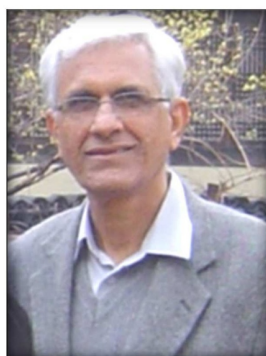


OBITUARY



Dr. Saleem Romani
(1946 – 2021)

Dr Saleem Romani, former Chairman of Central Ground Water Board, and a peer in hydrogeoscience of national and international renown, passed away on 10th May 2021, at Bhopal after a brief period of illness, deeply mourned by his wife, Shahgul, daughters, Afreen and Fahreen, son-in-laws, and extended family of friends, colleagues, near and dear ones leaving behind a five decade long sparkling professional career.

Born on 28th December 1946 at Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India Romani completed his early education at Bhopal. He did his graduation from Motilal Vigyan Mahavidyalaya, Bhopal in 1964 and masters (M. Tech) in Geology from the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Roorkee in 1967. Pursuing his academic interests Romani continued as Research Assistant in the Department for a brief period.

During his stint at Roorkee University he had his grounding in well hydraulics and groundwater flow dynamics, which was further refined in course of his career. This knowledge was later crystallised in the conceptual framework of water conservation and management activities stepped up in the country since mid-1980's. His report on "Observation on Decline in Ground Water Levels in area adjacent to the Augmentation canal of Haryana State (Upper Yamuna Project, Tech. Report No. 7, Library No. UYP-18, CGWB Chandigarh-1982)" bears testimony to this.

He joined Geological Survey of India as Junior Geologist in its Western Region, Jaipur in 1969 and later Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) in 1972. In 1976 he was transferred to the Upper Yamuna Project, Chandigarh. After termination of the Project he joined Central Region (CR), Nagpur in 1978, North Central Region (NCR), Bhopal in 1983, and North Central Chhattisgarh Region (NCCR), Raipur in 1995. He was Regional Director of NCR, Bhopal during 1996-2002. After his initiation in Western Region and in the Upper Yamuna Project his career as hydrogeologist zoomed and there was no looking back. During this three decade span of his career Romani carried out or steered several landmark projects, studded with spectacular achievements, to name a few, (a) 1984-85: Prestigious groundwater investigation in the Bansagar project, Madhya Pradesh, for the protection of the huge deposit of Steel Grade Limestone belonging to the Steel Authority of India, and coming under submergence of Bansagar reservoir, suggesting a revision in the alignment of the earthen ring bund; (b) 1987-89: First Technology Mission for drinking water in the Tribal Districts of Madhya Pradesh; (c) 1997- 2002: World Bank aided Hydrology Project for strengthening, instrumentation and

automation of Network Hydrograph Stations for ground water monitoring in Madhya Pradesh, (d) Demonstrative Artificial Recharge Projects in Madhya Pradesh with remarkable successes. He was also credited with the dynamic concept of 'Reclamation of Chambal ravines land' by creating "artificial aquifers" in the gullies and ravines of Mandsaur and Neemuch districts, M.P.

In 1993, Romani worked as a Member in the National Committee on the Scope of Artificial Recharge in India from surplus monsoon runoff. The report of the committee "National perspective plan for recharge to ground water by utilizing surplus monsoon runoff (CGWB1996), earned accolades from both national and international circles, as a pioneering study which laid foundation of Master Plan for Artificial Recharge in India (2002). This was followed by the "National Blueprint for Recharging Groundwater Resources of India" prepared under his guidance suggesting artificial recharge to groundwater in a big way throughout the country. An area of about 0.45 million square kilometers was identified for the purpose in various parts of the country. He vigorously continued artificial recharge studies in the Deccan Trap terrain in Western Madhya Pradesh. His studies brought out artificial recharge models in Deccan Traps. Romani introduced the modern techniques of water conservation and artificial recharge in the drought affected area of Jhabua district. In recognition of his outstanding studies and contributions, Romani was conferred PhD in hydrogeology by Barkatulla University, Bhopal in 1991.

Dr. Romani took much interest in the cost effective, technically simple water conservation and artificial recharge practices as prevalent in the mediaeval Madhya Pradesh, which are still relevant with modern science and technology inputs. In 1993 Dr Romani brought to limelight the famous Infiltration Galleries (Khuni Bhandara) near Burhanpur town in M.P., a unique water supply system developed on the principles of 'Quannat system' during the reign of the Mughals. He suggested measures to revitalize the systems which received country wide media attention.

