

## Roopkund: An Unsolved Mystery

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*Present paper is trying to make total concentration on the collection of all scientific and cultural material related to Roopkund mystery. Authors used all the literature material in their original form and divided it into three sections like, religious, historic and scientific according to the nature of research findings. Previous scientific research findings and cultural beliefs are compared with each other and discussed of these hypothesis and explore a genuine and acceptable story of Roopkund victims. At the end of the paper the author gives conclusion on the theories and future work scope for the researches.*

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India has retained its identity in the world through its different traditional and cultural heritage. An Indian person over the year celebrates their religious and cultural events according their tradition and believes. In this succession of tradition, Uttarakhand, generally known as Devbhumi (Land of Gods) performs a pure spiritual-cultural pilgrimage ceremony of NANDA Rajjat in every twelve years. The only religious journey passes from the human less, tough and high zones of Himalaya in all over Asia. During the Rajjat, pilgrims touch the boundary of 'NANDA Biosphere Reserve Forest', where the Popular & Mysterious glacial lake 'Roopkund' located near the basin of Holy Mountains Trishul and Nanda Ghungti. In ancient era Roopkund was known as Rudrakund<sup>1</sup> and today's 'Rupkund Mystery' is a renowned subject of research and attracts the researchers and investigators from all over the world.

### GEOGRAPHICAL SURROUNDING-

Roopkund is a small bowl shaped glacial lake situated in the upper Himalayan region of Uttarakhand, between 79045"E longitude and 30018N latitude on the altitude of 5029mt at the foothills of the Trishul massif, small in dimension (approximate 150mt to 200mt), this is more than 40 km far from the local human habitat and it takes 3 to 4 day to reach the lake. The lake is surrounded by steep hill on all sides except the south-western corner which is the only approach to the lake. The Roopkund lies to the south and west of the Nanda Devi and Trishul. The weather conditions vary with the altitude and only month of August to September is appropriate for seeing its beauty<sup>2</sup>.

### THE MYSTERY OF ROOPKUND-

Roopkund is not only famous for its beautiful locations, environment & religious value but in these days it became popular as a skeletal lake among the researchers due to the presence of 200 to 800 human skeletons. And the mystery lies in the fact that these skeletal remains are still in the same condition as they were first explored.

At the first time, this glacial lake was noticed by the British investigator in the year 1898<sup>3,4</sup>. In 1907, Longstuff also mentioned about these skeletal remains in his Trishul expedition<sup>5</sup>. This discovery has revolutionized the world of ancient history ever since 1942, when a Forest officer Mr. Madhwal and Scottish Lt. Hamilton came across this mass deposition of bones<sup>6,7</sup>. In 1955 Madhwal repeated his visit to Roopkund with former State Minister of Forest Mr. Jagmohan Singh Negi, and then the racial and historical investigation of Roopkund remains get started. But still it's a mystery, some investigations about the Roopkund skeleton are available and these help us to explore something about the remains. But the major question is still remaining that whose are these people? Why were they coming here?

There are many stories regarding these skeletal remains are present in the society and for our convenience we can divide it into two categories.

Religious and historical

### RELEGIOUS BELIEF ABOUT THE MYSTERY-

The religious beliefs associate these Roopkund skeletal remains with the Kanno king Yasdhawal, queen Balampa and their attendants.

According to folklore once the king and his wife were participating in the Royal pilgrimage of Devi Nanda, who is the local shrine of the Queen's maternal side. But during the journey they didn't followed the rules of Rajjat and entertained themselves

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with the dancing girls, locally called Patar, at Niralidhar. The goddess became upset with this act of raja and as a punishment she converted the girls in the statue later then the place become famous as Patar Nachoniya. After some distance the queen gave birth to a child whereby the area get polluted which agitated the goddess. She cursed the whole group and iron balls started falling from the sky. To save them king and his followers started running towards the Roopkund but nobody survived.<sup>1, 10, 14</sup>

### FINDINGS OF HISTORIC INVESTIGATION-

Though there is no any written evidence available about Roopkund mystery in the history yet some people did research and study to place it in the historic era.

- Initially a forest officer visited this area to collect some rare species of alpine flower, he saw many human bodies scattered here and there near the lake shore. There was not one or two but thousands of bodies were dumped in the snow and turned into rocks....that scene scared the porters and they ran away from the place. He saw a big size leather shoes which indicate that they were Tibetan traders and it was proven because of the presence of trading route via Roopkund.<sup>3</sup>
- At the time of war when the Britishers were only concentrating on arrangement of soldier's from the Garhwal, the news about the dead bodies was ignored by the government. Although it was published in the news papers that a dead army of any ancient king was found at the route of nandakini and their clothes, shoes were scattered near the bodies. But after one year some army official were secretly sent there by the govt. and when they were assured that these were not soldier and seemed as Tibetans, this ancient tragedy were completely ignored.<sup>4</sup>
- At the ancient time Roopkund was known as a Rudrakund and it was believed that at the very ancient time the pilgrims had come here to sacrificing themselves and it might be only the aim of the great journey from kumaun toward the highest Nanda Devi peak.<sup>12</sup>

The same kind of ritual was also alive in the 19th century at Bhairav Jhanp stream near the kedarnath where the people committed suicide to get place in heaven and it was banned by the British govt. in 1831.

