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## THE JOURNEY OF THE JOURNAL

*Editing the Himalayan Journal*

HARISH KAPADIA

**T**HE HIMALAYAN JOURNAL (H.J.) was on its 35th issue when I first happened to join the editorial team. Soli Mehta was proceeding to Nigeria for a few years and he was looking for an assistant. He had produced the last two issues of the journal being stationed at Sudan, and, as he put it, had almost lost the issues in the post. And so here I was joining the team of this historical and famous journal without any editorial experience at all. It was reassuring to learn that R. E. Hawkins would also be joining with me. Hawkins had many years of experience in the printing line, having retired as the General Manager of the Oxford University Press.

'You don't know what you are taking on, Harish', Meheru, Soli's energetic wife said ominously.

'Late night work and dealing with all this paper has driven Soli mad'.

Then looking at my wife Geeta, she gave her first advice, 'Don't let Harish gather any paper. My garage is full with manuscripts, articles and correspondence. Just throw them away or else these editors will ruin the peace of the house.'

But the ladies served us well in those initial days, quite literally with lunches and dinners, while I received instruction and initiation in the art of editing from Soli. In fact, volume XXXV was in press and was already delayed by 3 years. Hawkins had made many changes to bring it in line with international standards. Our printers had not taken these last minute changes well and had put the journal on the side line. So one of my first jobs was to cajole the reluctant printers. This was managed only after Soli left for Nigeria and the volume saw the light of the day with much prodding and persuasion. The next issue was also delayed forcing us to change the printers.

## Early Days

The journal had already come a long way. It was conceived in 1928, in the first year of the club. The H.J. Vol. I (1929) records it as under, in the Secretary's report printed on Pp. 128-133.

### Club Proceedings

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE CLUB IN THE YEAR  
1928. BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY.

(*Sir Geofferey Corbett*)

The Annual General Meeting was held on the 25th February 1929. The President, Field Marshal Sir William Birdwood, Bart, took the Chair.

**"The Himalayan Journal"**. — Last and most important is *The Himalayan Journal*. The Committee has authorised Major Mason to produce the first number of the Journal, and it is hoped that it will be published by the end of April. It will be welcomed, I am sure, not only as a record of the activities of the Club and its members, but for its great interest and scientific value.

The first editor Kenneth Mason was a legend. He was a surveyor operating from Shimla and later continued editing from England. At that time expeditions were few and were undertaken by distinguished personalities. With his stature and status, Mason gathered information about all explorations. He produced the first 12 volumes before the Second World War forced the stoppage of publication for few years. Then it was thought that this was the end of the H.J. — for the first time, for such thoughts were to occur again.

In his last editorial (in Vol. XII, 1940, p. 137) Mason wrote,

As may be imagined, the *Himalayan Journal* has been edited and published this year under considerable difficulty and great pressure of other work. Some papers have had to be held over until 1941. There is little time in England now for anything but concentration on the task of ridding the world of the disgusting cruelty and sadistic brutality of the creed which permeates Hitler's Germany

K.M.

The post-war editors, C.W.F. Noyce, H.W. Tobin and T.H. Braham produced 9 volumes between them.

Noyce started with a flourish, writing in the editorial, 'The journal for 1946 would inevitably, be a "coming to life" number.....'

But within a year H.W. Tobin, the next editor was predicting doom again.

But, alas, the swift evolution as independent states of India and Pakistan brings in its train the early repatriation of nearly all active members of the Himalayan Club. And the hitherto simple access to the great mountains of India's northern borderlands will be enjoyed only by those who will work in the new states. Consequently, unless, or until, mountaineering is taken up seriously by Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and others, the very *raison d'être* of the Club will be no more.<sup>1</sup>

Nationalization of the Club or its successor will mean production of its *Journal* by a national editor and a national publication. So it seems that volume XIV is almost certain to be a final issue,.....

(H.J. Vol. XIV, 1947, p. 7)

On the death of Tobin in January 1957, T.H. Braham took over Vol. XX and produced 2 issues.

