merchant they met on the way, he succeeded in charting the route through large parts of Tibet. His maps provided the only definitive information on these parts for almost half a century, when the next British party was able to reach Tengri Nor. This last journey had taken its toll on his health, also impairing his vision. He continued for a few years to train other Indians in the art of surveying (and spying), and did a highly commended job of it, too.

Nain Singh’s name, and feats, could now be made public after years of secrecy. In 1876, his achievements were announced in the *Geographical Magazine*. The awards and recognition soon started flowing in. On his retirement, the Indian Government honoured him with the grant of a village, and 1000 rupees in revenue. The Paris Geographical Society, having heard of his feats, sent him a gold watch (according to Montgomerie, ‘not a very handsome watch, but the Society is not rich, and they meant to pay N.S. a handsome compliment’). The crowning achievement came in 1876, when the Royal Geographical Society honoured him with a gold medal as the ‘man who has added a greater amount of positive knowledge to the map of Asia than any individual of our time’.

Although Nain Singh got the recognition he deserved late in life, it is difficult to imagine what drove such a man to carry out arduous and dangerous work like this, under conditions of near-impossibility, all for a starting salary of rupees twenty a month!


Harini Nagendra is at Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560 012, India.