Romani's major contributions were in the arena of water conservation in arid/semiarid Madhya Pradesh turning it into a citadel of knowledge in the management of water resources.

In 2002 he was promoted as Member, CGWB, and Member Secretary, Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA), and transferred to CGWB Headquarters, Faridabad/ N. Delhi. He got the opportunity to apply his rich knowledge to groundwater management through the

Authority. He elaborately dwelt on the Role of Central Groundwater Authority (CGWA) constituted under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, in a paper "Past Experience and Future Strategies for Regulating the Development and Utilization of Groundwater in India" (Malhotra Publishing House, New Delhi-2006).

With his long unparalleled experience of working in many prestigious projects on groundwater exploration and management, he took over reins of Chairman, of the apex organisation Central Ground water Board in February 2005 till his superannuation in December 2006. During his tenure as Chairman CGWB, one of his stellar achievements was bringing out Watershed Map of India, the first of its kind, which enabled depiction of hydrogeological data precisely on even village scale and made village level water management a reality. The map was released by the Hon'ble Minister of Water Resources in December 2005. He firmly believed that the challenges to ground water management may be addressed through proper understanding of the dynamics of groundwater flow under different hydrogeological conditions in space and time as presented in his paper "Groundwater management-emerging challenges" (Capital Publishing Company, New Delhi-2006). This was in essence his policy directive to the Department during his tenure as Chairman.

Dr Romani held positions as Chairman or Member of various Ministerial/Inter-Ministerial committees / sub-committees on water management as domain expert in groundwater. He participated as a member of Indian delegation to Bangladesh, and World Water Forum, Kyoto. He was an active member of the Indian National Committee on Ground Water for R & D activities.

His dazzling career reached a pinnacle as he organised 12th National Symposium on Hydrology - "Ground water governance – Ownership of ground water and its Pricing". It deliberated on various models of groundwater governance in varied hydrogeological environs in the country. The Proceedings Volume of the Symposium constitutes a National Document.

Even after his superannuation in 2006 his interest in hydrogeology did not wane a bit. He also kept himself abreast with latest developments in the subject. He was working as Consultant in World Bank Projects. He served as a consultant to the World Bank on a study titled "India: Institutional Framework and Organizational Arrangements for addressing Ground Water Resource Over-exploitation". As a Ground Water Expert, he had also reviewed the State Action Plan on Climate Change prepared by the Environmental Planning & Co-ordination Organization (Housing and Environment Department), Government of Madhya Pradesh in 2014.

Apart from his many outstanding Departmental Reports, his tremendous contributions can be adjudged from his fifty one (51) scientific articles, authored singly/jointly, which were published in

national and international journals/proceedings of seminars or symposia. One of his famous publications is "Manual on analysis of pumping test data of large diameter wells" (CGWB-1986) which is widely used by researchers, academicians and ground water professionals. He presented the methodology of determining optimum yield of an open well in an international event at Madras in 1973. Dr Romani co-authored a new, simplified diagram for classification of natural waters and interpretation of chemical analysis data by modifying Piper trilinear diagram (Environmental science, Vol 17, Elsevier, Amsterdam-1981). It is also frequently used for water quality analysis. He co-authored the Manuals on Artificial Recharge published by CGWB (1994) and revised in 2002, & 2007. He was also the principal editor of the book "Groundwater Governance – Ownership of Groundwater and its pricing" (Capital Publishing Company New Delhi-2006). He co-authored "India Groundwater Governance Case Study. Water papers, World Bank, Washington, D.C., World Bank -2011." In another report of World Bank (2010) he dwelt on the Characterization of Groundwater Pollution Issues in India. (World Bank Consultancy for ESW-groundwater governance Study. Washington, DC: World Bank-2010).

In his family life he was a devoted husband, a proud father of his two well educated daughters, now settled abroad, and an affectionate grandfather. He was always concerned with the welfare of his near and dear ones, friends and colleagues. Even after his superannuation he was just a phone call away from all of them and exchanged greetings on the festive occasions like Eid, Holi etc. Saleem was a devout religious person, but truly secular to the core of his heart. His amiable nature, signature smile, modest behaviour and unassuming personality endeared him to all.

A versatile hydrogeoscientist in the post Karanth era, he was the leading light of CGWB, especially the young brigade in the field. He will be ever remembered as one of the peers in Hydrogeology of India. He departed silently as he worked silently throughout his life and rose through ranks to lead the premier organisation. The sad demise of Dr. Saleem Romani is an irreparable loss to the ground water fraternity, but Romani left a rich legacy of dedication to the science of water conservation and water security.

Geological Society of India pays homage to this Titan of hydrogeoscience in India.

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