

Shri V. V. Sohoni, B.A.(Hons), M.Sc., F.N.I., (1898-1977)

We mourn the passing away of Shri Visvanatha Vishnu Sohoni, Retired Director General of Observatories at Pune (formerly known as Poona) on 5 May 1977. He was nearing his 79th birthday at the time of his demise.

Shri Sohoni was born in the village of Agargulen in the Ratnagiri district of the State of Maharashtra on 6 September 1898. He joined the India Meteorological Department in March 1922 at the age of 24 as a Class I Meteorologist. He rose to the position of Superintending Meteorologist (now designated as Deputy Director General of Observatories) in August 1942 and in April 1950, he succeeded Dr. S. K. Banerji, as Director General of Observatories. In this capacity he served upto May 1953 when he proceeded on leave preparatory to retirement. Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since his retirement but even today he is remembered with great admiration and regard by all those who had the opportunity to serve under him.

Shri Sohoni was the first whole time meteorologist of the Department to take over the responsibilities of storm-warning work for the Bay of Bengal, when this work was transferred from Simla to Calcutta in 1926. He quickly re-organised the storm-warning service, placed it on a systematic basis and won the appreciation of shipping interest. He also restored their confidence in the Department's storm-warning service which had been somewhat shaken by the loss of *S.S. Okara* in the Bay of Bengal cyclone of May 1923.

During the Second World War, Shri Sohoni held charge for a short period, of the storm-warning work for the Arabian Sea which was being done at Pune. I had then an opportunity to work directly under Shri Sohoni. During that war-time period, the ships in the Indian seas had to maintain complete "wireless silence". The storm-warning officer had to depend entirely upon the Indian surface and pilot balloon observations and the latter would become even more scanty during bad weather. There were no radio-

wind stations in those days. Consequently, the warning-service for the Arabian Sea which, at all times, had been difficult, became a nightmare to the officers in the Weather Section then at Pune. And yet, during this extremely difficult period, Shri Sohoni undertook the storm-warning work for the Arabian Sea with a mental poise worthy of emulation by the younger officers of the Department. I remember even today the events that occurred in the fateful early hours of 16 October 1940. The surface winds at the Colaba Observatory at Bombay had rapidly changed since the previous evening and indicated that we were dealing with a typical tropical cyclone with a core of hurricane winds and which would soon strike the Bombay coast. In such a tense situation which would normally unnerve anybody, Shri Sohoni with his characteristic mental detachment, asked me how I was feeling at that moment. "Are you not feeling that you are now in a house where an expectant mother is about to deliver?" he interrogated. I was amazed at his mental equanimity and I was reminded of the lines in *Bhagavadgita* :

"But a man of disciplined mind, who moves among the objects of sense, with the senses under control and free from attachment and aversion, he attains purity of spirit" (Chapter II, verse 64).

Shri Sohoni was very able as an Administrator even in the early years of his service. I well remember the discussions I had with him in 1931-32 when the "great axe" of retrenchment fell upon the India Meteorological Department and other departments of the Government of India. Shri Sohoni was then Meteorologist "General Section" of the Headquarters Office and had helped the Director General of Observatories Dr. C.W.B. Normand in effecting retrenchment and in making drastic reduction in the budget of the Department. I wish to record here that the later expansion of the I. Met. D. about which Shri Sohoni had talked to me and which Shri Sohoni had foreseen so clearly at that time, actually happened.



V. V. Sohoni

Shri Sohoni was known for his quick disposal of cases. In fact, he would always give the impression that he had very light work. With a penetrating mind and with great concentration, he would very quickly clear his table and leave the office in a completely relaxed mood.

He had also the ability to choose the right man for the right place, in important positions in the Department. And he would stick to his decisions however irksome they might appear to those affected by them. He would never rebuke his staff in the presence of others. He spoke little while in office but when he did speak, his words were absolutely logical and precise and his arguments irrefutable. His queries in the files were always very brief and to the point and revealed his critical mind. He was truly a "born-administrator" as he used to be then referred to by the junior officers of the Department.

As Head of the India Meteorological Department and Permanent Representative of India in the World Meteorological Organisation, Shri Sohoni was elected as President of the Regional Association for Asia of the World Meteorological

Organisation in April 1951 and he served in that capacity till his retirement from service. As President of the Regional Association, he was as *ex-officio* member of the Executive Committee of the W.M.O. His assistance and sound advice contributed much to the work of that world organisation. As Director General of Observatories, Shri Sohoni was also *ex-officio* Editor of the *Indian Journal of Meteorology & Geophysics*.

Shri Sohoni had taken great interest in popularising the science of meteorology and in promoting weather consciousness among the public. To him, goes the credit of introducing the publication of Weather Maps in the daily newspapers in our country. He had also contributed a large number of popular articles on scientific subjects in English and Marathi.

Among his scientific contributions, may be specially mentioned his study of the Thunder storms at Calcutta and his Memoir of I. Met. D. entitled "Latent Instability in the Atmosphere revealed by some Indian tephigrams". He had also organised and carried out a set of field experiments near Alibag (in the State of Maharashtra) where the India Meteorological Department had magnetic instruments. His work enabled the Department to stipulate precisely under that restrictions the electrification of the Alibag town could be undertaken without vitiating the magnetic observations recorded at that station.

He was a good tennis player and he was also fond of hiking. He was popular among his colleagues. He was elected as the President of the departmental Gazetted Officers' Association for three consecutive terms.

After he retired from service, he took keen interest in gardening. He used to show round his garden, the interested visitors and they were impressed by the wide variety of flowers he had reared and the large number of vegetables he had grown.

Shri Sohoni's robust common sense, his simple way of tackling the most difficult administrative problems and his pleasant way of dealing with all officers and staff, will always be remembered by his former colleagues. His death has removed a personality whom his contemporaries respected and admired.

C. RAMASWAMY