These editors were stationed in India and with some assistance from England (V.S. Risoë, G.C. Band and J.A. Jackson) recorded the expeditions to the highest of peaks in the Himalaya. This was the golden age of climbing and the H.J. recorded the events faithfully. The sport was still a British preserve and very few Indians participated in it. So when the last of the Britishers left India there was again a serious doubt whether the H.J. would continue at all. It was even doubted whether there would be any climbing activity by the Indians or a qualified editor or press available to publish such a specialised journal.

But the skeptics were again proved wrong. Dr. K. Biswas took over as the first Indian editor of the journal and the H.J. appeared every year under him from 1960 to 1966. The Club's President, Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Williams was to write in the editorial to H.J. Vol. XXII, (1959-60) p.1.

An earlier number Editorial expressed the fear that unless mountaineering was taken up seriously in India that particular

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1. Fulfilling his predictions in a different vein the H.J. has seen Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and Christian editors.

*Journal* might well be the last. This fear no longer exists. In the last few years there has been very marked enthusiasm for mountaineering in India and Pakistan and many successful expeditions, .....

### The Middle Years

Another major crisis came when Soli Mehta took over from 1969 for a decade. This was the most crucial period not only for the H.J. but also for the survival of the Himalayan Club. The Club had lost its momentum. At Calcutta, where it was registered, there was insufficient team to manage the affairs of the Club after the last of the British members had left India. Soli literally produced the issues single-handed<sup>2</sup> and posted them to all the members, whether they had updated their subscriptions or not. This took a heavy toll on the finances of the Club and in 1970 it almost looked as if the Club and the Journal would fold up.

Soli hailed from Bombay and with his connections managed to convince the people in charge to shift the headquarters of the Club from Calcutta to Bombay where trekking and climbing flourished due to the proximity of the Western Ghats. So all the defeatist talks of closing down the Club and the journal were given up and a new era for both began in the early 70's. Since then the H.J., and the Club, have not looked back. But if one person is to be credited for the survival of the H.J. after the early pioneers, then that has to be Soli Mehta. Without him it would have been difficult to continue the tradition. He returned to India from Nigeria in 1987 to take back the reins, but his untimely death in 1989 snatched away a prime mover behind the publication when he had many volumes still left in him.

Once the H.J. shifted to Bombay two important things happened. Gulab Ramchandani, the Club's treasurer introduced a system by which the Life Members of the club (and there were many) would pay for the cost of the Journal. This made the Club's finances look up. I remember one evening, at the Managing Committee meeting, the Secretary very seriously informed us about a proposition. 'Maruzen, a leading company from Japan, wishes to reprint volumes I to XV of the H.J. and would pay a handsome sum to the Club. Would the committee wish to consider this proposal?'

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2. The Baptist Mission Press, where the H.J. was being printed at Calcutta, closed down suddenly. Soli had great difficulties to retrieve the printed forms from the press after the closure. The forms were sent to Bombay for binding and publishing. Soli procured and edited the manuscripts for volumes XXXII to XXXIV from Calcutta. These were sent to Bombay for printing and publishing. Lots of papers flying around!

Before anyone could react, Gulab, in his typical fashion, removed his pipe and said, 'Who is this Father Christmas? Say yes immediately!' Starting with this, various supports started flowing to the Club and the H.J. was firmly established.

I started working on the H.J. with Hawk (as he was known to his friends). In fact, Hawk insisted on remaining as the assistant editor after Soli left, for he believed that despite his seniority, only a mountaineer should edit such a journal. Hawk was a great teacher. If Soli taught me the art of enjoying editorship — with samosas, tea and lots of laughter — Hawk had a different style. He taught me with question marks. If there was a doubt of any sort he would put a small '?', and that was it. I had to run around to reference libraries or books to find the solution. Of course, if I failed he was there to sort it out. With two such different personalities, editing the journal was an education, till both of them passed away within three weeks of each other in 1989.

The learning was not easy and I made many mistakes too. In the editorial in volume 37 'Doug' was printed as 'Dong' (sorry Scott!). In volume 41 Genevieve deSa, a lady mountaineer from Bombay, was quoted as saying, 'So what you are a guy,' when defeated at climbing by males. The printer had composed, 'So what you are a gay'.

