

VILLAGE OF HIMALAAYA

The 'Himalayan' village Bageshwar,

is situated on the confluence of the two rivers 'Saryu' and 'Gomati'. Bageshwar enjoys the status of historical importance by virtue of two significant reasons - first because it was the Taposthali (the place of penance) of Rishi Markendya and secondly, because, Lord Shiva bestowed his blessings on this tiny village. Today, this village is no longer tiny, but has shaped into a small town. The ancient Mandir "Baghnath" which is situated on the banks of the rivers, and the Shri 'Panchjoona Akhara' enhance the importance of the place. The 'Saryu' river flows down in meandering musical motion to the village from its point of emergence the 'Mahendra shill'. In the course of its journey to Ayodhya, it takes other rivers like Gomati and 'Kali Ganga' in its fold. In the Skanda Purana particularly in the 'Kedar Khand' the village Bageshwar has been alluded to as 'Lord Shivas' town. It is said that sage Vashist under went an austere penance in a cave in the 'Mahendra Shila' in order to please Saryu (the river). But when Saryu river, pleased by the penance of the sage, began to flow, Lord shiva became apprehensive, and requested Saryu to confine the flows of its waters to the village border. But Saryu was not ready to accept this proposal. She said "On the way Rishi Markendya is engrossed in penance. I do not want to disturb him and become a victim of his wrath. Also, the continuous Tapasya (Penance) of the sage Vashist cannot be ignored. Lord shiva told 'Saryu' to wait for some time, and started towards the cave where sage Markendya was wrapt in deep 'Tapasya'. Lord Shiva and Shivani transformed themselves as Bagh (tiger) and cow. The cow stood before the cave crying for help from the menace of the tiger who was right behind her. There upon, the Rishi ran out to rescue the helpless cow from the tiger.

In the meantime the cave was fully inundated by the flowing saryu In a flash, the Rishi comprehended the conspired act and at that instant Lord Shiva and Shivani stood before him in their true selves. Lord 'Shiva' said many things to him, but Markendya firmly insisted that hence forth 'Lord Shiva' will be worshipped as a Bagh (tiger) in the village. Since then 'Lord Shiva' continues to be worshipped as 'Baghnath' in the village 'Bageshwar'. And this episode also explains the importance of the place in the context of religion and piety.

I was keen on 'Bageshwar' chiefly because I wanted to do penance for a few days on the shore of the Saryu (the river) and then, temporarily settle in the foothills of 'Pindar' and 'Kailash'. And so, with this intentions I started my journey on foot to the pious village 'Bageshwar'. On the way, I suddenly remembered the divine from kalichaur, and to receive her benediction straight away went to kalichaur. Quite a few changes had taken place in kalichaur. A cluster of new houses had sprung up and in the temple, new idols had been installed. But the 'divine mother' remains unaffected by these changes.

The temple 'priest' Ram Kumar, also exhibited modernity in his attitude and thoughts I stayed for a fortnight (during the Navraatri) in the 'Mother's shelter' and after seeking the 'divine mothers' blessings proceeded towards Bageshwar. This time I opted to go through the forest, free from all clothings, and bare foot.

I spent couple of days in the 'Deva Guru' forest, and then arrived at Mukteshwar. My time in Mukteshwar was spent in the company of Bengali Baba. When I reached Almora, I stayed with Mohanji Maharaja, a renowned siddha of the 'Kumaon region'. One evening, while we were busy cooking the meals, Vishwanath Bramhrchari along with his disciples paid us an impromptu visit. A gentleman belonging to the Kapoor family knew the Vaishnav saint, and so he humbly offered us the lift to Bageshwar. But before we could answer him, the Bramhachari intervened and said in English "these people look quite dirty, How can we possibly accomodate the stinking sadhus in our jeep? I felt highly offended by this reproachful remark. Though we were not dressed as per the standards of the society, but we were certainly not uncivilized. In retaliation, I decided to reach Bageshwar before them and that too on foot.

