and history of Punjab, he also translated a number of works from English to Punjabi. Some of his important books are: *Tehreek-i-Azadi Vich Punjab da Hissa* (Punjabi), *Adab Raheen Punjab de Tareekh* (Punjabi), *Akhia Sachal Sarmast Nay* (Punjabi), *Resistance Themes in Punjabi Literature* (English), *Shah Hussain, A Biography* (Urdu), *Lahu Suhag* (Punjabi translation of *Blood Wedding* by Federico Garcia Lorca), *Booha Koeena* (Punjabi translation of *No Exit* by Jean Paul Sartre). He was awarded the Presidential Award of Pride of Performance.

Shafqat Tanvir Mirza is survived by his wife Tamkinat Ara, and daughter, Tabashra Bano.

Safir Rammah

December 2012