

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The current year has witnessed two events worthy of special mention. First, the Himalayan Club completed 75 years. This landmark was celebrated with enthusiasm in several places, with special events and celebrations. Details of these and my thoughts on it are published in *The Himalayan Club Newsletter* (No. 56, March 2003). The second notable event was the award by Royal Geographical Society of its prestigious 'Patron's Medal' to Harish Kapadia later in the year. It is a proud moment for Indian mountaineering, exploration and the Himalayan Club. There is more about the award, which is the highest that the RGS confers, in later pages in this volume.

As a member of the Himalayan Club I had been following Harish's remarkable career for many years, though I did not know him personally. When I was elected the President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in 1993, in order to carry out major reforms that I had in mind, I was clear that Harish should be one of the Vice Presidents. It took lot of persuasion but I succeeded. During my six years as President, Harish was a powerful support at difficult times and suggested several new ideas that brought a paradigm shift in the way Indian mountaineering worked. Items of mountaineering equipment were imported in large quantities, for which I obtained a tax-free government license. A concept of small scale and small budget expeditions was introduced, gatherings of young mountaineers from all over India were held, various publications were produced and the first meeting of HIMCOM (Himalayan Countries Meet) was organised. During the two years of his vice-presidency he travelled to Delhi regularly to galvanise the workings of the IMF.

We continued our close interaction after I took over as President of the Himalayan Club in 1999. Over last few years the Himalayan Club has expanded and strengthened its base and he has been a key figure in that. He has undertaken many initiatives over the years to take the Club to greater heights and made the *Himalayan Journal* a world-class publication, being its editor for 25 years.

All this while he has continued to go to the Himalaya, particularly to the Siachen glacier and the East Karakoram, to carry forward explorations, which were backed up with excellent documentation and writing. He is a selfless mountain lover who undertook everything

simply for the love of it and not for fame or money. He managed all this while he was a businessman — mountains and exploration came first, even ahead of business. When the need was felt, he sold his successful family enterprise to devote all his time to his first love — mountains. He continued his passion despite two serious personal injuries and a major family setback in the tragic loss of his young soldier son to terrorism in Kashmir.

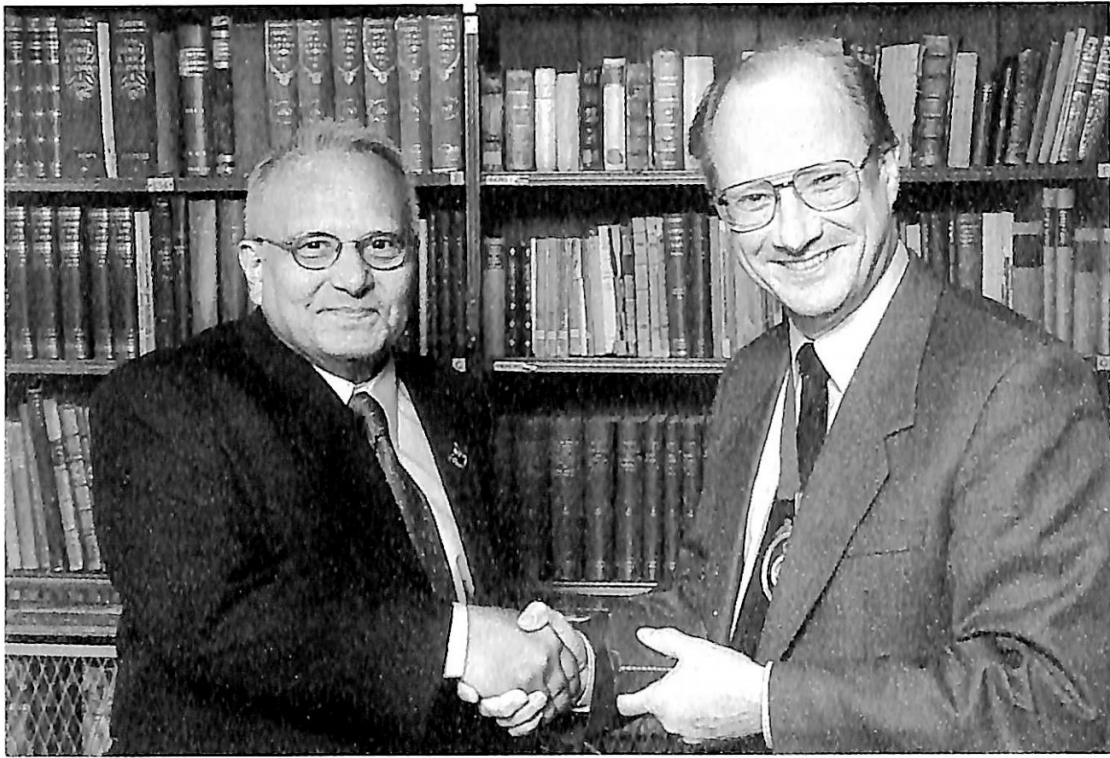
He is an explorer in the true traditional mode and has visited almost all the ranges in the Indian Himalaya in last four decades. His explorations have opened new horizons for future mountaineers and I rank him amongst some of the finest explorers I know or have read about. Moreover he is a rare breed, especially in India, who has always written, modestly but with deep knowledge, about his Himalayan journeys in several books and articles, creating a record for posterity.