I had lost it, only the sharp eye of Hawk had picked it up. Another Hawkins 'picking' was when he came running to my house with a mistake in the final proofs. The printer had put an 't' instead of 'l' in the name of H.W. Tilman. I would have resigned if this mistake was carried through in print. I would have also resigned if he had not spotted the last minute lateral inverted H.J. cover picture. But these mistakes and near mistakes made everything interesting, and the letters that we received (not always complimentary) made it worthwhile.

The journal was being read, referred to and commented upon. By the early 80's we had the new printers, India Printing Works. Its owner, Anand Limaye, believed that one must consume cups of tea equivalent to the number of pages printed, sandwiches to be eaten always in proportion with the number of photo plates and the panoramas always equivalent to the working lunches taken! With new designs and the offset process introduced, the printing side saw a major change. With the new printers, the quality began to look up. Not a single issue was delayed more than a month. We agreed on a simple rule. If the journal was delayed for more than one month the printer had to climb a peak in the local hills. To his credit he has not climbed any peaks yet.

Over the years H.J. has seen some major changes. If the volumes produced by Mason were very restrained and dignified, the Soli Mehta era saw the inclusion of light-hearted articles, some poetry and a broadening of subjects. The cover has changed from the ordinary collage to a black and white photograph and now to a photograph in colour. Panoramas and fold-out maps and sketches have remained the H.J.'s speciality, as only an Indian printer can afford the labour charges for them.

### **Printers and Publishers**

The first four volumes of the H.J. (1928-1932) were published by Thacker, Spink and Co. (Calcutta and Simla). From volume V (1934) Oxford University Press became the publishers of the H.J. OUP are still the publishers of the H.J. (1994), thus completing 50 years (and 45 volumes) of continuous association.

The H.J. volumes are produced and printed under the editors and, finally on behalf of the Himalayan Club, the publishers are given the final copies to distribute. Baptist Mission Press printed many volumes at Calcutta, and then at Bombay, Mouj Printing Bureau printed a few volumes till the H.J. settled with the India Printing Works for the last 14 volumes.

### **Present Days**

After Soli's death, M. H. Contractor joined me as the assistant editor. We introduced many new ideas. 'Illustrated Notes' covers current expeditions mentioning their achievements in a paragraph and giving a visual for the same. As a policy we welcome articles from non-English writing climbers as well. The Japanese, Polish, Koreans and Europeans had done a host of climbs and we specially began recording them by even rewriting the piece if required. We occasionally had to sacrifice English grammar to retain the original flavour and a record for posterity. The journal, of course, continues to be well served by the British and other English writers. Various series of articles were also introduced, like one on the geology of the Karakoram peaks by Prof. Ardito Desio. Currently a series about the 'The H.J. itself is being undertaken by Aamir Ali. His articles link up the relevance of the past issues to the present day climbing scene. The series when completed may form a concise H.J. (Vols 1-50).'

By the '80s climbing high mountains became a routine affair, sometimes too monotonous to record. We printed articles reminiscent of the past from old stalwarts, about climbing psychology or Jungian philosophy (related to climbers) and articles about the environment as related

to the climbers. With many 'Book Reviews' and much 'Correspondence', the H.J. remains a complete record of activities related to the Himalaya.

### **Authenticity and Controversies**

We made it a point to check everything that was received. Every peak name was recorded as given on the latest available maps (Kangchenjunga with 'g' and the Himalaya without 's') and all heights were checked. New names which were in accordance with the guidelines of the Survey of India were accepted and many such names have been incorporated on recent maps due to their usage in the H.J. More importantly, unsuitable names rejected by the H.J. were kept out.

Sometimes the H.J. had to act as a watch-dog on false claims and mistakes. Some mistaken claims, like that on Panch Chuli III, IV and V (1964) were corrected after 28 years. Some cases of misidentification of peaks (Papsura, Dharamsura, Angdu Ri in Tos valley) were re-recorded changing the history of those peaks. Matters published in the H.J. about wrong claims on Nilkanth, Sudarshan Parbat and Kabru Dome are now of course history. Many ethical considerations and comments evoked a strong response. All this is hard work, involving correspondence and presenting the material to the reluctant errant climbers.

