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# Journal of Peace Studies

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# OBITUARY

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## **Remembering Riyaz: Down the Memory Lane**

**Dr M Saleem Kidwai**

My association with Riyaz Punjabi dates back to our student days at Aligarh Muslim University. I was doing MA and he was studying Law. Our common interest in extra-curricular activities brought us together. Both of us actively participated in the literary and cultural events in the campus. However, our real contacts developed later when we became colleagues at Kashmir University. Riyaz welcomed me warmly in true Aligarh spirit and helped me in establishing myself in new environment. As a result, we became intimate friends within no time. We spent lot of time together in and outside the campus.

I regularly visited his chamber, which was very close to my department in the beautiful Naseem Bagh. We discussed local, national and global issues with common friends over cups of tea. Both of us were on the same page on most of the issues. Both of us evinced keen interest in the programmes of Iqbal Institute and Centre for Central Asian Studies which were headed by renowned scholars, Prof A A Suroor and Prof Maqbool Ahmad respectively. Both of us frequently participated in radio and TV programmes together. Incidentally, Riyaz was chosen by *Doordarshan* to interview me as the winner of Jawaharlal Nehru National Solidarity Award. He introduced me to leading figures of Kashmir and got me associated with various forums like *Naya Kashmir*. Interestingly, I was the lone non-Kashmiri member of the forum thanks to Riyaz. Last but not the least, both of us used to visit Indian Coffee House often to interact with intellectuals there and Riyaz was regarded as a prominent intellectual of the valley. We became closest of friends and comrades during our decade-long service in Kashmir university.

Both of us were forced to leave Kashmir in the wake of militancy in the early 1990s. We landed in Delhi and became colleagues at JNU. Riyaz had a fertile brain. Soon after settling down in Delhi, he decided to establish

## OBITUARY

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Centre for Peace Studies. It was his brainchild and I was among its founding members. He became its founding Director and later President while I served the Centre in various capacities for more than two decades. Working together at JNU and at CPS further strengthened our bonds of friendship.

Riyaz was a multi-dimensional personality, who left his mark in several spheres like education, law, sociology and literature. He was a prolific writer and wrote extensively on a variety of themes. He was a wonderful orator and actively participated in seminars, symposia and workshops. He was a great institution builder. As Director of Institute of correspondence courses in Kashmir university he transformed it into a reputed Centre for Distance Education. As founding Director and then as President of the CPS, he changed its name to International Centre for Peace Studies. Under his able and dynamic stewardship, it touched new heights and won recognition in academic and intellectual world. By associating some top scholars like MS Agwani, TK Oommen and Ravinder Kumar, he was able to enhance its reputation.

Riyaz was a fine specimen of Kashmiri culture and values. He always stood for its autonomy. At the same time, he was an Indian nationalist to the core. In fact, he was a rare combination of both. He was a firm believer in the idea of India as enshrined in the constitution of India. He was an ardent champion of democracy, liberalism, human rights and inclusive society. He was a staunch advocate of composite culture of India. His opposition to communalism and parochialism stemmed from his commitment to liberalism. He was deeply concerned about the use of religion in politics, which he believed would erode the principles of democracy and secularism and would eventually endanger unity in diversity.

Now when Riyaz is no more, memories come assailing the mind, making me realise how transient our existence is. His demise has left the academic world poorer of a sound scholar, who was a rarity, much more so now. It is vitally important to recall his liberalism when religious fundamentalism and irrational intolerance threaten the foundations of India's nationhood. The best tribute one can pay to Riyaz Punjabi is to reaffirm the values he stood for. ■