

# **Kathmandu**

## **Introduction**

This lesson is an extract from Vikram Seth's book 'From Heaven Lake'. In this book he records his experiences of a long journey from China to India. *via.*, Tibet and Nepal. Here he gives an account of the temples and the bazaars of Kathmandu.

## **Summary**

The author visits the temple of Pashupatinath at Kathmandu in the morning. There is a signboard at the gate of the temple. It reads "Entrance for the Hindus Only". There is an atmosphere of utter confusion in and around the temple. There are a number of devotees inside the temple. They push one another to offer their prayers to the Lord. A group of saffron-clad Westerners claiming to be Hindus struggled for permission to enter the temple. Two monkeys are



fighting and one jumps onto a *shivalinga* and then runs screaming around the temples and then down to the river *Bagmati*, which flows below the temple. A corpse is being cremated and washerwomen are washing clothes on its banks. Children are bathing in the river. Wilted flowers and leaves are being thrown in the river. A small shrine can be seen half protruding from the stone platform on the river bank. It is believed that the day the whole of the shrine comes out of the river, the evil period of *Kaliyug* will come to an end on Earth.

The author next visits *Baudhnath Stupa*, the Buddhist shrine of Kathmandu.

The atmosphere here is calm and quiet. The immense white dome of the *Stupa* is ringed by a road. Small shops of Tibetan immigrants stand on the outer edge of temple. Felt bags, Tibetan prints and silver jewellery can be bought from these shops.

Kathmandu bazaar is full of noise and din. It is full of fruit sellers, flute sellers and hawkers. There are a number of shops. The author buys some eatables which he gulps down with Coca Cola and an orange drink. He also buys some books.

Then, he contemplates on how to return back home. He can go to Patna by a bus and a train, then sail up the Ganges past Benaras to Allahabad and then past Agra to Delhi. But he is too exhausted to undertake such a long journey and therefore he buys an air ticket for Delhi from Nepal Airlines office.

He is fascinated by a flute seller who is standing in a corner of the square near his hotel. He is carrying fifty or sixty flutes stuck to the attachment at the top of a pole. From time to time he selects a flute from his stock and plays for a few minutes. His carefree style pleases the author. In fact, flute music always attracts him. It reminds him of the commonality of all mankind.

## Message

This lesson conveys the message that mankind is bonded by commonality. In spite of many differences, certain common aspects can be observed in all cultures.

## Extract Based Questions

### 1. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

At *Pashupatinath* (outside which a sign proclaims 'Entrance for the Hindus only') there is an atmosphere of 'febrile confusion'. Priests, hawkers, devotees, tourists, cows, monkeys, pigeons and dogs roam through the grounds. We offer a few flowers. There are so many worshippers that some people trying to get the priest's attention are elbowed aside by others pushing their way to the front. A princess of the Nepalese royal house appears; everyone bows and makes way. By the main gate, a party of saffron-clad Westerners struggle for permission to enter. The policeman is not convinced that they are 'the Hindus'.

- (a) The writer and his friends offered a few ..... in the temple.
- (i) gifts (ii) flowers  
(iii) sweets (iv) prasad
- (b) Everyone got aside to give way and bowed when the princess of .....
- (c) Which part of speech is 'attention'?
- (i) Noun (ii) Adjective  
(iii) Adverb (iv) Conjunction
- (d) State whether the given statement is True or False.  
There were a few worshippers in the temple.

### Answers

- (a) (ii) flowers  
(b) Nepalese royal house appeared  
(c) (i) Noun  
(d) False

### 2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

A fight breaks out between two monkeys. One chases the other, who jumps onto a *shivalinga*, then runs screaming around the temples and down to the river, the holy *Bagmati*, that flows below. A corpse is being cremated on its banks; washerwomen are at their work and children bathe. From a balcony a basket of flowers and leaves, old offerings now wilted, is dropped into the river. A small shrine half protrudes from the stone platform on the river bank. When it emerges fully, the goddess inside will escape, and the evil period of the *Kaliyug* will end on earth.

- (a) A fight broke out between two:
- (i) elephants (ii) monkeys  
(iii) rats (iv) priests
- (b) A basket of flowers and leaves was thrown into the river from .....
- (c) A small temple protruded from the stone platform on the:
- (i) river bank (ii) place of worship  
(iii) courtyard (iv) back of the temple
- (d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract.  
scream : shriek : : pursue : .....

