

# ਪੰਜਾਬ ਲੋਕ ਬੋਲੀ ਮੇਲਾ

## Punjab Lok Boli Mela

some basic facts





This booklet has been published by Punjab Lok RaHS and Punjab Lok Sujag for circulation among its supporters. It provides basic information about Punjab Lok Boli Mela, a cultural festival organized every year by the two organizations in collaboration with a host of other organizations and individuals.

The information is arranged in the form of answers to these questions:

Why Punjab Lok Boli Mela?

What makes Punjab Lok Boli Mela?

Who participates in Punjab Lok Boli Mela?

Where is Punjab Lok Boli Mela held?

When is Punjab Lok Boli Mela held?

How can you join?

For more information please contact any of our offices.

Details are given below.

July 2008



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**Punjab Lok RaHS**



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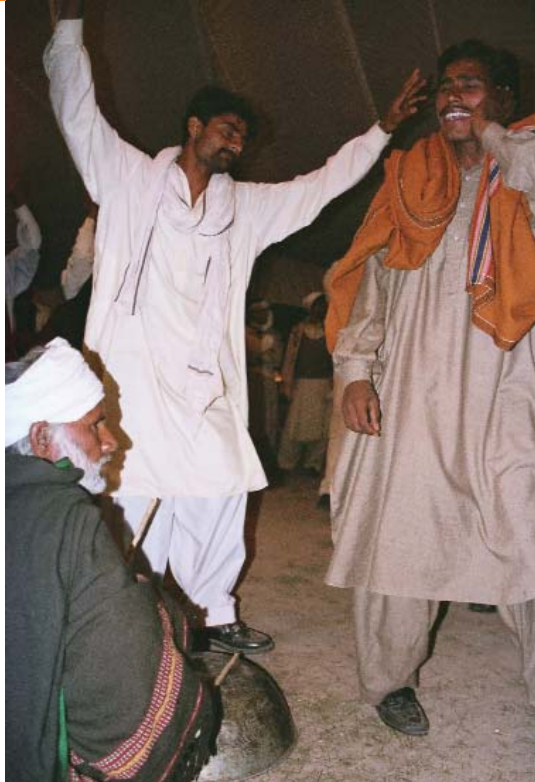


# WHY

## Punjab Lok Boli Mela?

Mela, literally meaning a festival, is a long standing tradition of this land. A high point of our cultural lives and we had had quite a number of those. In fact our culture has been moving and progressing from one mela to the next mela. Some were pinned around seasonal markets while others had an anniversary of a revered poet or that of a popular hero as their focal points. Melas hosted a huge ensemble of independent artists and attracted massive number of attendants from all walks of life. They facilitated the creative synthesis of the myriad of social, economic and cultural relations that abound a thriving society. They provided the artists open space and free opportunity to interact with people. The artists not only commented on society through their varied modes of expressions, they helped people dream and





aspire for higher values and achievements.

Punjab Lok Boli Mela (Punjab Mother Language Festival) is an attempt to awaken the now snoozing tradition of melas. It is organized by Punjab Lok Raahs in collaboration with Punjab Lok Sujag, the two organizations working for the language and cultural rights of the people of Punjab.

The word mela originates from the Punjabi word *mel* - meeting, interaction, coupling. True to their name the melas are a juxtaposition of open social, cultural and economic spaces. Their sole objective is to facilitate *mel*. This is quite contrary to the conferences that are obsessed with desired results, dictate the process and pre-judge the outcome. We believe that our language and culture need a mela to move forward.

Punjab Lok Boli Mela is a celebration of rich and diverse language and culture of this vast land. Battered by the colonial rule and caught into the new global political and economic quagmire, our language and culture yet form the sharpest features of our identity. The Boli Mela is an effort to search and resurrect our identity. It is an attempt at understanding and acknowledging the new realities that our language and culture face today. It is an opportunity for the artists and intellectuals to sit together, exchange views, interact with one another and with the people and dream and plan about a better future.

