

Pakistan - More than a student march: Left-wing organisers carry higher political ambitions

Thursday 5 December 2019, by [GABOL Imran](#) (Date first published: 4 December 2019).

LAHORE: The recently-held Student Solidarity March, which led to the state levelling sedition charges against its organisers and some prominent participants, was not just a simple march as its title denotes. Despite the fact that it was spearheaded by students and left-leaning youths, including teachers, with demands related to students, it was not without political ambitions at the large scale at the national level. Held in 50 cities across the country, it was organised with the aim to launch a left-wing political party, led by the youth, instead of old, tested and tried horses.

Given the nature of slogans raised during the march, like ‘*jab lal lal lehraey ga, tou hosh thekany aey ga*’ [1] and ‘*surkh ha,i surkh hai, Asia surkh hai*’ [2] and in support of freedom, many questions were raised about the reasons and need for these slogans, signifying something more important underlying than the apparent objectives of the march. Everyone in the country was thinking why the students had started chanting these slogans repeatedly in every city of the country.

Most of the students of current era in a country, having its right-wing mainstream population, don’t know about this *Lal* (red) factor as compared to the youth of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s who used to chant this slogan in every campus of the country. To know the *Lal* factor, one would have to read about eight-day strike in Petrograd (Saint Petersburg), which resulted in Russian Revolution in 1917.

There was discussion in the country, especially on social media, about the significance of wording of the sloganeering and speeches of the march leaders. Some were terming it as an attempt to dislodge the government and defame the country, others termed it a challenge the religion while others saw empowerment of women and youth. Some others were also declaring it an attempt to defame the establishment of the country.

After receiving the immense response and participation by youth, Ammar Ali Jan, the main organize, had written a facebook post, which hints at the objectives other than the students’ issues.

“This is only the beginning. A new possibility has emerged in Pakistan. It is the possibility of a people’s politics that is not run by feudals, industrialists or the establishment. It is a politics based on grassroots campaigns run by ordinary citizens, in which the voiceless are finally heard.

We will have to do a lot more to deepen our work among the masses. We resolve to continue fighting for social and economic rights to the best of our abilities. With unity, discipline and kindness, I am certain we will win.”

Dawn spoke to a number of organisers of the Student Solidarity March to dig deep into the whole affair to find the actual reason for launching the march regarding the student issues which had existed here for decades.

The speakers say one of the main reasons of the march was to mobilise students for revival of the student unions. They say there is also discussion among the organisers and participants of the march to launch a political party, focusing on the left as the capitalism has failed to move the humanity ahead despite reaching its culmination point.

“The political party will give representation to everyone and it would focus progress of the marginalised communities and segments of society, including women, transgender persons, labour and the minorities,” says one of the organisers.

They claim the party would give equal representation to all segments of society and there would be no discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion and social status.

“We will demand end to all the discriminatory laws against women, children and the minorities,” they add.

However, these young student leaders, who did not want to be identified, think that time is not ripe yet to launch a party right now as they would first want to continue student mobilisation for next six to eight months.

The old comrades, however, have a different view as they think that all the mainstream political parties are busy mud-slinging instead of focusing on the issues of the public. “It is the right time to launch the party to provide the public with an alternative,” they argue.

They say that the state has been continuing with a ban on student unions for the last 35 years although the Public Sector Universities Act, 1973 supports student unions and there is no platform to address their grievances. They say revival of student unions would give legitimacy to all the measures of the universities which they consider illegal without student participation.

On the other hand, the state while feeling the rising sentiments of the youth and left-wing movement has booked the organisers and participants in the Student Solidarity March under sedition charges. They also took Alamgir Wazir, a speaker in the march and a former leader of Pakhtun Council of the Punjab University, into custody.

Talking to Dawn, Ammar Ali Jan has termed the mobilisation of the students whose part was the Nov 29th march as also a civil rights movement and they are focusing implementation of the articles of the constitution related to rights of the people. He says these articles were included in the constitution due to efforts of the left since 1968 onwards.

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P.S.

• Published in Dawn, December 4th, 2019:

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1520322/more-than-a-student-march-left-wing-organisers-carry-higher-political-ambitions>

Footnotes

[1] Now the red will turn red, then the conscious will come to rest.

[2] Yes, red, Asia is red.