We ate our frugal meal, I immediately proceeded towards Bageshwar, and told my companion to follow me. We took the mountaneous route via 'Kalimath Takular' and reached Bageshwar. We had a good bath in the flowing "Saryu" and washed our clothes also. When the jeep arrived, the occupants, were greatly surprised to find us already there, despite the fact that we had walked all the way to

Bageshwar. This time I spoke to the Bramhachari in fluent English and made him realize and regret his earlier scornful attitude. In a penitent voice he said "Sir, you are a yogi and can perform strange acts". The Bramhachari is a good saint, and for the last thirty years he has been in Bageshwar. He is well known and respected by the local populace. Formerly, he was a simple tapaswi (a mendicant) and today he has acquired the status of a Matha deesh (the head of a monastery). The new found status has inflated his ego - otherwise, inwardly he is a good soul.

Shri Krishna Chandra Giri, the Mahanata of Bageshwar, knew me very well and so I got the opportunity to spend some time in his company. I also came in contact with some sadhvis (female saints) belonging to the Avdhoot sect. They looked pleasant with their long matted locks. I was longing to go to the Pindari cave and when I expressed my desire, the Naga Baba - 'Sant Giri' requested me to stay for another two or three days more. The Baba was also keen to accompany me to the cave - Hence the request. I stayed back, and witnessed an unpredictable cycle of events. An 'Avdhootani', who was ailing for a couple of months, was kept behind the locked doors of a room. Since she was totally broken in spirit and body, her death was expected, by and large, by everyone. One day while I was passing by, I saw something, that arrested me in my 'tracks'. An astral form was trying to enter the sick woman's room. He was 'Mashan' from the grave yard. I imprisoned him with the powers of Mantra, but also promised to release him the next day.

The following morning, I went to the Mahantji and made enquiries about the sick woman. He took me to the room of the woman, who had indeed turned into a skeleton and was in a pathetic state. I covered the woman with a piece of cloth, and as per my promise I released the 'Mashan'. The 'Mashan' made the cloth to fly towards the cremation ground. The cloth magically flew and fell on the cremation ground which was on the banks of the river. Consequently the woman under went a marked change. After a couple of hours she managed to get up from her bed and had a bath in the saryu river. A little later she ate some food, and recovered miraculously. I had given her a new life by freeing her from the clutches of the "Mashan".

The same day Sahaji, a revolutionary and a freedom fighter, arrived at Bageshwar. He had come to Bageshwar for the treatment of his son who had been ailing for the last nine months. The son was also an active politician, and belonged to the 'Jan Sangh' party. Along with the doctor the entire family was trying to nurse the patient back to health. Since Mahantji too had a cordial relationship with Sahaji, he requested me to have a look at the patient. In the evening I went to Sahaji's house, where the 'Jagaran' was in progress. The 'Jagaran' is a common custom in the hilly areas. I took my seat in the group of the spectators. A young man was dancing, as though possessed, swaying drunkenly he touched the forehead of the patient and said "He will be alright within eight days" and returned to his seat. I was feeling rather angry to see the drama of superstition, stupidity, and sham. When the spectacle became unbearable I spoke in a loud voice, "I challenge the man to dance now. I really wonder, whether there is any Devata at all. Let the 'Devata' over take the young man I will not allow him to do so ". And the boy, despite his best efforts and hypnotic music, could not dance. I had proved the entire exercise as sham and superstitious, not capable of yielding the healing touch.

I came out of the house and called Sahaji to me. I spoke to him thus "Your son will die on the eight day, for his time has come. You are an educated man still you are entertaining such futile superstitious activities? All this dancing and music is not going to change the fate of your son". Devatavas don't appear at the mere clap of hands, people who have been truly blessed are not ordinary people. I cannot go against nature - and I have already informed Mahantji about this.

Finally, the day came when I was able to leave for the Pindari cave. Naga Baba and the Vaishnav Saint also came along with me. True to my prediction, 'Sahaji's son died on the eighth day, and once again I became the issue of discussion in Bageshwar.