Boli Mela is a means of promoting self expression. It provides opportunities to thousands of aspiring artists to perform, display and share their creative endeavors with fellow artists and a mass of people. Through this interaction the Boli Mela aspires to facilitate a synthesis of creative endeavors of the youth. Boli Mela also offers the new generation a flavor of our traditional art forms that have become almost extinct. It aims to help new artists place themselves in a historical perspective, relate to their traditions and link with the real and live people.



# WHAT

makes Punjab Lok Boli Mela?

Punjab Lok Boli Mela has five major components:


1: Performances by traditional artists

There are a host of traditional art forms from story telling to theater and from playing drums to heer singing. Lok RaHS conducts field surveys to look for traditional artists some times as a planned program and at others as a secondary activity attached to some other field work. RaHS records their work and also facilitates them to re-enact their work so that it could be recorded and assessed. We maintain liaison with these artists and invite them to perform at the annual Lok Boli Mela.

Singers and music makers invariably occupy the center stage and dance troupes become the heartbeat of the Mela.

While traditional theater, RaHS, also wins some crowd response to traditional puppets have been lackluster.





Perhaps because these artists are least enthusiastic about their art. They have taken up other professions and puppeteering is only a part time undertaking for them now. They have inherited all of their props from their grandparents and none has acquired the skill to make a new puppet. Story telling is another art form that finds itself in trouble in Mela but that is solely because the Mela is too festive to hold a rather somber gathering. Many other art forms like mimicry, dholay and maheya singing do not need a formal arrangement and sneak into various Mela venues and climb up into many stage programs. We have arranged for the now abandoned kachee takees or roving cinemas but that didn't click because of legal barriers to screening of the movies that people would have liked to watch.

#### 2: Performances by young amateur artists

The young artists are grouped into three sections; school age artists, college and university age artists and community based youth groups. They are engaged in six elaborate programs. Two of these are theater festivals, one for college and university students and the other for school children. Three others are competitions and one is a five day stage program.

Rahs works with schools, colleges and universities across the Punjab year round to help them learn the art of theater making and produce and perform plays. Lok Boli Mela is the pinnacle of this work. At Boli Mela there are four separate venues that simultaneously host plays from these groups for five days and nights. Many of them are produced with the assistance of Lok Rahs but there are many others who work on their own and perform at the Boli Mela.

A stage program from 9 in the morning to 3 in afternoon runs through all five days where school troupes perform plays, music, dances and other shows.

At each Boli Mela, Rahs and Sujag organize at least three

art competitions. One, Laikh Rachna, essay writing in mother tongue competition for school children from all over the Punjab. Two, Rangan Likan, the drawing and painting competition for younger school children from a select group of schools from various districts. The third is the photography competition for amateurs and students of colleges and universities. We had experimented with organizing singing competition and a poetry competition for college and university students but had discontinued it for the time being for lack of expertise that the organization of these competitions requires.

The work on competitions starts four months in advance, a committee for each is formed and rules are drafted and published in the form of brochures which are then widely circulated. The concluding activity of these competitions is held at the Boli Mela.

3: Rahs and Sujag organizes seminars and meetings on various subjects at the Boli Mela. A seminar on issues faced by language and culture in our country has been a part of all the Melas. Another seminar is held on gender related issues and women participants and resource persons are mobilized to take part. We also offer the Mela venue to other organizations to hold seminars and meetings on their own issues and subjects. For example, an organization from Sahiwal organized a seminar of issues of bonded labor at the 3rd Boli Mela. Another held a meeting of representatives of farmer organizations from all over the country at the same Boli Mela.

