

Few days in Almora

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If there is anything more pristine than a glimpse of Nanda devi, I will have to wait for such a sight. It was one of those breathtaking moments that left a lasting impression in my mind. For me, this visit was a result of a bit of alone time over the Covid years, trying to work through another round of PhD. The beauty of the short visit was the welcoming familiar face at Almora, a promise of retreat, reading time, lot of quiet, vast spaces, and dialogue. Why do you need a place to retreat? What could possibly be troubling you? Do you really need to move to a different location for peace of mind? Well, yes. And even if there is no hesitation in one's mind, these questions matter less and less, as soon as you enter the land of Kumaon. The less abundant population, sparse mountains, Kumaoni songs, and ice capped Himalyan peaks – all this renders the urge more acute to leave behind the societal threads, work concerns, and seek solace in cold solitude.

Of all the six districts of Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, Almora is one of the idyllic towns to visit, with scenic Himalayan mountain tops, temples, and forest. The name originates from Bhilmora, Kilmora kind of sorrel, (*Berberis*) used by the Katarmal temple priests to clean the temple vessels. A small few treks in the forests of Almora gives an idea of the presence of birdlife and wildlife in the region. The sparsely populated district has the famous Kasar Devi temple. The majestic view of the Nanda devi and Panchacholi is one of the most enchanting sights to behold. The rush of calmness in the middle of forests of Almora is something I will cherish for a long time to come.

The week spent in the middle of such sights was rejuvenating to say the least. The Himalayan white snow covered peak clears the cob webs of everyday life in a jiffy. It must be calming presence of the mountains which removes the clutters of a developing emitting world and gently nudges the mind to focus on the present. I was lucky to find books, conversations, monologues, and dialogues of thinkers during the stay at Krishnamurthi retreat center. I felt the combination of the place and the resources at hand inspiring to think and reflect on the questions of existence. Perhaps, time spent in the backdrop of Himalayan mountains facilitated cutting all the noises of a city life, demands of everyday rush to work or sustain, said or unsaid societal expectations, as well as the pulls which tug at our day to day existence or fulfillment in life, the bigger life questions one ponders.

When one packs up with a heavy heart, it happens with the compass inner being, nature, birds, patterns in wisps of clouds, and letting go of the emotions one considers draining. Of course, one leaves with the thought of preserving such landscapes.