

CHAPTER – 8

SILK ROAD

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Understanding the text

Question 1(1): The article has been titled ‘Silk Road.’

ANSWER:

The title of the article has been named on the historic silk road or routes. The network connected the Afro-Eurasian landmass. It established trade of Chinese silk, spices, teas and porcelain; Indian textiles, precious stones and pepper; and the Roman Empire's gold, silver, fine glassware, wine, carpets and jewels. The road was named Silk Road largely because of the silk trade with China. In the chapter the author travels to Mount Kailash, exploring the Himalayan belt in Tibet. Since the author explored this region, the chapter is titled as Silk Road.

Question 1(2): Tibetan mastiffs were popular in China’s imperial courts.

ANSWER:

The Tibetan mastiffs are big headed beasts who fix their hunting eyes and cock their heads on a stranger approaching. As one draws closer, they explode into action, darting like a bullet from a gun and nearly as fast. They usually wear bright red collars adding to their ferocious dark black look. They barked furiously with their massive jaws. They are completely fearless of any entity and shoot straight to any advancing stranger. They do not ease off before a chase of at least a hundred metres or so. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why these ferocious Tibetan mastiffs became popular in China's imperial courts as hunting dogs.

Question 1(3): The author's experience at Hor was in stark contrast to earlier accounts of the place.

ANSWER:

Hor was a grim, miserable place. The dust and rocks were scattered everywhere in abundance; there was little vegetation. The place seemed unfortunate and dejected, though it sat on the shore of the Lake Manasarovar. The author was flabbergasted to realise the contrast in his experience to that of the earlier read accounts. A Japanese monk, Ekai Kawaguchi, who had arrived there in 1990, was so moved by the sanctity of the lake that he burst into tears. The hallowed waters had a similar effect on Sven Hedin, a Swede who was not prone to sentimental outbursts. However, for the author, when he reached Hor, first he had to get two punctures mended. The only relaxation was the tea served by a Chinese youth in the only café in the town, which was constructed from badly painted concrete and had three broken windows. The good view of the lake through one of them helped to compensate however.

Question 1(4): The author was disappointed with Darchen.

ANSWER:

It was dark already when the author and Tsetan reached Darchen. They pulled up in a guest house and it turned out to be another troubled night. The author's blocked nostril had been causing much inconvenience. Though he tried to get accustomed to breathing by single nostril, it was not providing him with enough oxygen. Tired, he started breathing through mouth. There was some difficulty in his chest and received a sinus attack and so he sat up the night. The next day on visiting the local medical college, the author was a bit relieved. The medicines the doctor gave were helpful and that night he had a sound sleep.

Few days passed, the author was roaming the town. The life seemed mundane and no visitors or pilgrims were at the sight. The few rudimentary general stores were selling Chinese cigarettes, soap and other basic provisions and the prayer fags. Few gathered men played pool at a battered table while nearby women washed their hair in the icy water. This all was not exactly what the author had expected. He was told that in the season of *Kora* there lot of pilgrims visiting. All this came as a significant drawback to the author. It seemed that he had arrived a bit too early. It all disappointed the author.

Question 1(5): The author thought that his positive thinking strategy worked well after all.

ANSWER:

The other afternoon when the author sat pondering his options over a glass of tea in the only café of Darchen. He was wondering if he could do the *Kora* alone, he had no idea whether the snow had cleared. Also, Tsetan had left and there was no one, who knew English well enough, to communicate. Despite all odds, the author forced himself to think positive and tried to be hopeful. Then he met Norbu, he had seen the book the author was reading. Then he came and asked the author if he was English. The author judged from Norbu's clothes that he did not belong to those parts. He had come to complete the *Kora* as well. He worked in Beijing at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in the Institute of Ethnic Literature, he had been writing academic papers about the Kialish *Kora* and its importance in various works of Buddhist literature for many years. Norbu suggested that he and the author could be a team and this brought hope to the author; perhaps his positive-thinking strategy was working after all.