#### 4: Exhibitions and displays

We make arrangements at the Boli Mela for the artists and craftpersons to display their work. The organizers put at display the work of youth produced during competitions. It has however been not possible for us to put on display work by senior and professional artists as it requires extra security and care which we find difficult to

*Continued on page 10*

## 1 Performances by traditional artists



Music



Theater



Dance



Puppet



Story telling



Mushaira

## 2 Performances by young amateur artists



### a: Theater festivals

#### ■ Baal RaHS Mela

Theater by school children

#### ■ Sanjha RaHS Mela

Theater by university/college students and youth groups



### b: Competitions

#### ■ Laikh Rachna

Essay writing in mother tongue by school children

#### ■ Rangan Likan

Drawing and painting by school children

#### ■ Photography

Photography by students and amateur photographers

### c: Stage programs

Skits, dances, music and other stage shows by kids



### 3 Seminars, lectures and meetings



A meeting of Punjabi writers from India and Pakistan at first Lok Boli Mela.



A lecture on Dying Languages by two renowned linguists at 2nd Lok Boli Mela.



A meeting of farmer organizations from all over Pakistan at 3rd Lok Boli Mela.



A seminar on issues faced by women in Punjab at 3rd Lok Boli Mela.

### 4 Exhibitions and displays



An exhibition of paintings by local artists at first Lok Boli Mela.



A display of selected works by school children at 2nd Lok Boli Mela.



The book fair at 3rd Lok Boli Mela drew large crowds.



The stilt walker from Holland was a big attraction at first Boli Mela.



## 5 Mela Bazaar



Rides of all sorts dominate the sky line of all melas and Boli Melas are no exception.



A number of companies compete with each other in offers and displays at the Boli Melas.



Most businesses find the massively attended Boli Melas as a unique opportunity to reach out.



The Bazaar at Boli Mela gets sleepless nights as the visitors keep on thronging.



Some companies develop elaborate programs for Boli Mela to make the maximum out of it.



Small local businesses specially vendors of food items love the Boli Mela bonanza.



Continued from page 6

achieve in the open environment of Mela.

5: Mela Bazaar

A separate area at the Mela venue is set as a Bazaar. The Mela sponsors set up their stalls here. Some of them now participate with elaborate programs specially developed for the Boli Mela. These are executed by their teams who spend the Mela days and nights there. Local businesses and food vendors also get a separate enclosure at the Boli Mela.

The Mela is a five day and night event. We prefer to start it on Friday morning so that the weekend could fall in the middle. This facilitates the participants from other cities and areas to join in.

A typical Mela day starts with school programs. The main five-hour long stage program is hosted in the main big venue while school theater teams perform plays in separate and exclusive venues. Puppet and magic shows are held in other venues. Bazaar and exhibitions also open up in the morning and continue till late in the night.

For the afternoons various seminars and meetings are scheduled in different venues. In the evenings the main big venue is occupied by music makers while theater makers perform in separate tents. Dance troupes just need to find enough space anywhere in the Mela to perform. Music makers hold repeat performances in open the next day.



Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
9 am		<b>Main venue:</b> Stage programs by schools and concluding activities of competitions		
10	Morning sessions	<b>Theater venues:</b> Plays by schools Puppet shows Magic shows		
11				
12 noon				
1 pm		<b>Bazaar and exhibitions</b>		
2				
3	Afternoon sessions	<b>Theater venues:</b> Seminars and meetings		
4		<b>Open air:</b> Dance performances Repeat performances by music makers		
5				
6		<b>Bazaar and exhibitions</b>		
7		<b>Main venue:</b> Music		
8	Evening sessions	<b>Theater venues:</b> Plays by students and other groups Puppet shows Magic shows		
9				
10				
11				
12 night		<b>Open air:</b> Dance performances		
		<b>Bazaar and exhibitions</b>		



# WHO

participates in Punjab Lok Boli Mela?

## People

People throng the Boli Mela in thousands. Villagers drive in on tractor trollies and ride on bus roofs. Locals come on their vehicles but most have to walk to the Mela in groups as the local transport invariably fails to meet the demand. Friends in distant towns and cities make car pools or hire vans and buses. Participation is massive, thorough and round the clock. Mornings are filled by school based programs. These children then become volunteer advertisers of the Mela and come back in the evenings with their families. Traffic control and crowd management becomes a mind boggling task for the organizers in the evenings. No less than 20,000 visit the Mela venue every day.



