

## Markendya Kund

'Markendya Kund' is a spot on a mountain where many ages ago Rishi Markendya used to practice penance. This circular kund is formed in a rock. It is a desolate place, surrounded by 'Pine tree'. But in the adjoining areas there are many caves. While on way to Nainital from Haldwani one can conveniently visit this spot. The famous Markendya Purana was created in this place by the Rishi - this is the popular belief which is commonly prevalent in this zone.

I spent couple of days at Hanuman Mandir, when, I came back from 'Kalichaur' During my short stay I became friendly with a monkey, and started calling him 'Bhagwandas'. The monkey used to mimic all my actions - for instance when I used to climb the Neem tree, and eat the tender leaves, the monkey also ate those leaves. Whenever, I did meditation the monkey tried to copy my posture. All his activities reflected the traits of a yogi. The monkey accepted the food only when it was offered by me or by Sitaram Baba. Some times, the monkey went on his routine wanderings, and always returned with some sweets or eatables. He had become extremely attached to me, and always protected me from the pranks of children, in the market place. He displayed a special disdain towards drunkards. And whenever, he came across one, that he gave a severe chastisement to that person. In this manner, I became the centre of interest and curiosity of the local residents.

One day, I set forth on my expedition ; - the search of the ancient Markendya Kund . The monkey Bhagwandas, and Sitaram Baba also joined me in this marathon exercise. On the way, we collected more information regarding the topography of our destination from Mangal giri Baba. Equipped with the information, and some milk and sugar as the sustenance, we proceeded on our journey. When we reached Rani Bagh Chungi Chowkis, the most difficult part of our journey began. From this point, we started climbing the mountain which was suppose to lead us to our destination. After a couple of hours of tedious journey, the monkey suddenly pointed towards a direction, and yelled in delight. He climbed over a tree and gestured towards us to follow the direction of his journey from tree to tree. He covered quite a distance by jumping from one tree to another, and navigating our path: He came down, when he saw a dried river path, which led to the massive rock. Although the rock appeared to be covered with moss and looked slippery, the monkey continued to climb it cautiously. And soon, we also followed his example. At the top of the mountain, we were simply over whelmed by the breath taking beauty of the circular pond situated in the idyllic surroundings. The pond was brimming with clean water. Water was there, but no food could be seen growing in the near by area. The place was an image of total wilderness, far from the madding crowd.

We collected some dry branches and twigs to construct a make shift shelter which would give us protection from the chilly wintry winds. By night fall our shelter was ready. We lit a small bonfire for warmth, and I sat in the middle, flanked on the either side by Beeru Baba and Bhagwandas respectively. Our Sadhana continued in this manner for a couple of days, uninterrupted.

One day the ration that we had, also got exhausted, except for a little sugar. I offered the sugar to the monkey, but instead of eating it all by himself, he added water to it, and gave each of us a glass full. He drank from the 'Kamandal'. I broke into a laughter at his smartness and said "My friend : all your actions are of a human being? Why are you born as a monkey". The monkey gave me blanklooks, for my remarks were unintelligible to him. As the night advanced, the cold became more intense. The icy winds gradually took the shape of a storm, which started uprooting the trees with its ferocity. In order to combat the cold, I went to the kund and had a bath with its chilly waters. We spent the entire night performing this activity to over come the biting cold. When the storm became slightly weak, and the snowing also stopped, I added more fuel to the fire to brighten it and resumed my Sadhana. The monkey too came out of the sheet, and sat before the Dhuni. Despite his limitation, the monkey behaved like a yogi, and I really marvelled at his perserverance. All his actions were perhaps related to his karmas of previous birth, I deduced, and I was almost tempted to peep into his past, but seeing the monkey asleep I decided to defer it to some other suitable moment. The whole place wore a silent look, but for the chirping of the crickets. It had stopped raining but the sky was still overcast with clouds. I took out my beads and got busy with my 'Jap'. Since the cold was intense, the monkey came closer to the Dhuni to bask in the warmth of the fire. At that moment, our attention was distracted by the three arches of light coming from different directions and heading towards the kund. A closer look revealed that they were infact three Mahatamas who had come to visit us. The first one was wearing a loose kurta, the second one was clad in ochre coloured clothes and the third one was dressed only in a