### Answers

- (a) (ii) monkeys  
(b) the balcony of a building  
(c) (i) river bank  
(d) chase

### 3. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

Kathmandu is vivid, mercenary, religious, with small shrines to flower-adorned deities along the narrowest and busiest streets; with fruit sellers, flute sellers, hawkers of postcards; shops selling western cosmetics, film rolls and

chocolate; or copper utensils and Nepalese antiques. Film songs blare out from the radios, car horns sound, bicycle bells ring, stray cows low questioningly at motorcycles, vendors shout out their wares. I indulge myself mindlessly: buy a bar of marzipan, a corn-on-the-cob roasted in a charcoal brazier on the pavement (rubbed with salt, chilli powder and lemon); a couple of love story comics, and even a *Reader's Digest*. All this I wash down with Coca Cola and a nauseating orange drink, and feel much the better for it.

(a) The writer bought a bar of ..... and a corn on the cob roasted on charcoal fire.

- (i) chocolate (ii) marzipan  
(iii) soap (iv) detergent cake

(b) Fill in the blank with one word only.

Kathmandu has religious places with many shrines to ..... decorated with flowers on the narrow busy streets.

(c) Eating all the things, the writer drank ..... which would help digest the food easily.

- (i) Limca (ii) Shikanji  
(iii) Coca Cola (iv) Sprite

(d) State whether the given statement is True or False.  
Film songs blared out from the loudspeakers.

### Answers

- (a) (ii) marzipan  
(b) deities  
(c) (iii) Coca Cola  
(d) False

4. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

I look at the flute seller standing in a corner of the square near the hotel. In his hand is a pole with an attachment at the top from which fifty or sixty *bansuris* protrude in all directions, like the quills of a porcupine. They are of bamboo; there are cross-flutes and recorders. From time to time he stands the pole on the ground, selects a flute and plays for a few minutes. The sound rises clearly above the noise of the traffic and the hawkers' cries. He plays slowly, meditatively without excessive display. He does not shout out his wares. Occasionally he makes a sale, but in a curiously offhanded way as if this were incidental to his enterprise. Sometimes he breaks off playing to talk to the fruit seller. I imagine that this has been the pattern of his life for years.

(a) The flute seller played the flute slowly and meditatively without:

- (i) stopping  
(ii) excessive display  
(iii) keeping it on the ground  
(iv) attracting the attention

(b) Fill in the blank with one word only.

The writer saw a ..... standing in a corner of the square near the hotel.

(c) The antonym of 'curiously' is:

- (i) disinterestedly (ii) eagerly  
(iii) keenly (iv) brightly

(d) The pole had an attachment on the top with 50-60 flutes that resembled the thorny body of a .....

### Answers

- (a) (ii) excessive display  
(b) flute seller  
(c) (i) disinterestedly  
(d) porcupine

5. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

I find it difficult to tear myself away from the square. Flute music always does this to me; it is at once the most universal and most particular of sounds. There is no culture that does not have its flute—the reed *neh*, the recorder, the Japanese *shakuhachi*, the deep *bansuri* of Hindustani classical music, the clear or breathy flutes of South America, the high-pitched Chinese flutes. Each has its specific fingering and compass. It weaves its own associations. Yet to hear any flute is, it seems to me, to be drawn into the commonality of all making, to be moved by music closest in its phrases and sentences to the human voice. Its motive force too is living breath: it too needs to pause and breathe before it can go on.

(a) The sound that emerges out of a flute is the sound of:

- (i) Hindustani classical music  
(ii) human voice  
(iii) animal's voice  
(iv) deep breath

(b) The motive force of playing flute is .....

(c) The word 'pause' means the same as:

- (i) ceaseless (ii) halt  
(iii) eternal (iv) speedy

(d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract.  
difficult : tough :: nearest : .....

### Answers

- (a) (ii) human voice  
(b) living breath  
(c) (ii) halt  
(d) closest



### Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. Describe the atmosphere as Pashupatinath.

Ans. The atmosphere at Pashupatinath is confusing and feverish. There exists a situation of febrile confusion. The priests, hawkers, tourists and animals roam around. Devotees push one another to offer their prayers to the Lord.

**Q 2. What is the belief at Pashupatinath about the end of Kaliyug?**

**Ans.** A small shrine half protrudes from the stone platform on the banks of river Bagmati. It is believed that when it shall emerge fully, the goddess inside it will escape and then the evil period of Kaliyug will end on Earth.