Question 2(1): The purpose of the author's journey to Mount Kailash.

ANSWER:

Nick Middleton is a physical geographer and has travelled to over 50 countries. A passionate explorer, he likes to take on the challenges in the extreme conditions and survives them. His experiences in hostile conditions are endured by a television series *Going to Extremes*. He travels to Mount Kailash for the same reasons, surviving one of the most challenging and hostile geographical territories. The author was fascinated to explore the ancient Silk Road. He details his experience of the region and his mental as well as the physical striving. However, had there been a bit of emotional and sentimental element dropped in, the write up would have been more interesting to read.

Question 2(2): The author's physical condition in Darchen.**ANSWER:**

Darchen was a derelict; dusty and refused. When the author and Tsetan reached the town it was dark already, they pulled up in a guest house. The night they settled in was troublesome for the author. The open-air rubbish dump that passed for the town of Hor had set off his cold once more. One of his nostrils blocked, he tried to accustom to breathing with one nostril. However, it did not provide him with sufficient oxygen so he tried to breathe from mouth. Still he could not sleep, his chest felt heavy and the fear never let him sleep for the rest of the night. The next morning Tsetan took him to the Darchen's medical college. The doctor, after asking a few questions, declared that the author had caught cold and the effects of altitude. The doctor prescribed the author various medicines, one of which tasted like cinnamon. That night after having the medicines the author had a sound sleep finally.

Question 2(3): The author's meeting with Norbu.

ANSWER:

The author had almost lost hope and felt absolutely helpless as the town seemed so mundane with no pilgrims or visitors, despite it was the season of Kora. Only the locals were busy carrying their daily activities of playing pool or ladies washing their head in the icy water. It was all very disappointing for the author. Besides, now that Tsetan had also left, he wondered how will he be able to communicate with anyone in English. He was not prepared to complete the Kora on his own. He did not even know if the snow is cleared and had no body to answer him this simple question. The author was sitting in the café when a man walks up to him. Recognising the language in the book he is reading, he asks the author if he was English. The author reckoned that the man was not from the region as he wore a windcheater and metal-rimmed spectacles of a western style. The man told his name was Norbu and he worked in Beijing at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in the Institute of Ethnic Literature. He as well had come to do the Kora. He had been writing academic papers about the Kailash Kora and its importance in various works of Buddhist literature for many years. They both were equally ill-equipped and were ideal companions for the expedition.

Question 2(4): Tsetan's support to the author during the journey.**ANSWER:**

Tsetan had been much supportive to the author during the journey till Darchen. Initially, when the author, Daniel and Tsetan were leaving Ravu, Tsetan drove them through a route that took them south-west, almost directly towards Mount Kailash. Throughout he was a perfect guide. Soon, the turns became sharper and bumpier. However, Tsetan drove with caution and patience. He knew the places and was well prepared for no matter what circumstances. He was caring yet an enlightened Buddhist. At Darchen he realised that the author was not keeping well and so took

him to the doctor's. However, he also told the author that as a Buddhist, he knew that it did not really matter if the author passed away, but he thought it would be bad for business. Also, Tsetan was a great asset to the author during the trip as he knew English and helped the author throughout to communicate with the locals.

Question 2(5): “As a Buddhist, he told me, he knew that it didn’t really matter if I passed away, but he thought it would be bad for business.”

ANSWER:

Buddhism talks of rebirth. It does not propound Moksha. Hence, death is not an end and Tsetan understood this, being a Buddhist. So, he told the author that even if he would have died it would not have mattered as he will be reborn as the soul never dies and just wears a new body, his soul would have still lived on. Besides, they were in Kailash, the holy place in Buddhist culture. It would have been a blessing to have died in a place like that when he was almost done with the *Kora*. However, as a business person he would have felt bad. First of all losing a customer like him would have not been good for his business. Plus, it might have affected his business' reputation badly.

Talking about the text

Question 1: The sensitive behaviour of hill-folk.