"Kopin". I greeted them with respect and spread a sheet for them to sit. They introduced themselves in the following order : the taller one was Herakhan Baba, the second one was Somwari Baba, and the third one was Awadhoot Baba. Herakhan Baba caressed the monkey's head affectionately and said "So Mauni Maharaj you have finally taken birth in this yoni? You could not be traced since your departure from the cave in Badrinath". It was indeed an astonishing revelation to me, that the monkey was indeed a Muni in his last birth and his present behaviour confirmed this. My visitors stayed only for a short while, and before they left they advised me to leave the place. The monkey too followed the three Mahatamas and returned the third day wearing a despondent look. We had to starve for nearly three days, because nothing worth eating could be found in the wilderness. In the mean while the Mahatamas continued to visit us and reasserted their advice for moving away from the present surrounding. These frequent visits made me more irritable, because we could no longer contain hunger pangs, and our "Sankalp" did not permit us to go to village in search of food.

The sheer indifference of 'Nature' for not providing us with any thing which could be eaten, infuriated me. And in this mood of extreme rage I broke into wild cries, which was the out come 'Jalandhar Bandh'. And these wild cries created a confusion in the wild life of the forest. The animals started running helter skelter in fright and panic. My wild cries resulted into the arrival of a young boy in white clothes, who carried a pot of milk in his hands.

The boy said "Sir please stop these fierce cries, the animals are stricken with extreme fright and there is total chaos every where. I have brought some milk, and some roots kindly accept this meagre offering". My voice gradually died away and I returned to my normal self. First we offered the milk to the kind visitor and then we drank our share. The visitor also promised to send his black cow every day to this area, so that we could get our daily milk. And the boy kept his promise, because the next day we spotted the black cow grazing near our camp.

In the morning I went for a walk towards the caves, and sat there awaiting for the three Mahatamas. When they did not show up despite the long hours of waiting, I became restless and entered the cave to lie down. I picked up some stray dried branches and tried to bar the opening lest any intruder decided to venture in. My waiting was rewarded by the arrival of Herakhan Baba who, after removing the make shift barrier entered the cave and said "My son do not be obstinate : Last night you created almost a holocaust in the forest. Do not be impatient let 'time' unfold itself. I would rather advise you to return to your hut, when your hut will get burnt down then, proceed towards, Nal Damyanti Tal via Bhimtal. I will wait for you in the Pindari caves".

Our 'Sadhana continued in a peaceful manner for a couple of days more, till finally our temporary shelter caught fire as predicted by the Mahatama and our sojourn came to an end, We picked up our luggage and started our descent from the mountain.

**NAL DAMYANTI POND** : Nal Damyanti Tal named after king Nal and his wife Damyanti, is a first pond in the group of the seven well known ponds. The legend of king Nal, who deserted his wife at this spot is kept alive by this pond.

Today, one of the ponds from this group, has been converted into a cremation ground. Small temples have come up on the dried beds of rest of the ponds. These temples were erected by Mauni Baba "Nath yogi". It is believed that an ancient idol of Vishnu was found in this site, which inspired the people to construct temples and install the excavated divine idol. Some more idols, exquisitely carved were also discovered from the same pond. I chose a small hut, which was within the temple's vicinity for my stay. A positive aspect of this site was that it was close to the small number of inhabitants of the place. Mr. Nagpal, aged ninety four, lived nearby. He enjoyed robust health and could be seen working in the fields. He had two grown up sons, Jeevan Singh and Harendra Singh. The younger one was married and stayed with his father. He had quite a few daughters in his house, and one of them was Champa, who happened to be my sister in my previous birth. This family considered it as their duty to look after all Mahatamas who visited the temple.

