

## Guest Editorial to the 75<sup>th</sup> Volume of the *Himalaya Journal*

When I took over the editorship of the *Himalayan Journal* from Soli Mehta in 1975, he presented me papers and contacts that would prove useful. His wife Meheru advised me, "Do not gather papers as Soli has done, our house is full of them". I was curious to see some exchange of letters between Soli Mehta and one Mrs Mavis Heath from Kenya. She was living on a farm, alone, after the passing away of her husband. She had read almost every word from the HJ issues, as I could gather from her letters. I continued corresponding with her. A few years later, she inquired when the next volume of the HJ was likely to be published. "My doctors have advised me against reading anything for more than an hour or two per day due to my failing eyesight. And I want to preserve my 'eyesight time' for the Journal". This told me about the importance of the Journal and the committed readers we had, apart from climbers.

The Journal has always had its share of troubles. During the initial years under Kenneth Mason, there was not much serious climbing happening. He used his contacts as a surveyor to set the tone for covering explorations and many other aspects like- geology, botany, shikar and related experiences in the Himalaya. During the World War II, the Journal had to stop publication, and soon thereafter, with the Indian independence in 1947, many Britishers, the main preserve of the Journal, migrated back and except for a few handpicked enthusiasts, the Journal was at a loss for volunteers. There was a "farewell" editorial and soon a "back to life" editorial, during this period. Trevor Braham was roped in as an emergency editor and he soon handed over the reins to the first Indian editor Dr K. Biswas.

More than before, a major crisis confronted the Journal and the next editor Soli Mehta was faced with a lack of volunteers and support while he published from Calcutta where he was posted. But this spirited Parsi continued to wage a lone battle, procured, edited and published the volumes of the HJ and posted it to the entire membership. This took a heavy toll on the Club's finances and new ideas to generate income were introduced. For ease and continuity of operations, the club shifted its headquarters to Mumbai and the Journal continued under Soli Mehta. Once, I saw his wife, aunt and daughter, packing the Journal for posting and then he carried the lot in his car to a post office for dispatch. The journal was always a voluntary effort.

As Soli was transferred to Sudan and later to Nigeria, I was roped in and luckily with, perhaps the most experienced editor in India then, R E Hawkins, of Oxford University Press. He introduced many changes, due to which the HJ became a very professionally edited publication. We published successive volumes for one and half decades between us. Soli Mehta and R E Hawkins both died within three weeks of each other in late 1989. I continued their work for the next two decades producing a total of 35 volumes. When the time came to retire, I handed over the editorship to Rajesh Gadgil, who was later succeeded by Nandini Purandare, and she continues with the endeavour.

As the Journal publishes this historic volume – the 75<sup>th</sup> edition of the journal, a major milestone, we must look to the future. Some frank and fresh thinking is required. The membership of the HC is falling and along with that, the readership of the HJ and volunteers to work. The editor has been waging a brave battle single-handedly to bring out publications year after year. Rising costs over the years have been further compounded by the COVID-19 epidemic. With most businesses being majorly

affected, the advertising support on which the HJ finances are mainly dependent, have fallen sharply. What about Online publication? Will old eyes like mine enjoy reading the HJ on a screen? The pleasure of holding a printed volume and flipping through its pages is incomparable. Like all the difficulties that the Journal has faced since its inception, this one too shall pass.

We are hopeful that climbers will soon be active, and the ranges will be well visited. The goodwill of 75 published volumes, the efforts of the editors and the wishes of its readers like Mrs Heath will sustain us. After a long silence, I had received a letter from her son, that she had peacefully passed on and one of the main items that she had donated in her Will was a full set of the HJ to a library in Africa!

During the British Rule in India, the Raj, Governor General would send an annual report to England ending with a positive statement. I can say the same for the *Himalayan Journal today* . "It is alive, well and rules (*publishes*) Ok" (*italics mine*)

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