ANSWER:

Hill folk are innocent and rustic people. They are very conservative and cultural. They do not have the exposure of a city life. They are simple and humble. They are habitual to country life, which is not fast. They are always ready to help. People who are from small towns are religious and humane.

Question 2: The reasons why people willingly undergo the travails of difficult journeys.

ANSWER:

People like Nick Middleton and Edward Michael "Bear" Grylls undergo the travails of difficult journeys for not just one single reasons. They like to explore and experience the adventure. Risk is the biggest of all addictions in the world and the challenges they take on gives them the perfect rush. Nick is a geographer who likes to expose himself to nature. He likes to survive the extreme and hostile conditions, like starving oxygen. The programme Going to Extremes is about the extreme lifestyles he survives on. The adrenaline and the excitement of these unusual experiences is unparalleled and unmatched. It is an addiction that these explorers dwell on. It is their food for living.

Question 3: The accounts of exotic places in legends and the reality.

ANSWER:

All the exotic places on earth have been much written and talked about already either in legends or articles. There are several ancient myths attached to such places. It has been seen in many cases, especially the river sources and mountain caves are associated with religion and declared holy. However, in reality these places are nothing but nature's beautiful treasures. Places like Kailash and Manasarovar occupy a prominent place in Hinduism as well as Buddhism.

Thinking about language

Question 1: Notice the kind of English Tsetan uses while talking to the author. How do you think he picked it up?

ANSWER:

Tsetan spoke short sentences, direct and simple. His English is simple; vocabulary not rhetorical. Besides he called the author “sir” everywhere. He seems to pay much respect to the author. He apparently was a tourist guide, which means daily interactions with foreign tourists. That is where he must have picked up the language from. It is quite possible that he had broken knowledge of other languages as well.

Question 2: What do the following utterances indicate?

(i) “I told her, through Daniel ...”

(ii) “It’s a cold,” he said finally through Tsetan.

ANSWER:

The author of course did not know Tibetan so he required Tsetan and Daniel to help him to communicate with the locals. So it was always someone helping the author out to communicate, translating his words in Tibetan. First Daniel did to make Lhamo understand what the author was saying. Later, even at the doctor's, Tsetan translated for the author to the doctor what he had to say.

Question 3: Guess the meaning of the following words.

kora	drokba	kyang
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In which language are these words found?

ANSWER:

All these words are from the Tibetan language.

- **Kora:** It is the circumambulation of a stupa or a temple. It is also a pilgrimage that the Buddhists do to Namtso Lake and Mount Kailash, both holy sites in Tibet. It is also a type of meditation.

- **Drokba:** They are the nomads and shepherds around the Tibet region.
- **Kyang:** It is a wild Tibetan ass.

Working with words

Question 1: The narrative has many phrases to describe the scenic beauty of the mountainside like:

A flawless half-moon floated in a perfect blue sky.

Scan the text to locate other such picturesque phrases.

ANSWER:

Here are a few extracts from the text that describe the scenic beauty of the Tibet region:

"Extended banks of cloud like long French loaves glowed pink as the sun emerged to splash the distant mountain tops with a rose-tinted blush."

"We entered a valley where the river was wide and mostly clogged with ice, brilliant white and glinting in the sunshine. The trail hugged its bank, twisting with the meanders as we gradually gained height and the valley sides closed in."

Question 2: Explain the use of the adjectives in the following phrases

(i) shaggy monsters

(ii) brackish lakes

(iii) rickety table

(iv) hairpin bend

(v) rudimentary general stores

ANSWER:

(i) Shaggy monster: The fearful physical appearance of the Tibetan Mastiffs

(ii) Brackish lakes: The salty lakes of the Tibetan Plateau

(iii) Rickety table: An old rugged table that was almost shattered

(iv) Hairpin bend: Hairpin bend/turn is named after its physical resemblance to a hairpin. Such a turn can be found on mountain roads.

(v) Rudimentary general stores: General stores selling only the basic consumer goods.