## Children

200 schools, half for boys and half for girls, are approached for participation in Laikh Rachna, the essay writing competition. 200 others participate in Rangan Likan, the drawing and painting competition. The invitation for Laikh Rachna reaches 100,000 boys and girls and for Rangan Likan gets to 30,000. Ten schools present half hour stage programs each days, a total of 50 in the Mela. Half of them are from nearby towns while others travel from various districts. Eight other schools perform plays in separate theater venues. In all 15,000 school children visit the Mela venue in five days.



## Women

Public events in Pakistan are generally out of bounds for women but not the Boli Mela. We make efforts to ensure their participation in each and every sphere of the Mela. Not only girls from schools and colleges take part in the activities, common women also throng the venues in bands and family groups. Participation of women is invited and encouraged through our publicity campaigns and then we make extra arrangements to ensure a secure enough environment for women to be there. Almost a third of young artists and children and a tenth intellectuals and general public are females.



## Intellectuals

300 intellectuals, poets, writers and activists take part in one or the other Mela activity each day. They come to attend seminars and meetings, mushaira, to meet each other and, of course, to enjoy the Mela. Many come as part of groups representing literary and other organizations. They come from all corners of the Punjab. Delegates from Indian Punjab also join in when they are able to secure visas. The Mela has reached the diaspora as well and each year enthusiasts fly from Europe, US and Canada to be part of the Boli Mela.

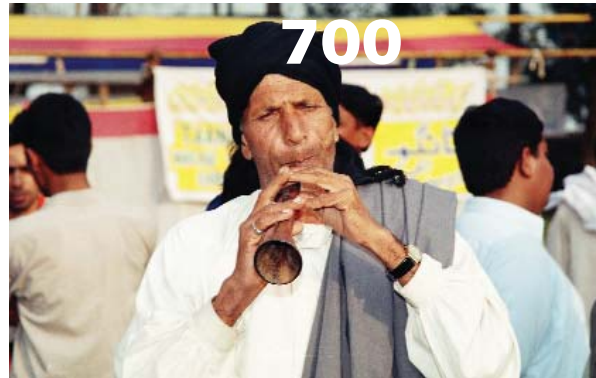




## Traditional artists

80 singers and musicians perform on each of the five Mela evenings. They come from all over the Punjab. Some are solo performers while others come in troupes. Some are exclusively music makers while others have a mix group of dancers, singers and musicians.

Performances by six teams of dancers and traditional theater makers are also part of daily schedules. Music makers occupy the main venue while others are given exclusive smaller venues. Most of the singers and dancers prefer to repeat their performances the next day in open space. Over all 700 traditional artists perform at Mela.



## Young artists

900 child artists contribute in Mela. Around 200 in theater, 500 in stage programs and 100 best performers each of the two competitions. Some of them are trained by RaHS while others depend on their own resources. Invitation for participation in theater festival and other competitions is sent to over 50 colleges and universities. Groups from around 20 institutions make it to

Mela. RaHS works with five or more groups months in advance to produce plays for the Mela. Creative efforts of 300 of college and university students form part of various Mela programs and it is growing with each Mela.



## Businesses

10 big businesses like banks, telecommunication and consumer goods manufacturers form the core of Mela Bazaar. Many hire teams of performers and develop special programs to attract Mela attendants to their stalls. They are the one of the major contributors to 'the buzz' of the Mela. Around 100 small, local businesses fill up all the Mela empty spaces. Some of them are

specially invited to make food items available to the thousands of visitors while others jump in for the quick buck. A book fair is also part of the Mela Bazaar. Many organizations and departments also set up display stalls.



## Guests

Many of the performers and participants of the Mela programs need to stay overnight at the Mela venue. They are considered as the Mela guests. We make arrangements for their stay and meals. The arrangements are simple and basic. Guests stay in tents and sleep on bedding or in sleeping bags on a thick layer of *paralee*.

