

## KATHMANDU

Vikram Seth

*VIKRAM SETH, born in Kolkata in 1952, was educated at Oxford. He has travelled widely and has captured his experiences of China, Tibet and Nepal in his famous book **Heaven Lake**, which won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award. The present piece "Kathmandu", which is an extract from **Heaven Lake**, beautifully delineates the beauty of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal.*

**A. Answer the following questions orally:**

1. Have you ever visited a sacred place? Share your experiences with your friends.
2. Name some of the holy places of your state.
3. Describe the surroundings of a holy place you have visited.

## KATHMANDU

1 I get a cheap room in the centre of town and sleep for hours. The next morning, with Mr. Shah's son and nephew, I visit the two temples in Kathmandu that are most sacred to Hindus and Buddhists.

2 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' (only Hindus are allowed





to enter the temple). 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, which 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.

3 At the Baudhnath stupa, the Buddhist shrine of Kathmandu, there is, in contrast, a sense of stillness. Its immense white dome is ringed by a road. Small shops stand on its outer edge: many of these are owned by Tibetan immigrants; felt bags, Tibetan prints and silver jewelry can be bought here. There are no crowds: this is a haven of quietness in the busy streets around.

4 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.

5 I consider what route I should take back home. If I



The Baudhnath Stupa, Kathmandu



were propelled by enthusiasm for travel per se, I would go by bus and train to Patna, then sail up the Ganges past Benaras to Allahabad, then up the Yamuna, past Agra to Delhi. But I am too exhausted and homesick; today is the last day of August. Go home, I tell myself: move directly towards home. I enter a Nepal Airlines office and buy a ticket for tomorrow's flight.

**B.1.1. Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements:**

1. At Pashupatinath there is an atmosphere of 'febrile confusion'.
2. By the main gate an Indian struggles for permission to enter.
3. I consider what route I should take back home.
4. From a balcony a basket of flowers and leaves, old offerings now wilted, is dropped into the lake.
5. I enter a Nepal Airport office and buy a ticket for the day after tomorrow flight.

**B.1.2. Answer the following questions very briefly:**

1. With whom does Mr. Vikram Seth visit the two temples in Kathmandu?
2. Why does a party of saffron-clad Westerner struggle?
3. Briefly describe Baudhnath stupa?
4. What does the author buy at Nepal Airlines?
5. When will the Kallyug end on earth?

6 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.

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 mankind, 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.

- 8 That I can be so affected by a few familiar phrases on the *bansuri*, surprises me at first, for on the previous occasions that I have returned home after a long absence abroad, I have hardly noticed such details, and certainly have not invested them with the significance I now do.

**B.2. Answer the following questions very briefly:**

1. Where does the author look at the flute seller?
2. Name three kinds of the flute.
3. What does the flute seller have in his hand?
4. Why does the author find it difficult to go away from the square?

**GLOSSARY AND NOTES**

**travel** (n): journey

**cheap** (adj): low in price

**priest** (n): a clergy man who performs service to the deity etc.

**febrile** (adj): pertaining to fever

**protrudes** (v) projects

**confusion** (n): disorder

**clad** (v): p.p. of cloth. (adj) putting on clothes

**roam** (v): walk aimlessly

**scream** (v): cry out in shrill voice

**corpse** (n): a dead body

**shrine** (n): a sacred place

**immense** (adj): very great

**immigrants** (n): persons who immigrate.

**wilt** (v): wither, to become limp and dropping as a fading flower.

**mercenary** (adj): working only for money

**porcupine** (n): a small rat-like animal covered with spines that the animals can stick out if attacked

**bar** (n): a rod

**marzipan** (n): a sweet made with grated almond

**roast** (v): cook or be cooked in hot oven

**quills** (n): the spines of a porcupine

**curiously** (adj): strangely

**significance** (n): importance



**C. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS**

1. Why is Kathmandu famous? Describe briefly.
2. Describe Baudhnath Stupa and its surroundings.
3. Describe daily happenings at Pashupatinath.
4. What, according to the author, has been the pattern of the flute seller's life?
5. The author was moved by the music of the flute. Describe a similar experience of your own.

