

An Introduction to Vasishta Guha

By Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj

If there is a heaven on earth, it is certainly Vasishta Guha. Guha means a cave. This Vasishta Guha Ashram (referred to as the 'The Guha' in the subsequent paras) is situated at 22 kms from Rishikesh on the famous Bus route to Badrinath / Kedarnath (6 kms. from Shiv Puri where there are a lot of rafting institutions, and 10kms before reaching Byasi).



In the Himalayas, the names of many of the caves are linked with some renowned sage or other of yore e.g. Vyasa Guha, Uddalaka Guha.

Vasishta is one of the saptarshis (7 sages) and one of the first creations of Lord Brahma (the creator) out of his will power. He was the chief priest (Kula Guru) of the line of kings claiming their descendance from the Sun God (Surya Vansa), the most famous in that line being king Sri Ram (RAMA CHANDRA) - an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Vasishta's one hundred sons were killed due to the machinations of his competitor Sage Viswamitra through the application of black magic rituals. Though a highly evolved soul well established in the supreme consciousness (Brahman), the tragedy of the death of all his hundred sons was too deep a blow to be borne with equanimity. Vasishta, in frustration decided to end his life by jumping into a river. The River goddess did not want to incur the heinous sin of being the cause of the death of such a holy sage and so just carried him safely unharmed and deposited him on the other bank where Arundhati, the wife of Vasishta, was already waiting for her husband. As Arundhati thought that if they continued to stay in that environment, the memories of their dead children would haunt them, suggested going on a pilgrimage to the southern part of India. En route, presumably, this Vasishta Guha was one of the places where he camped for performance of austerities (Tapas) for a few hundred years (Vasishta was a sage who remained as the chief priest for more than five generations of kings each of whom ruled for several thousands of years). The Guha is situated on the banks of the holy river Ganga about 120 feet below from the main road and it is barely a five minutes walk to Arundhati Guha, access to which is by walking over the Ganga's sand beach. Similar Vasishta Ashrams exist in various places (i.e. B.R. HILLS in Karnataka, in SRI LANKA etc.).

Who knows how many saints, sages and Siddhas have lived in this cave and added to its glory, holiness and spiritual vibrations! Behind the Siva linga at the far end of the cave can be seen a slightly vertically inclined opening into the cave. If you put your hand in it, you will find inside it is closed. It seems the cave used to extend inside for another 20 kms or so till a place called Ghanta Karna Mandir up in the Himalayas. A few years back this passage was

closed. It is believed that a number of Himalayan adepts (SIDDHAS) have been doing austerities in their subtle body (not visible to naked eyes of common people) inside the back of the cave for thousands of years.

Besides, our Gurudev Swami Purushottamanandji Maharaj also had done his austerities here since 1928. He was a grand disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and disciple of Swami Brahmananda.

Many visitors, not only Indians but foreigners too, who used to sit inside the cave in meditation in recent times, claimed to have had varied psychic experiences. In April 1996, a letter was received in this Ashram from H. H. Swami Dayananda Saraswatiji of international fame, enclosing two copies of a photograph of the cave taken at his behest during his recent visit thereto.

It seems that when the photograph of the far end platform containing Siva Linga was taken and got developed it was found that there were two rays of light emanating from the top / side of the Siva Linga and going over the side walls and ceiling till it disappeared into the earth halfway from the cave entrance. It could have represented the ultimate merger of one or more of the unseen Siddhas into the Supreme being. When Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi left his mortal body at Tiruvannamalai, at that very moment many were able to see in different cities a bright star-like flame coursing through the sky and this was reported in some newspapers too.

Many have expressed that when once they sit inside the Guha for meditation, their level of consciousness immediately rises up to such a high level which they were able to reach only occasionally and that too after years of spiritual practice.

Two other incidents which have been included in a book "Fragrant Flowers" are reproduced below to illustrate the glory of the Guha:-

1. Some time in 1994 or so, a young Dutch woman visited the Guha on a day when I (Swami Shantananda) happened to be there. It was her first visit. She was sitting in meditation inside the cave till lunch time.

