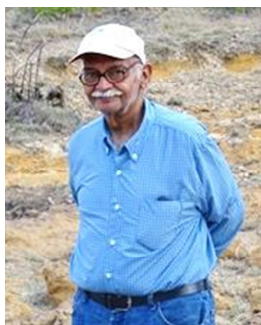


## OBITUARY



**Prof. V. G. Phansalkar**  
(1939-2019)

Prof. Vijay Gurudas Phansalkar, a highly respected paleontologist and stratigrapher, passed away on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019. In his passing away we lost a warm loving personality, free thinker, mentor, friend and *guru* of several generations of students from Pune. He is survived by his wife, Pramila and two daughters Kaumudi and Snehal.

Vijay Phansalkar, was born at Varanasi on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1939. His early years were spent at the Theosophical Society, Varanasi, which laid the foundation for his intellectual abilities and philosophical approach to life. He obtained his B.Sc. and M.Sc. (Geology) from the Banaras Hindu University in 1960 and 1962 respectively. He embarked on his teaching career at the Department of Geology, BHU in 1962 before moving to the Department of Geology, University of Pune (since renamed Savitribai Phule Pune University) in 1968. The same year he also embarked upon his married life with Mrs. Pramila.

He completed his doctoral thesis under the guidance of Prof. G.W. Chiplonkar in 1976. He continued to teach Paleontology, Stratigraphy and Petroleum Geology at Pune till his retirement in 1999. He was tasked with the establishment of the Post-Graduate Geology Department of the Shivaji University at Solapur (presently Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar Solapur University), between 1985 and 1987, as the founder Professor and Head, before returning back to Pune.

Prof. Phansalkar focused his research on the Cretaceous period, successfully guiding several students for their M.Sc. dissertations, M.Phil. and Doctoral thesis on the Cretaceous from the Cauvery Basin, Narmada Basin (Bagh Beds), Kutch Basin (Bhuj Sandstone) on various aspects of Paleontology, Stratigraphy and Sedimentology. His contributions on the Ammonite biostratigraphy of the Ariyalur-Pondicherry sub-basin exposures, based on the family Acanthoceratidae for the Albian – Coniacian is well quoted in literature. He also guided students on the planktonic foraminiferal and calcareous nannofossil biostratigraphy. His interest in stratigraphy included the the ‘Purana’ Basins of India, notably the Vindhyan, Cuddapah, Bhima and Kaladgi Basins. We still remember his taking up the challenge of studying the Cretaceous calcareous nannofossils, at a time (before internet) when the entire literature available in the University was limited to one USGS publication. Love for field work was one of the notable characters of Prof. Phansalkar, that he actively sustained even after his retirement, joining field trips to various areas including the harsh Himalayas and to socially challenging sites such as the Ravines and Badlands in the Chambal and Yamuna basins.

The remarkable aspect of the style of working of Prof. Phansalkar was that he never insisted on authorship of any of his students’ work.

Many of us often remarked that if only he had published all that he taught, such publications would have been landmark contributions to the science of stratigraphy and palaeontology. We informally referred to him as the ‘unpublished genius’. The contributions of his students were founded on his teachings (but never attributed to him) and bear testimony of his vast, in-depth knowledge of the subject. His lectures on ‘time-rock units’ as the basic principle of (litho-, bio-, chrono- & sequence) stratigraphy will always be remembered by his students and will be missed by the generations to come. Prof. Phansalkar was an uncompromising personality when it came to academic integrity and honesty. During the course of his career he lost several opportunities due to his integrity. He never regretted these set-backs, neither allowed them to come in way of his teaching or his relations with his students, associates and colleagues.

Post-retirement Prof. Phansalkar devoted his time to the development of the not-for-profit organisation ACWADAM (Advanced Center for Water Resources Development and Management, Pune) as its Founder Trustee and eventually as its Treasurer. He was quite instrumental in helping develop the pedagogy behind ACWADAM’s work on water in general and groundwater in particular. Although ACWADAM’s work has focused on groundwater, Prof. Phansalkar brought in the concept of a ‘holistic approach integrating science, environment with the demand and supply assessment of water resources’ based on his background of stratigraphy and earth history. His philosophy on science was founded as much on the rigour of scientific inquiry and findings as on the domains in which science could be applied for the benefit of society at large, especially the variously marginalised. This approach is a cornerstone of the success of ACWADAM in its growth trajectory as a leading knowledge-provider and think-tank in water resources development and management in the country. His memory-recall on field geology was especially useful in ACWADAM’s action research programme on mapping aquifers and developing systems of community management of groundwater resources across India’s diverse hydrogeological settings.

Dr. Phansalkar was an excellent sportsman who played cricket, badminton and tennis, the latter until almost quite recently.

*(With inputs from Himanshu Kulkarni, Vivek Kale and Kantimati Kulkarni)*

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