**C.2. GROUP DISCUSSION**

Discuss the following in groups or pairs

1. Religious tolerance is inbuilt in Indian society.
2. Music has overwhelming power.

**C.3. COMPOSITION**

1. Write a paragraph on an important holy place.
2. Narrate any travel experience of yours in about 100 words.

**D. WORD STUDY****D.1. Dictionary Use**

Correct the spelling of the following words:

suroundinngs

convinse

cremat

shrin

relegious

flut

sametime

occasionaly

familier

**D.2. Word Meaning**

Fill in the blanks with suitable forms of verbs given below:

A corpse is being ..... on the bank of the holy Bagmati (cremate)

A corpse is being **cremated** on the bank of the holy Bagmati

do

notice

convince

invest

buy

1. Tibetan prints and silver Jewellery can be ..... in Kathmandu.
2. The police man is not ..... that they are the Hindus.
3. I have hardly ..... such details and certainly have not ..... them with the significance I now .....

D.3. Match the words in column 'A' with their meaning given in column 'B'

A	B
i. vivid	(a) confidently
ii. sacred	(b) extravagant
iii. attachment	(c) writing that says what something is like
iv. description	(d) affection
v. excessive	(e) conceive
vi. imagine	(f) bright
vii. certainly	(g) holy

D.4. Read the lesson carefully and find out the sentences in which the following phrases have been used. Then use them in sentences of your own:

ring by	roam through	look at	sail up	move by
break off	take back	at the top	to push	way to

### E. GRAMMAR

Look at the following sentences:

- I went to Mr. Sen, **who** is my teacher.
- She did the home work **which** was given by Mr. Patil.
- Is this the watch **which** you lost?
- The dog **that** barks does not bite.

In these sentences **who**, **which** and **that** add two sentences.

In example No. (i):

(a) I went to Mr. Sen. (b) He is my teacher.

Sentences (a) and (b) are added by **who** and it qualifies the noun **Mr. Sen**.

**Definition:** A Relative Clause (also called Adjective Clause) qualifies a noun or a pronoun by providing some information. Relative Clauses begin with a Relative Pronoun (who, whom, which, that, whose) or a relative Adverb (when, where, why, how).

In example No. (ii) **which** qualifies the noun **home work** and in (iii) **which** qualifies the noun **watch**. In (iv) **that** qualifies the noun **the dog**. Relative Clauses can be **restrictive** or **non - restrictive**.

#### Restrictive or Defining Relative Clauses

A Restrictive Relative Clause is essential in order to complete the meaning of the Main Clause; e.g.

This is the man **who he is talking about**.



This is the pen **that I bought yesterday.**

### Non-Restrictive or Continuative or Non-Defining Relative Clauses:

A Non-Restrictive Relative clause adds some information to the Main Clause, but is not necessary for meaning. Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses are set off by commas; e.g.

He is John, **who** is my friend.

I have bought a flat, **where** my parents live.

**Ex.1.** Complete the following paragraph using Relative Clauses given in the box:

- (a) **who is a famous actor.**  
**where my brother Amitabh has been living.**  
**which is very impressive.**

I am going to Delhi ..... for the last five years. I am  
eager to see the Metro Rail .....  
I will also meet Govinda .....

- (b) **how to reach there.**  
**where my friend Gopi lives.**  
**which is a world-famous monument**

I am looking forward to my visit to Agra ..... I am  
very eager to see the Taj ..... My father has  
described to me the way .....

c) Pick-out Relative Clauses in the following sentences:

- (i) He who loves the poor is loved by God.
- (ii) This is the boy who stood first in his class last year.
- (iii) This is the house that Mr. Sen built.
- (iv) He is the boy whom I want to teach.
- (v) I am going to Ranchi, where my brother has been living for ten years.

### ACTIVITY

Do some project work on how the following places show the seeds of religious tolerance in Indian society since time immemorial. Take assistance from your teacher or reference books.

Nalanda, Khajuraho, Ajanta, Ellora, Mount Abu.

**Q. TRANSLATION**

Translate the following sentences into English:

1. लड़का जो वर्ग में बैठा है मेरा छोटा भाई है।
2. पुस्तक जो मैंने खरीदी है महंगी है।
3. जो गाय मेरे पास है वह काफी दूध देती है।
4. क्या यह वही लड़का है जो वार्षिक परीक्षा में वर्ग में प्रथम आया है?
5. क्या यह वही मकान है जिसे तुम्हारे पिताजी ने बनाया था?
6. यह वही कुत्ता है जो न भूँकता है न काटता है।
7. यह वही व्यक्ति है जो कहता बहुत है पर करता कम है।
8. मैं मुम्बई जाना चाहता हूँ जहाँ मेरा भाई तीन वर्षों से रह रहा है।
9. क्या यह वही घोड़ा है जिसे तुमने गत वर्ष खरीदा?
10. मैं ताज महल देखना चाहता हूँ जिसे शाहजहाँ ने बनवाया।