They are given coupons which they can 'cash' into meals at the Mela kitchen. The kitchen is set up by a team of village women who are hired for this job. They cook simple and traditional food that most of the common people in Punjab eat and humbly offer it to the guests in earthen pots while they wait for their turns on mats. The Mela kitchen has surprisingly become very popular among the visitors and many find it a feast to watch it. This is the most photographed section of the Mela. On an average we serve three meals to over 600 guests every day besides arranging for their stay.

Day time performers and participants of schools from distant towns are the Mela guests too. They are offered a separate set of coupons that they can change into simple and traditional take away food items from designated stalls. Tea is available for everyone at many stalls set up all over the Mela venue.





# WHERE

is Punjab Lok Boli Mela held?

The Lok Boli Mela is held in a small town surrounded by villages and there certainly are numerous in the Punjab. The Mela town is selected in a meeting of the organizing committee almost an year in advance. Local support for the cause of the Mela is an important factor in deciding about the site. It probably would be much easier to hold it in a big city like Lahore than at places that are devoid of any logistic supports for an event of the Boli Mela scale. But ease is certainly not a criteria for us while making this decision. The big cities in our specific cultural context tend to represent a departure and a breaking away from roots and traditions. Cultural alienation is packaged with economic development here. Urban identities are a strange mix of mutilated traditions and clumsy mockery of whatever is considered modernity. It is not that the small towns or even villages exist today as some serene abode of an idealized form of our culture. They aren't any frozen slices out of a presumed golden period of our cultural history as well but they certainly are at a greater distance from notions that urbanites fall easy prey to. We want ourselves and the participants of the Mela to fathom that distance, breath in some fresh air and for a moment have a detached look at where we are heading.

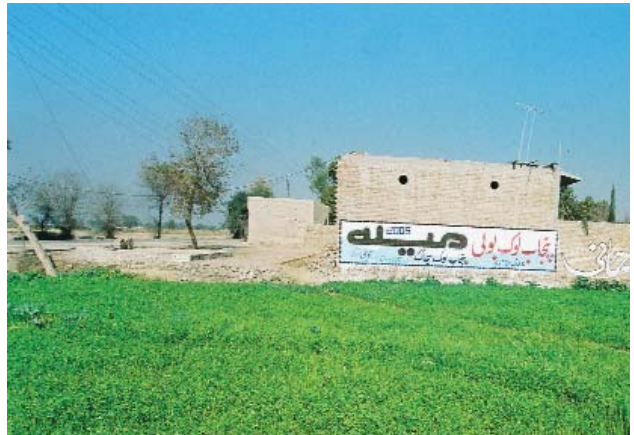
The first Punjab Lok Boli Mela was held at Depalpur and the second at Haveli Lakha both in Okara district. The third Mela dedicated to the 1857 freedom fighter of the Punjab, Ahmed Khan Kharal was held in Gugera. The town used to be the capital of Montgomery district 150 years ago, before it was shifted to the present day Sahiwal. Gugera, the town on the bank of river Ravi was the battle ground in 1857. The fourth Boli Mela dedicated to another freedom fighter of the Punjab, Bhagat Singh, is being held close to his village in Jaranwala town of Faisalabad district.



The Boli Mela team keeps on working through out the Punjab round the year. We help educational institutions train teams of theater makers and produce and perform plays in their home towns. Other cultural events like mushaira or seminars on the issues of language and culture are also organized in various districts. This work however moves to the Mela town and its neighborhoods around four months before the Mela date. A focus area is charted and educational institutions and civil society organizations of this area are involved in various activities. This run up to the Mela helps in building the momentum and enlarges the ownership base of the mega event.

Wall chalking along the roads leading up to the Mela venue form an important part of the Mela publicity campaign. We have worked out some other innovative methods to spread the word as well. One of these is our mobile puppet proscenium. A box like structure is mounted on a three-wheeler with two puppets playing on a recorded Mela song. This puppet on wheels show takes rounds of villages and towns performing and distributing Mela brochures. It draws big crowds. Children of schools involved in Mela programs also take out bicycle rallies in their towns while holding Mela banners and flags making the Mela the talk of the town. Specially recorded Mela songs and videos are also played on local cable networks inviting the families to join in.