We reached Khati the last Indian village cosily tucked between the Himgiri peaks. In Khati, normally it rains throughout the year. On the way we had a difficult time due to the rains. As soon as we reached Khati, Naga Baba straight away headed to the village to make arrangements for our meals and I waited for him on the outskirts of the village. Shortly, Naga Baba returned loaded with the ration and accompanied by the simple guileless villagers. I was running short of money and was worried about the future expenses which will crop up on our way to the Pindari cave.

But the villagers solved this problem by helping us with money and the ration. Since it used to rain every afternoon the villagers felt concerned about our proposed onward journey. I was quietly listening to the dialogue between Naga Baba and Dewan Sigh the teacher. Regarding our journey, I was confident that nature will continue to give its contribution, because my past experience had taught this. Since, I have never gone against the law of nature, then logically I inferred, why should nature go against us?

When the villagers spoke about the rains which was a regular feature, I replied spontaneously "Well if this is the daily occurrence then why should we interfere with the activity of God? God? Gods acts are beyond comprehension. Since we are determined to go, we will definitely get an opportunity to go a head with our plans. Whatever has happened to us in the past, the same will be repeated". With a start I realized that unwillingly I have made a forecast about the weather. In the afternoon, when we were about to start on our journey I said to the villagers, "Since when have you started to test the Mahatamas? If it is so, then bear this in your minds, there will not be a drop of rain this afternoon except stormy winds.

Nature always gives us the fore warning about its fluctuating moods. My forecast came true, because when we had completed the three miles, strong winds blew the roof top of the 'Kali Mandir' but not a single drop of rain fell that day.

The following day we reached the 'Pindari' cave. After cleaning the cave, my two companion went out to collect wood for the bonfire. In the meantime I piled up the stones, which were lying inside the cave and formed an 'Asana' for myself. The Babas came back with the dry wood. After covering the opening of the cave with a huge boulder we lit the fire, Due to the continuous snowfall it was very cold. Gradually the entire surroundings were enveloped by the consequent fog, which made the visibility almost nil. Soon it became dark and the Pindari cave was lost in the darkness. But the darkness was soon replaced by the milky moonlight, which bathed the entire valley with its breath taking beauty. I came out of my cave to savour the beauty of the snow clad Himalayas in the moonlight. The two Babas also came out, but Bairagi Baba could not stand the extreme cold and started shivering. I covered him with my shawl, but he continued to shiver so I brought him out in the open and, virtually forced him to stay thus for a while then only I allowed him to go inside the cave. This approach helped to reduce his chill considerably and he dozed off to sleep. Naga Baba was engrossed in his 'Sadhana' so I came out and seated myself on a rock, to enjoy the moonlit night and listen to the musical notes of the river 'Saryu'. On an impulse I got up, and, started walking towards the Nanda Ghat. I was drawn to the sound of "Shankha" (konch shell) and 'Nagare' (drums) which was coming from a place which seemed to be at a short distance. The sight of thousands of beautiful women attired colourfully arrested me. They were dancing in a massive cave, and the sound of the music emanated only from this spot. Suddenly, five young girls came to me and pestered me to accompany them to the yonder cave. They took me inside the cave and led me to a three tier cave which was constructed within the main cave.

And very soon I found myself in front of the 'divine mother'. Overcome with profound emotions, I stepped forward and clung to her feet. She was magnificently adorned by ornament and this time she had appeared with her Asta Bhujas (eight hand). Four other Devis (goddesses) namely - Mandakini, Nandakeni, Ghalidwar and Pinoori Devi were also present there along with the "Divine Mother". Some women were sitting on the second floor, and now and then, I used to turn around to cast a glance at them. The 'divine Mother' sat quietly, and did not pay any attention to my activity. But when I got up she turned around, and the same scene was visible on the opposite side I was rather astonished to see myself in the congregation of men, women and children. The congregation had encircled me and was moving around me. However, the other group - (the dancing one) was dancing and singing before the 'Mother'. The sound of "Swaha : Swaha reverberated in the atmosphere and I visualized myself busy in the construction of a huge 'Mandap' while the congregation revolved around me. Gradually, the image began to fade away, and with a jolt I returned to normalcy. At this moment the "divine mother" said "you have to establish the idol of the vision in Pindari, This work you will have to carry out with your hands. A yagna in Bageshwar should precede this ceremony".

