

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!

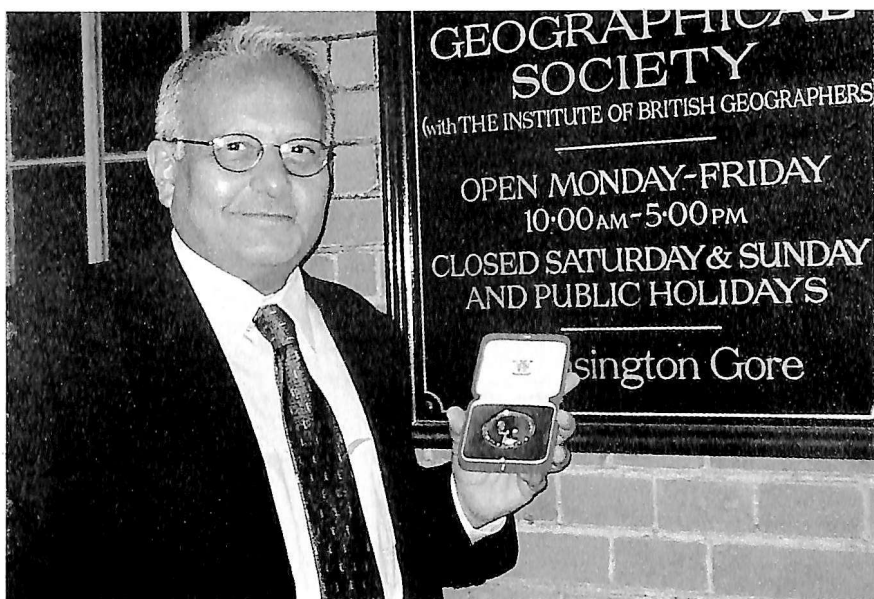
Dr M. S. Gill

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