I am indeed delighted that Her Majesty the Queen has awarded this well deserved 'Patron's Medal' to Harish, in the 50th anniversary year of both, the Coronation and the first ascent of Everest. Only one other Indian has received this honour - Pandit Nain Singh in 1877. I would like to salute his lifetime of achievements. It is but fitting that the citation of his award and his remarkable Acceptance Speech be produced in the *Himalayan Journal* and I have so insisted in spite of his reluctance to do so, as he is himself the editor.

The award is a proud moment for India, the Himalayan Club and a celebration of the Indian Himalaya. Thank you Harish, you have made us all feel taller!

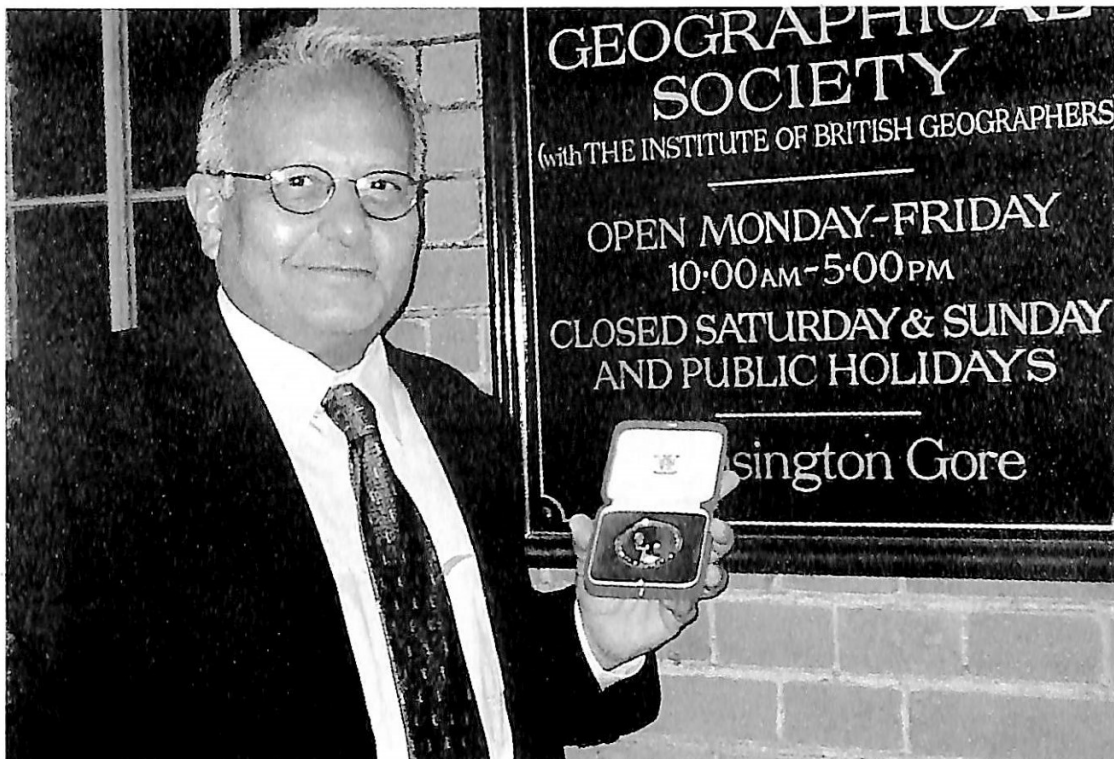
Dr M. S. Gill

President
The Himalayan Club



(RGS Archives)

President of The Royal Geographical Society, Sir Ron Cooke (right) presenting the 'Patron's Medal' to Harish Kapadia on 2 June 2003.



(Savita Apte)

Harish Kapadia with Patron's Medal at the RGS, London.

Citation by President
of The Royal Geographical Society

PATRON'S MEDAL

HARISH KAPADIA

HARISH KAPADIA has made a unique contribution to our knowledge of the Himalaya: as editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, one of the most authoritative and comprehensive records of exploratory activity in the Himalaya; through his numerous guide books and as a leader and organiser of countless expeditions over the years. He has been assistant editor and then editor of the *Himalayan Journal* since 1978 and has consistently improved both its content and its production. His guidebook and works on the Himalaya are erudite and practical, skilfully combining historical, geographical and practical guidance to increase our understanding of the region.

As an expedition leader, he has initiated a series of joint expeditions with climbers from the United Kingdom, France, Japan and the United States to explore and climb throughout the Indian Himalaya. The quality of exploration and the full and detailed reports that he has issued have provided superb background information about these areas.

Furthermore, Harish has been a tireless campaigner for the resolution of the Kashmir conflict through the Siachen Peace Park initiative in the Karakoram region. He is an outstanding modern explorer in the finest traditions of the great Himalayan pioneers.