It was almost morning when I returned to my cave and found Bairagi Baba still asleep, but Naga Baba was awake. I tried to snatch some sleep but could not do so. Naga Baba, in the mean time went to the stream and had a bath in the icy waters. And when he was walking back to the caves he saw the enchanting sight of the 'divine mother', enrobed in red clothes and bedecked in jewels, seated on a

rock. Naga broke into an ecstatic dance and began to shout -"Ma, Ma, Ma, I immediately came out of the cave and had the 'Darshan' of the Mother. The first rays of the morning sun fell on the mother and a celestial light emitted from her temple. A sweet scent permeated the atmosphere. Bairagi prostrated himself before the mother in joyous devotion. The 'divine mother' sat for couple of hours, and we also sat there, entranced by the divine vision. Only Naga Baba continued his dance in the devotional frenzy. When the sun rays became stronger, and the tourist began to trickle in the figure of 'divine mother' vanished from the rock.

BABA MATHURA DAS : I spent the entire day wandering around the place, and in the night, I once again started towards the mighty cave which can be found in the rocky expansion of the snowy peak. 'Mandakini Tal' is the nearest land mark, which leads the traveller to the cave. As soon as I reached the cave, a sadhvi came forward and welcomed me. She, there upon took me inside the cave which was bathed in yellow light, and twenty three Mahatamas sat in a row. The last and the twenty fourth seat was lying vacant, and the sadhvi gestured to me to occupy the place. People had been waiting for me for quite some time, and we received the food which the 'Sankalp Shakhi' had materialised. I was taken to a Mahatama who was seated on a different Asana, a little away from the row of the Mahatamas. He looked healthy, and his locks were snowy white. The Baba gazed at me for a while and then said "In future please do not come to this place in your physical form, for these Mahatamas have come in the astral forms, and have created their respective physique. The bodies of these Mahatamas are infact lying in their respective caves, which are situated in different Himalayan zones.

They have come to attend the 'Priti Bhoj' (meals) which I have organized. We spotted you all of a sudden".

The Mahatamas left the cave by and bye. I could recognize many of them, but since they were in a hurry, they did not come forward to meet me. Finally, I was the only one who was left behind, except for the sadhvi. The 'Baba' then dematerialized himself in the sitting position itself , and then spoke at length on the importance of the astral world.

He dwelt on a variety of subjects ranging from science to politics. He displayed a special interest in the ups and downs of the contemporary polities. The stimulating talk soon came to an end, and the sadhvi escorted me to my cave.

My meeting with Mathuradas Baba gave me enough food for thought. Pleased by the ceaseless worship of Madan Mohan Malviya and Motilal Nehru, Mathuradas had renounced his body in order to be born as Jawaharlal Nehru He led a long life as a 'Karma Yogi' and then returned to his original garb of an ascetic in the lap of the 'Himalayas'. His interest in politics was primarily, due to his role on earth as a Karma - Yogi. My train of thoughts was disturbed by aches and pains of Bairagi Baba. His feet had become sore due to the intense cold and he also experienced a strange burning sensation all over his body. I melted the candle and applied it to the open pores of his feet, and, this reduced his suffering only slightly. I also made a paste out of a Himalayas herb and asked the Baba to eat it. The sedative effect of the herb soon put the Baba to sleep. Since his agony seemed to be under control. I decided to reconsider my stay in the Pindari cave. In an adjacent cave I went into meditation and changed into an astral form. I went to 'Khati' in my 'astral form' and with my thought vibrations communicated with Ratan Singh. On my return, I found Naga Baba also in the grip of painful frostbite. Considering the plight of my companions, I decided to return. In future, I resolved, I will come alone to the cave.