To mobilize participation from far away areas, the Mela video shows are held as part of all the public programs that RaHS and Sujag organize anywhere at any time of the year.



Wall chalking announcing the Mela dates and venue is done in a circle of around 50 kms around the Mela venue.



The mobile puppet show about the Mela takes a round of over 100 villages a month before the Mela.



The schools participating in the Mela programs take out cycle rallies in their respective towns and villages to publicize the Boli Mela.



# WHEN

is Punjab Lok Boli Mela held?

The Boli Mela was originally planned at the Unesco-declared International Mother Tongue Day held every year on 21 February. The first Boli Mela was held from 17 to 22 February 2004. The dates however coincided with the Islamic mourning month of Moharram the next year when festivities are avoided. We moved the next Mela to 24-28 January 2005. But weather is pretty cold at that of the year specially in the open. This makes stay arrangements for the guests more problematic. And it rained on the third day of the 2nd Mela worsening further the conditions. We moved the next Mela to the month of November and the third Boli Mela was held from 23-27 November. As the winters have just set in, it is pleasantly cool at that time. Moreover, this suits the participating educational institutions as well. The academic year has just started and there is no pressure of examinations closing in as it is in January and February. We have decided to settle in with November for some time but plan to ultimately move back to February to coincide with the International Mother Tongue Day.



## **1st Punjab Lok Boli Mela**

Depalpur

17-22 February 2004

## **2nd Punjab Lok Boli Mela**

Haveli Lakha

24-28 January 2005

## **3rd Punjab Lok Boli Mela**

Gugera

23-27 November 2006

## **4th Punjab Lok Boli Mela**

Jaranwala

Initially planned at 24-28 November 2007 but had to be delayed due to political turmoil and later the imposition of emergency rule in the country. It is now scheduled to be held on 21-25 November 2008

## **5th Punjab Lok Boli Mela**

Chunian

20-24 November 2009

## **6th Punjab Lok Boli Mela**

Chiniot

18-22 February 2011

A number of souvenirs are produced at each Boli Mela. These include key chains, buttons, card caps, note pads and the Mela picture albums besides many brochures, pamphlets and a program booklet. Some are distributed among the participants for free while others are available at the organizers' stall at a price. The organizers also publish a local calendar each year in March.



The large tents used by the marriage party organizers are not suitable for hosting the Mela events, specially for theater. We have specially designed the venue tents for the Mela. Sitting area is covered by a thick layer of *paralee* straws that offer perfect warmth in the cold November nights. Similarly for stay arrangements also we have purpose made tents and sleeping bags.



# HOW

can you join Punjab Lok Boli Mela?

## Be there

One does not need an invitation to attend a mela. Come to the next Punjab Lok Boli Mela with friends and/or with family. If you wish to stay overnight at the Mela venue, you have to inform us three weeks before the Mela.

## Volunteer

There are many ways you can donate your time and efforts for Boli Mela. You can meet and discuss it with the Mela organizers and take up an assignment at the Mela as part of the management team or you can help us publicize Mela in your area of residence or influence and organize a group's participation in the Mela or specifically anyone one of its programs.

## Contribute

You can also become a part of the Mela through your creative vocations. Be a part of any of the Mela programs, music, theater, dance, puppets, visual arts or crafts or design you own activity. Please, do discuss it at least two months in advance to help us with logistics and a proper placement in schedule.

Not for profit organizations can also setup their stalls and design and implement activities involving people.

Our only condition is that it must be about the people of Punjab and for the people of Punjab.

## Donate/ sponsor

Mela runs on personal donations and sponsorship by businesses. You can contribute by making a donation or by buying space in the Mela Bazaar or an exclusive space for your business or by sponsoring a Mela program.





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Punjab Lok Boli Mela

21-25 November 2008, Jaranwala, district Faisalabad