When an Indian army officer presented an article, which was printed in the H.J., claiming a false ascent of a peak, the then editor Soli Mehta wrote to the Chief of the Army a strong letter, which ended with,

We have always taken the report of climbs by the Indian Army as absolutely correct, even if no photographs or details could be sent due to security reasons. With such incidents it will destroy the credibility of the claims that follow and make us the laughing stock in world mountaineering circles. We view this very seriously.

We normally don't expect post-mortems and committees to sit in judgement over every claim that emanates from the forces. Of course, summit photos would put the claim beyond doubt, but unfortunately the reproductions submitted with articles (at least to the H.J.) are designed to be of least interest to the climbers who follow. The nonsense about strategic area and secretive clasping of anything of interest close to one's chest (including maps) is quite obsolete

in these days of satellite photography. Let the Chief of Staff allow his officers to be mountaineers first on the mountains and leave the fairy tales for the gin and tonic evenings in the officers mess. General, are you listening?

The legacy of such strong action coupled with meticulous research have been responsible for the authenticity and accuracy of facts recorded in the H.J.

Based on the H.J. experience, Soli Mehta and I wrote a book *Exploring the Hidden Himalaya* in 1988. This was published to celebrate the sixtieth year of the Himalayan Club. Now, to celebrate 50 years of the *Himalayan Journal*, the current editors are working on the *Classification of the Himalaya* project. No mention on the H.J. would be complete without its index. D.F.O. Dangar undertook the indexing for most of the issues. After his retirement and death, Dhiren Toolsidas continued the task and has now produced a *Consolidated Index to Volumes I — 50*<sup>3</sup>, thus compiling the available references in one booklet. It is to many such enthusiasts in the past and the present (and I am sure in the future) that H.J. owes its existence and continuation.

As an editor I have received much help from other editors. H. Adams Carter of the *American Alpine Journal* has always been quick to respond. And the successive editors of *The Alpine Journal* have had most cordial relations with us. The editors of various mountaineering magazines and past editors of the H.J. are always helpful. Much correspondence and information is exchanged and some articles reprinted. All the material received, letters and photographs are bound and indexed in different sets titled *Editor's Papers* for each volume and added to the Club's library. It already contains some historic material for a future researcher.

Sometimes I get thoroughly exasperated with the *Himalayan Journal*. Nothing seems to work out, articles do not arrive, there is a postal strike, the printer has delayed the matter and everything is falling apart. With the pressure, all other aspects of life — business, family, other interests, and the worse of it, even actual climbing and trekking take a back seat. Finally a day comes when a climbing friend introduces you to someone as a 'paper trekker', and I tell myself, 'This is it, no more issues of the H.J.!'

But a review, a letter or a comment can change everything. Come April and a new volume is in my hand as the measure of success for all the 'exasperation' and everything changes. Mrs. Mavis Heath,

3. Volume I to XXXV are numbered in roman letters, till we changed to more convenient lettering from Volume 36 to 50.



an old time friend from Soli's time, wrote, 'With failing eyesight I am advised only some limited hours of reading in a week. I reserve it for the H.J.!' With such supporters, criticism and various controversies you know that your efforts are noted. With renewed vigour I start on the next issue. I am sure many editors of the H.J. and of other journals have gone through these phases. Ultimately, you start enjoying them!

I was driving to London airport with Johanna Merz, the current editor of the *Alpine Journal*. 'Do you like doing the H.J.', she inquired.

'Well, it is lots of hard work, very time consuming, sometimes very tedious, but overall I like it'.

As an after-thought I added, 'I enjoy doing it'.

Mike Westmacott (President of the Alpine Club) who was in the back seat remarked,

'You wouldn't be doing it if you did not enjoy doing it.'

There is no denying that!

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#### SUMMARY

A personal account on editing the *Himalayan Journal* by the present editor, recalling the past history.

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**7. Harish Kapadia**