I had come to this place because the divine mother had commanded me to do so. Some mysteries must be surely lurking in this area. Hence the divine command. This thought gave immense solace to my perturbed self. With the help of the local people I decided to organize a Bhagavat and a 'Yagna'. I renovated my hut and the temple entrance. The Block officer, Jila Parishad, and other local people gave their co-operation in various spheres.

A road leading to the temple was also constructed, a charitable trust was instituted which aimed at free education propagation of religion, and social welfare. Everything was moving as per the schedule, but inwardly I was not happy. I was feeling shattered, because I was deviating from my objective. I waited patiently for the divine mother's 'Darshan'. And as the days passed by, my restlessness increased, for the divine mother still kept me waiting. I was unwillingly getting involved in the issues of social welfare, which made me feel frustrated.

Since the cremation ground was nearby, I could witness the ghoulish dances of wandering souls at night. They tried to harass me but dared not come closer to me. In the morning, I frequented many places, like Hidimba Hill, Kokortaka Hill etc. My afternoons were spent in solving the different problems of the local people. One night, while I was loitering outside my hut in a restive mood, a horseman clad in regal white, caught my attention. The sound of the horse's hoofs came closer to me and stopped abruptly. When this incident occurred thrice, I decided to enchant the horse man lest it disappeared again. My 'Mantras' instantly arrested the horseman, who was none other but an English writer, a Christian by religion. He was extremely fond of this place and had financed the Christian mission. Although he was long dead yet his wandering soul still frequented this place. His daughter, Annie was also buried in this area and the English writer paid regular visits to the grave of his daughter. I freed him from the spell of my Mantras with the assurance that one day I will liberate his wandering soul. Then I came back to my hut and tried to meditate in order to establish my contact with the divine mother. But the sudden banging on the door broke my trance. When I opened the door I came face to face with a tall and a hefty Baba wearing a kopin. He took hold of my hand and led me to his cave on the 'Hidimba' mountain. We stayed there for a short while and returned to my hut. I had some warm milk, which I offered to my guest and requested him to drink. My visitor started talking about himself and the religious sect to which he belonged. He said "My name is Garib das and I am a Vaishnav Saint. I used to worship the 'Devi' and had a good knowledge of occult literature, but owing to my involvement with yoga I have emerged in this direction. Hera Khan was very popular in the by-gone times and his popularity is still a fresh. I came to this area primarily, in search of 'Hara Khan Baba'. In this way came in the contact of the land lords the - Mehras. The Mehras are the sole owners of the ponds and the lands of this area. Since this place is considered haunted, the Mehras sought the help of Sadhus. After treating them in a lavish manner, they lured them to this desolate haunted place and requested them to live there. The calmness of the place appealed to the sadhus and they agreed to stay. The landlords wanted to make the place worth living, and with this intention, they always brought the sadhus. But the sadhus had to pay a heavy price for the solitude for the following morning they were found dead in mysterious circumstances.

Similarly I was also brought to this place. When it had grown dark, huge stones came rolling towards me from the Hari mountain. I could immediately guess the under lying mysterious phenomenon, and with my powers, I stopped the stones from following further. Next day, when the Mehras came, they were taken back to find me still alive. I narrated the last night's incident to them to get certain things which were necessary for my 'Pooja'. I performed the 'Pooja' continuously for three days, and succeeded in freeing the place from the restless souls hold. And in course of time the place became fit for human habitation.

After thirteen years, I went into a samadhi. During the night I entered into the body of Raghu and came to the site where I was buried alive, and opened the mouth of the samadhi. Inside I found my body unharmed and intact. I wanted my body, so I re-entered my body and reached Raghu's body to his house. My next step was to destroy my hut and seal the samadhi well, lest anyone suspected a foul play. Since then, I am staying in this cave, and no one is aware of my existence.

"You must keep away from all the social entanglements. Your prime concern in your life should be your 'Sadhana' only. History is going to repeat itself, so you should beware of it. All the incidents always occur in a natural sequence. Some incidents can disintegrate you, but there are some which have the quality of integration. The present always stems from the past. Therefore past cannot be totally erased".