It is most fitting, that this year, in which we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the first ascent of Mount Everest, we honour Harish Kapadia. On behalf of the Society's Council, I have great pleasure asking Mr Kapadia to receive our Patron's Medal for contributions to geographical discovery and mountaineering in the Himalaya.

Professor Sir Ron Cooke, DSc
President,
The Royal Geographical Society

2nd June 2003

**Acceptance Speech Delivered by Harish Kapadia at
The Royal Geographical Society, London,
on 2nd June 2003**

Mr President and Fellows of the RGS,

I am grateful to Her Majesty the Queen for awarding me the Patron's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society for the year 2003.

When I started enjoying the mountains, almost 40 years ago, any honour or achievement was far from my mind. Being in the mountains was good enough. Living in a busy city like Mumbai the need for mountains was felt with greater intensity. It all started with trekking in the Western Ghats, the range near my home and later I visited the Himalaya as a young schoolboy first time in 1962 and have continued going to the Himalaya ever since, every year.

Since early days I had two habits, which perhaps were helpful. I generally never liked to visit the same place or area again. Though there were favourite places to go to, but the serious ventures, the expeditions were more of an intellectual activity and not only physical exercise. Looking to a new hill or range gave me more pleasure than simply climbing a peak. Most of the peaks I have climbed were to look on to the other side of the mountain and look at the vast panorama. The second habit I developed since the early days was to maintain detailed notes of my activities. These notes ultimately allowed me to write about the visits to mountains and publish books. In fact writing about the mountains is almost as great a pleasure as visiting it. Like the passion to visit the mountains, I had to write when the need was felt, there was no escape from it.

I have shared mountain trails with many people. Today I remember all of them, though the list is too long to recall them individually. Many people and associations have helped me to enjoy the hills, from earliest mountain instructors and companions, to my devoted porters from Kumaun, each contributed to the pleasures. As it happens in any risk taking activity, I have lost a few friends and their loss was felt more as they were young and fit people. I myself survived two major injuries to continue with the passion.

I have been on joint expeditions with the French and the Japanese but it was great pleasure to go on six such joint expeditions with the British mountaineers, especially with Sir Chris Bonington. We discussed many topics, played cricket at the base camps, enjoyed ourselves and of course climbed few mountains in between. In fact one reviewer gave me the tribute that 'Harish is at his best when climbing with his beloved Brits' ! I am particularly happy that the society of 'beloved Brits' are honouring me today.

In the last two decades I have explored the areas of the eastern Karakoram over several trips, specially the Siachen glacier where Indian and Pakistani armies are engaged in high altitude war.

The war has led to major destruction of the environment and the human and economic costs have been heavy. I have been involved in proposing a Peace Plan to stop this war and save this great glacier and its peaks from environmental degradation that they are reeling under. It will be my great pleasure if such recognition leads authorities to consider such peace proposals more substantially. We are two nations linked by the Himalayan geography. Nations which do not understand and respect geography are condemned by history. Governments and people of both the countries should realise that there is a humanity which binds us together. Whatever our game. And whichever our side of the fence.

When I started going to the hills my father Bhagwandas, amongst others, simply could not understand why one has to walk in the hot sun, climb mountains or take risks. But he never stopped me and looked after the family cloth business during my long absences. To him I owe a lot. My elder son, Sonam, now a banker, when young had no choice but to walk the trail with me in the hills. Today he knows all the stories I can tell, and with his sharp mind would not let me go wrong with any figures, like heights of peaks. Truly like a woman behind a man, my wife Geeta stood with me through thick and thin, and thanks to her our home became a welcoming hub for mountaineers from the world over, as we polished off mangoes before proceeding to the mountains every summer. I am indeed delighted that she is present with me today.

Decades ago on a summer day I stood on top of a hill fort around Mumbai with my son Nawang who shared many trails with me. We saw our imprints on clouds as Brocken Spectre. I could see in his eyes that a life of a city boy was not for him and he wanted to ride on clouds. He selected a different avenue than mine and became a Gorkha officer in the Indian army - to serve the nation. He died in Kashmir trying to save the life of a colleague and defending the Himalaya. I dedicate this award to him. He will be proud of it.

In the epic Hindu scripture, *Bhagavad-Gita* it is said that "the splendour of mountains reveal God more than anything else. Every deed of heroism, sacrifice and every work of dedication is a revelation. The epic moments of man's life are inexplicably beyond the finite mind of a man.' I find this very true today as I recall the beauty I was fortunate enough to witness during all these years of explorations.

It is indeed a great honour to receive this Patron's Medal and join with many great explorers from whose writings I have learnt much, -- they are my heroes. It is standing on shoulders of many that I have reached here. I hope this award will spur me on to more visits to the Himalaya and further explorations for which even one lifetime is not enough.

Thank you Sir Ron Cooke, President of the Royal Geographical Society for this great honour which I am happy to accept, specially as an Indian.