During lunch she suddenly addressed me and asked "I find that your Gurudev had left his body in Feb. 1961. Since then, have you met him again at any time?" The question sounded strange and I answered in the negative. After finishing her lunch she followed me to my room and narrated the following unique experience of hers in the Guha :-

"After about two hours of meditation, when I suddenly opened my eyes, I saw a Swamiji with a laughing face standing before me. He was identical with the photograph kept outside the cave in the dais. The only difference was that unlike in the picture he had a long stick in his hand. A thought come to my mind that the vision was some sort of an illusion. The Swamiji smilingly told me 'you are wrong, my dear child. I am as real as you are. I am not an illusion.'" I was astonished that he could divine my thoughts accurately. He asked me "Aye, what do you want?" I replied 'Swamiji, I want Gyan (True

Knowledge)! He laughed in a wild manner and disappeared. I believed her because in her narration she has mentioned certain typical characteristics of my Gurudev as follows:-

- My Gurudev often sported a long stick even though in the picture on the dais it was not there.
 - His typical question to many visitors or disciples was :- "Aye, what do you want?"
 - He always used to be laughing like a child.
2. In 1980, when I (Swami Shantananda) had gone to Vasishta Guha to attend my Guru Dev's birthday as also to do Sri mad Bhagavata Saptaham, one Mrs P. had also come to the Guha. On the first day of Bhagavata reading in the morning, Mrs P. did not attend the recitation partly perhaps she had no taste for it and could not also understand the sanskrit text. She went and sat inside the cave for meditation. After a while, when she opened her eyes, she saw our Gurudev standing before her with a smile. She would not believe her own eyes. He told her "yes, I am really standing before you but you will not believe. Today one old ex-armyman with a beard will be visiting Guha for the first time but he will refuse to have lunch here in the Ashram and will go back.

When this happens, you will believe in this vision. Tomorrow I shall initiate you with a mantra." Mrs P. never disclosed this to anybody. In the evening when I saw her face full of misery, I asked her for the reason. Then she narrated the incident and told me 'Today I have not seen any such old ex-army man visiting this Guha. Perhaps it was all my imagination.' Then I exclaimed "No, it is true. Today one old ex-army man came and the Swami-in-charge of the ashram took him to the library and was showing him the book "YOGA VASISHTA" in three volumes. When Swamiji pressed him to stay for lunch, he excused himself and left." Mrs P. was elated at this news.

Next morning when she went inside the Guha and sat for meditation, Gurudev again appeared. She was desperately praying in her heart. "I want only a mantra on 'Ram' and not on any other God" Gurudev smiled and said "yes, I shall give you only Ram Mantra. Do not worry. Do you know any hymn on Ram for meditation purposes (Dhyana Sloka); If so, recite it." She recited a hymn. Gurudev gave her a Mantra, bade her go and attend Bhagavatam reading which was going on outside and disappeared. I was the only one to whom Mrs. P confided the full details of her initiation.

Our Gurudev, Swami Purushottamanandji Maharaj left the Ramakrishana Mission and went wandering round the Himalayas in early 1920s. During his wanderings by foot he came across this Guha in 1928. The cave was surrounded by tall trees and it was all a jungle. He lived inside the Guha doing his meditation/ austerities for more than 25 years till a room was built for him near the Guha. In my assessment, he was a realised soul. It is told that in his earliest years in the Guha, a lion used to come from the other side of the Ganga daily in the dusk and sleep near the nearest end of the Guha while our Gurudev used to sleep at the farthest end of the Guha, where a circular memorial has since been built. After about a year of keeping the nightly companionship with my Gurudev, the lion went away, never to

return. Swami Purushottamanandji went into Maha Samadhi (by leaving the body) on 13 February 1961 on the SHIVARATRI day. His vibrations are still being felt in the entire area surrounding the Guha by his devotees.

The Guha is now being run by Sri Chaitanyanandji, a simple but eminent disciple of Gurudev and the managing trustee. The Trust is also running an outpatient department in an allopathic Hospital built by the Trust with 16 beds in the Goolar village about a kilometre off. Dry cooking rations are also provided to all the pilgrims going to/returning from Badrinath/Kedarnath etc. This Vasishta Guha is a very valuable spiritual institution adding to the splendour of Uttarakhand state. Even today, some times at midnight, some people claim to have heard the loud chanting of scriptures like Rudri as also the sounds of Damru, Mridanga and other instruments, coming from the mountain top above the Guha.

One of the popular messages of Gurudev is as follows:-

What are we seeking! Bliss

What we are searching for is within us. Within is a huge roaring ocean of divine and infinite bliss, a single drop of which can completely destroy all our woes forever and transport us to a high state of ecstasy. But foolishly we look for this outside. To imagine that wife, children, wealth, name, fame etc. can bring us happiness is a mere illusion. Our state is like that of a deer which contains the musk in its own navel but in its ignorance seeks this divine scent in its surroundings in trees, creepers, grass etc. The teachings of our great sages alone can therefore give us pure unalloyed and eternal bliss.