Your past will unfold kaleidoscopic images of love and affection before you. But you have to be indifferent to the sweet and bitter memories of the past. You have to, at this stage of life, destroy your sanskaras. 'Karmas' should cease to be your concern. The 'divine mother' will give you the guidance. Fare well: Whenever you wish to see me you can come to the "Hirap caves". After Baba's

departure, I took a bath and came back to my hut. In the morning a dumb boy was brought to me from Vinayak. I gave him a pinch of 'Vibhuti' (ash) and told him to try and pronounce the divine word "OM". The moment the boy swallowed the "Vibhuti", he could utter the word "OM". I was simply amazed at this, because this was my first experience. The same day another incident occurred which created a stir in the public : A lame boy was cured by my Vibhuti's massage. Consequently people from far off places started coming to me in hope of cures for a variety of ailments with which they were plagued. When I realized that I was deviating from my path by getting embroiled in the mundane, social affairs, I decided to take refuge in the 'Hirap caves far from the daily crowd of visitors. But the people were rather unhappy at my absence, and they started spreading false rumours about me, They also went to the extent of branding me as a spy. A constant vigil was kept on my movements. Despite such strict vigilance, I always managed to escape right in front of their eyes.

One day 'Harendra Singh Satwal's' sister Champa came to visit me with her mother. I was already aware of Champa's ailment, since her brother had briefed me about her problem, I wrote a Mantra on a piece of paper and gave it to her. I also cautioned her to keep it in strict security, because if she would lose it she would be unwell all over again. Champa got cured the very day. But due to the theft of the paper, she again got afflicted with the same disease.

All the preparations for the Bhagwat Yagna were almost over. I had extended invitations to all the Sadhus and Mahatamas of the neighbouring areas to attend the Bhagwat 'Yagna'.

As the day of the yagna was drawing closer, I was getting restive, because I still awaited some kind of communication from the divine mother. I even tried to establish contact with the divine mother in the astral form, but could not do so. All my hopes rested in the 'Mother's' blessings.

A strange element of scepticism had crept in the people attitude towards me. They continued to keep a close watch over my movements. I always managed to hood wink them by vanishing in the astral form and materializing where ever I wanted to go. I went to Garib Baba's cave to seek his blessing and also to inform him of the unfair attitude of the people. He was rather amused at my vanishing trick. He made an illuminating remark in this context. He said "society, in general, practises double standards. The hypocrisy of the people is apparent in their demonstration of their reverence towards Sadhu's and Mahatamas in the form of worship. Outwardly they exhibit their faith but inwardly they always entertain doubts about them. You should turn a blind eye to all these trivialities, have patience and await the command of the 'Divine Mother'. Too much involvement in social welfare will deter you from your chosen path. It is good to have a benevolent attitude towards social issues, but not, at the cost of self".

In the dark night, clad only in a kopin I looked almost, like a ghost. While I descended from the mountain, my kopin made a rustling sound, which gave an eerie touch to the darkness of the night. My attention was arrested by some activities on the Nal - Damyanti cremation ground. Funeral arrangements for a corpse were in progress. I stood for some time and watched the scene, and then again started moving with my rustling sound. At the sound of the Kopin, people mis took me for a ghost, panicked, and ran away from the scene. On an impulse I jumped into the 'Tal' with a splashing sound. This further increased their fright and the people accompanying the corpse took to their heels. I loudly called out to them to allay their baseless fears, but my voice did not have any affect on them. The entire situation looked comical, I smiled inwardly, took a round about path and entered my hut. The fleeing crowd in the meantime had reached my door step, and wanted me to rescue them from the so called ghost, which was only the figment of their imagination. When I came out of the hut wearing the same 'kopin' and making the same rustling sound, the mystery of the ghost of the cremation ground was instantly solved. The crowd had a hearty laugh at their stupidity, and proceeded to carry on with the unfinished funeral rites. I was amused at the vagary of human behaviour, and sat down to analyse the complicated human emotions.