- Eight offering is very common in the rajjat in which the biggest offering was buffalo. But in the very ancient time, people also committed self suicide. And may be this sacrifice they had jumped from the Juragali to Roopkund. The name Juragali the street of death god twin also glimpses this thing.<sup>12</sup>
- Dabral writing, that he got information in some villages and temples about the changed process of human offering, during his visits at the Rath and North Garhwal. In these areas in every 12 years peoples gather at one place and choose an old man to offering Nanda Devi. After this ceremony the old man started living in separate house and had food only one time and really within 6 months the old man had to be died.<sup>17</sup>
- There was a custom in the border areas of Garhwal that the village people put their family member's dead bodies in high Himalayan lakes.<sup>4</sup>
- According to swami pranwanand, these remains belong to those people who were not mountainous though some local people also with them and when the group was climbing on the juragali above the Roopkund they were hunted by the heavy rain fall and hailstorms.<sup>5</sup>
- Bill Atkins says that British historian associates these remains with Dogra General Jorawar Singh's soldiers. And the casualty happened when they was returning towards the Tibet from Laddakh in 1841.<sup>1</sup>
- Some authors suggest that this is the tragic end of the K ranchal winning expedition of Muhammad Tuglak and some said this was refugee Sahjada Suleman, who had wanted to run-away from Srinagar to Tibet to be safe from entrap of Mugal Emperor Aurangjeb.<sup>13</sup>
- Jagmohan Singh Negi said these were the remains of Sikh Soldier who were coming back from Tibet to kumaun.
- An American anthropologist said that this was the mass-suicide.

### FINDINGS OF SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION-

To solve the Roopkund mystery, some scientific investigation also has been done by the anthropologists. These investigations solve many things about the skeletons but after all this some questions still alive.

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- In 1956, the department of anthropology, govt. of India, Kolkata, organized an expedition to solve the mystery of Roopkund. Time to time, Dr. N Datta, Majumdar and Dr. R S Negi did blood group study on these remains and on other hand they collected some long bones to know the stature of the remains and after the study, it was known that these peoples had very long stature or may be belongs to the plains areas.<sup>22, 24</sup>
- In 1956, Dr. D N Majumdar, department head of Lucknow University also organized an expedition to Roopkund and collected many bone samples to reconstruct the complete skeleton; he also sent some sample to James griffin in American laboratory with the help of Minisota and Misigon universities for dating of the sample. They also tried to know the stature of the remains with the important measurements on the skulls and long bones.<sup>23</sup>
- Swami Pranwanand also tried to give full stop to the mystery on the basis of cultural evidence, mainly with folklore. According to him all these remains belonged to the family of king Yashdhwaj and his associates who were here to participate in the royal pilgrimage.<sup>5</sup>
- Some news agencies also collected bone and other cultural evidence from the Roopkund and analyzed by the scientist and it is proved that these people belonged to from different races.
- Recently in 2005 national geographic channel organized another expedition to the Roopkund and used Radio carbon Accelometer mass spectrometer and DNA Testing like latest techniques on the samples, they solved many puzzles related to the skeletal lake. According to study the tragedy happened around 850 ac and in this mass tragedy two groups of people were involved in which one group was belongs to local area and other one is from plains. But this investigation also not made full stop on the mystery of the Roopkund.

### DISCUSSION-

As we know there is no any written evidence is available about the Roopkund tragedy and every prevalent theory about the Roopkund remains are based on hypothesis and self imagination. These theories associate many things with the remains and within these conditions we can't say that reality is how near and far from the theories.

The most prevalent theory about the Roopkund remains is mainly based on the folklore. According to folklore these remains belongs to king of k nnoj, his wife and associates. Who were here to participate in the royal pilgrimage and because of their ignorance of rules, they were punished by the goddess. But no one found any royal symbols like jewelry, coin, pottery and other artifacts till today from Roopkund. We got only seal and glass bangles which are very common among the women of the middle class families in all over India.

According to another theory these remains belongs to a group of pilgrims and the possibility was that they were victimize by the misfortune. But no pilgrimage is recorded in this route other of Rajjat.

In rajjat after a particular place the use of leather and musical instrument is prohibited to the pilgrims yet we got numbers of handmade leather chapels and remains of dram in the Roopkund.

Some authors relate these remains to the Sikh General Jorawar Singh and his army. Who wished to run away from kumaun to Tibet but at the Roopkund they were victimize by the weather conditions. But we couldn't get any evidence related to Sikh community and weapon of army.

And the presences of women and children's in the victims also create suspense on the theory.

This is also popular about the Roopkund that these are those people were the epidemic victims and whom their family members placed here for their sole salvation. But the question rose that how could they bring them here because Roopkund is very far from the habitat area and the journey took 3-4 days.

Some said that this is the result of mass suicide but again the presence of children's is creating suspense.

### CONCLUSION-

Roopkund mystery always fascinates the thinker and researchers and after a study it's explore little but create a lot of new suspense.



After the anthropological studies of the Anthropological survey of India, Lucknow University and latest scientific study of 'National Geographic channels' it is proved that these people belongs to two different area and two different cultures. Their body structures show wide differences. So the question rose from where they came here? And why they were there?

Studies said that these were pilgrims but the presence of children's among the victims is questionable?

On the absence of weapons and other material related to trading is to make sure that these were not army person and not the traders but the question is who they were?

Mass suicide, pilgrims and self sacrifice theories automatically cancelled in the presence of adolescences and women.

So the mystery needs further investigation for its exploration.

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