

CHAPTER XIX

PLACES OF INTEREST

Askot (pargana Askot, tahsil Didihat)

The name, Askot, is said to be a corruption of 'Assikot' meaning eighty forts. A large village, it was the seat of the Rajwars, the former owners of pargana Askot, who followed the rule of primogeniture. The ruling family is said to have been a branch of the old royal house of Katyur. On the break up of the Katyuri kingdom one branch of the family led by Abhai Pal settled in Askot about 1273 A.D. He established a small principality which remained under his successors almost till about the beginning of the present century.

The village is surrounded by hills and the ridges fringing the Kali river are clothed with fine stretches of pine, *shisham*, *sal*, *khair* and oak forests.

Berinag (pargana Gangoli, tahsil Didihat)

The place derives its name from the temple of Bering (a local deity) which is said to be as old as the village itself. At a small distance lies the village of Garaun where there is a 46 m. high waterfall.

An expert committee was appointed (1827) to investigate the possibility of the successful cultivation of tea in Kumaon and a tea estate was set up here in the fifties of the last century. The manager of the Berinag tea company happened to discover the secret of manufacture of Chinese brick tea and his tea was considered to be far superior to the Chinese variety. In 1907, he disposed of about 54 quintals of it but gradually the business declined and by 1960 only a small tea garden had survived.

Berinag is also a popular market where, people from neighboring villages, come to purchase articles of daily use. Two fairs are held here in Sravana (July-August), one on Amavasya and the other on Naga Panchmi day.

Dharchula (pargana Askot, tahsil Dharchula)

The tahsil headquarters (of the same name) is said to have derived its name from *dhar* which in local dialect means peak and *chula* (cooking fire). Tradition has it that Vyasa, the famous sage, cooked his food here.

Making of hand woven and handspun woolen clothes by local inhabitants is the main industry. The industries department has started a centre here which prepares a variety of refined woolen articles. The place developed into a township after the formation of the district of Pithoragarh in 1960. The sub divisional magistrate's residence and court were built in 1965-66. During winter, most of the residents of the upper Byans migrate to this place.

Didihat (pargana Sira, tahsil Didihat)

Didihat has been the headquarters since 1960, of the tahsil of the same name.

Before the formation of the district the place was known as Digtar which was simply a halting place on the way to Kailash. The name Didihat appears to have been derived from the villages Digtar and Hat.

Near the place are also found the remains of a fort, Sherakot, which is said to have been built by a Gorkha king, who ruled here and who was later conquered by Puru Pant. Being on the top of a hill, Sherakot presents a wide and beautiful view of the Himalayas. Adjacent to the fort

there is an old and renowned temple of Malayanath, dedicated to Siva, which is visited by persons from places far and near. Fairs, attended by about 1,000 persons, are held at the temple on the occasions of Rakshabandhan and Sivaratri when goats are sometimes sacrificed.

About 8 km. from the place, there is Narain Nagar, a small but attractive locality, by one Narain Swami. It has a temple, dedicated to the deity of Narayana.

Gangolihat (pargana Gangoli, tahsil Pithoragarh)

The village derives its name from Gangoli, the name of the pargana and Hat, a name by which the place is locally called. It has a temple of Mahakali, which is said to be of great antiquity and is situated in the midst of a dense deodar forest. It is alleged that during the reign of the Chand rajas, human beings were, at times, offered in sacrifice at this temple, but the practice was stopped in the last century. Goats and buffaloes still continue to be sacrificed, particularly during the Navaratri of Chaitra and Asvina. The place also has the remains of a small fort built by a regent of the Chand rajas. In *patti Bherang*, about 8 km. from the village, there is an ancient temple of Patal Bhuvaneshvar, dedicated to Siva, which is located inside a long and dark tunnel and attracts a large number of devotees.

Jarajibli (pargana Askot, tahsil Dharchula)

The name Jarajibli (commonly known as Jauljibi) is said to have been derived from two words—*jaul* (confluence) and, *jibi* (tongue), a narrow strip of land, resembling a tongue, in between the two rivers, the Gori and the Kali.

A little above the confluence stands the temple of Mahadeva in a thick grove of mango and other trees. Opposite the temple is a dharamsala (constructed by the rani of Askot in 1944) from where there is a fine view of the confluence of these two rivers.

The place is famous for its *ringal* and woodwork (called *nigala*) and has a spinning and weaving centre. A commercial fair (attended by about 10,000 persons) is held at Jarajibli at the time of Brischik Sankranti in November, the practice being said to have been started by the Rajwars of Askot.

Milam (pargana Johar, tahsil Munsyari)

Milam is a village which lies in a region covered by lofty snow mountains where the rocks are of varied colors. Waterfalls are numerous and many of them are of great beauty.

Some distance up the glen of the Gori river, above Milam, is the Shangchu Kund, a small sheet of greenish water held in great repute as a place of pilgrimage.

Milam is inhabited from June to October and entirely deserted during the rest of the year due to sever cold. In the past it was the biggest migratory village in these parts and a central place for Malla Johar.

Munsyari (pragana Johar, tahsil Munsyari)

Munsyari, the tahsil headquarters, stands on the right bank of the Gori river. Formerly it was also known as Ranthi, the sub divisional and tahsil headquarters being situated at a place called Tiksen. It is cold in winter but very pleasant in summer.

Munsyari is one of the most important manufacturing centers for *thulmas* (large rugs), sheep rearing being the chief occupation of the people.

Pithoragarh (pargana Shor, Tahsil Pithoragarh)

During the period of the Chand rajas, Piru, *alias*, Prithvi Gosain constructed a fort which came to be called Pithoragarh and is said to have given its name to the town and later to the district. The town had two forts one of which has been demolished, its place being taken by the Government Girls' Intermediate College building. The building of the other fort houses the treasury and the tahsil.

Pithoragarh is a small town, which gives its name to the district. It lies in the centre of the western half of the Shor valley which resembles the Kashmir valley on a miniature scale. It is prettily dotted with villages, generally placed on eminences. The view from Pithoragarh is very fine as all the peaks of Panch Chulhi, Nanda Devi and Nanda Kot are visible from high spots in the town.

About 5 km. from the place there is a small and beautiful place named Chandag which houses an asylum for lepers. It is said that a goddess killed two devils, Chand and Mund, at this place. The episode gave the place the name Chandghat, Chandag appearing to be its corrupt form.