

OBITUARY

Professor Moonis Raza (1925 - 94)

Professor Moonis Raza, a well known geographer and an educationist died on 14th July 1994 at Woreester, a small town near Boston in the U.S.A., after a prolonged illness of over a year. He is survived by his wife, son and four daughters – the children all grown up and well settled in life. He was in the U.S.A. for medical treatment and was living with his son during the last days of his life.

Born in 1925, in the Ghazipur district of Uttar Pradesh, Moonis had his school education at Ghazipur and moved to Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) for higher education. Having obtained his Master's degree in geography from the AMU, he started his academic career in the same university as a Lecturer in geography. For some time, Professor Raza was actively associated with the left movement and was a member of the Communist party of India. And, though in subsequent years he dissociated himself from the party work, he remained an effective advocate of the marxist ideology, and his leftist leanings continued all through his life and are even reflected in the academic research he pioneered and promoted.

Professor Raza came into limelight after he was appointed a special officer attached to Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in the early stages of its development. Having close contact with Professor Nurul Hasan, the then Minister of Education in the Central Govt., he wielded considerable influence in the academic circles in general & the JNU in particular. In

recognition of the merit he possessed, he was appointed as a Professor at the Centre of Regional Development studies, JNU, of which he could be legitimately called a founder.

The Centre owes its existence and development largely to the initiative and continuous support of Professor Raza. As a geographer, his idea of development was tempered with a regional perspective, often overlooked by other disciplines. It was at the centre of Regional Development studies of the JNU that he contributed his best as an academician as well as an administrator. He pioneered research in regionalization, regional development and regional disparities and trained a few outstanding students who continue the tradition of research of which he lay the foundation. For about two decades, as a Professor of Geography and periodically as the Director of the Centre, he was at the helm of Indian geography, presiding over several committees at the national and international level, and furthering the cause of geography. With a band of dedicated students, he produced a substantial amount of quality research, and publications, mostly in joint authorship with his students and colleagues.

Raza was a good speaker and could summarise complicated works research findings and presentations with unsurpassed clarity. He often quoted Leo Tolstoy in his speeches, yet his background of class struggle never permitted him to be a liberal. He saw situations, ideas,

and approaches as specific to certain ideology and emanating from certain camps. This influenced his role as an integrating force in Indian geography. True to his convictions he promoted ideas and individuals who conformed to his view points, and in the process, his holistic geographical approach which he so avidly propounded did not extend beyond a disparate cluster of geographers in his immediated vicinity. Professor Raza was the spirit behind the establishment of the National Association of geographers of India. Though he was not its founder President, his command was final and unchallenged in all matters related to the Association. He was the editor of the Annas of NAGI for some time.

Professor Raza held several important positions as an educational administrator. He was the Director of the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration for a term followed by the vice-chancellorship of the university of Delhi. His last public appointment was as the chairman of the Indian Council of Social Science Research.

Among Prof. Raza's many achievements, it is difficult to single out the most outstanding contribution, yet one would not hesitate to add that the 'Centre of Regional Development studies' will ever remain a monument to his memory. As a researcher, his approach and involvement are more pertinent than his achievements. He pioneered a school which focussed its attention on Regional disparities and the status of the underprivileged in the larger frame of the pathology of Indian society, a theme neglected by other geography schools in the country, but pursued zealously by the students of the late Professor, Raza

As an individual Professor Raza was warm and affable, and humane in his dealings with his colleagues and students.

The death of such an outstanding geographer is an irreparable loss to Indian geography. The Institute of Indian geographers and the geographers associated with the Institute, deeply mourn his death.

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