**Q 3. Why did the policemen not allow the saffron-clad Westerners to enter the temple?**

**Ans.** The policemen did not allow a party of saffron-clad Westerners to enter the temple because he was not convinced that they were 'Hindus'. According to the temple management, only Hindus were allowed to enter the Pashupatinath temple.

**Q 4. Name the two temples the author visited in Kathmandu.**

**Ans.** (i) Pashupatinath temple  
(ii) Baudhnath shrine

**Q 5. How does the author indulges himself on his visit to Kathmandu?**

**Ans.** The author indulges himself mindlessly. He buys a bar of marzipan and a corn-on-the-cob roasted in a charcoal brazier which was rubbed with salt, chilli powder and lemon. Then, he buys Coca Cola and a orange drink. He also buys a couple of love story comics and a Reader's Digest.

**Q 6. Name five kinds of flutes.**

**Ans.** The reed *neh*, the Japanese *shakuhachi*, the deep *bansuri* of Hindustani classical music, the clear or breathy flutes of South America, the high-pitched Chinese flutes.

**Q 7. How do the people pollute the holy Bagmati?**

**Ans.** People drop the wilted flowers and leaves into the river. They also wash their clothes in river water and children bathe in the river. Corpses are also cremated near the river. All these acts pollute the river.



## Long Answer Type Questions ↘

**Q 1. Compare and contrast the atmosphere in and around the Baudhnath shrine with that of the Pashupatinath temple.**

**Ans.** The atmosphere around the two holy places is in stark, contrast to each other. At Pashupatinath temple there is an atmosphere of 'febrile confusion' and chaos. The priests, hawkers, devotees, tourists, and animals roam freely throughout the grounds. There is a large gathering of worshippers who are jostling with one another to get the attention of the priest.

Some tourists from West also try to get entry but in vain. There is a fight between two monkeys. The atmosphere is extremely noisy. In Baudhnath shrine, there is, in contrast, a sense of stillness. There are no crowds. The monks worship silently. It is a haven of quietness in the busy streets around.

**Q 2. How does the author describe Kathmandu's busiest streets?**

**Ans.** Along Kathmandu's narrowest and busiest streets, there are small shrines and flower-adorned deities. Apart from these, are fruit sellers, flute sellers, hawkers of postcards, shops selling Western cosmetics, film rolls, chocolate, those selling copper utensils and Nepalese antiques. The author hears film songs that were blaring out from the radios, sounds of car horns and bicycle bells, vendors shouting out their wares. He says that stray cows roam about on the roads. The streets are basically crowded and full of noises.

**Q 3. To hear any flute is to be drawn into the commonality of all mankind. Why does the author say this?**

**Ans.** The author considers flute music to be 'the most universal and most particular' of all sounds. This musical instrument is common to all cultures. It has different forms such as reed neh, the recorder, the Japanese Shakuhachi, the deep bansuri of Hindustani classical music, the clear or breathy flutes of South America, the high-pitched Chinese flutes, etc. Even though each of these has its specific fingering and compass yet, for the author, to hear any flute is 'to be drawn into the commonality of all mankind'. This is because in spite of their differences, every flute produces music with the help of human breath. Despite the differences in caste, culture, religion and faith, all human beings are the same, with the same living breath running through all of them. Therefore, the author says that to hear any flute is to be drawn into the commonality of all mankind.

**Q 4. 'Kathmandu is vivid, mercenary and religious'. Explain the statement.**

**Ans.** The author says that Kathmandu is vivid, mercenary and religious. It is vivid and religious because everywhere one can see big and small shrines. Even in the narrowest and busiest streets one can find flower-adorned deities. It is mercenary because its streets are full of shops selling goods of tourist attraction such as Western cosmetics, chocolates, copper utensils, Nepalese antiques, etc. Also, fruit sellers, flute sellers, hawkers, etc., can be seen of the street selling their wares.

**Q 5. How did the author find the flute seller different from other hawkers?**

**Ans.** The author saw a flute seller standing in a corner of the square near the hotel. In his hand is a pole with an attachment at the top from which fifty or sixty *bansuris* protrude in all directions, like the quills of porcupine. The flute seller doesn't cry to sell his flutes like the other hawkers do. He selects a flute and then plays it. In between, he sells his flute. Even when he makes a sale, he does so in an offhanded way, as if it is not his primary purpose, and it is just incidental to his playing the flute. This is also in stark contrast of other hawkers, whose main purpose it to sell their goods.