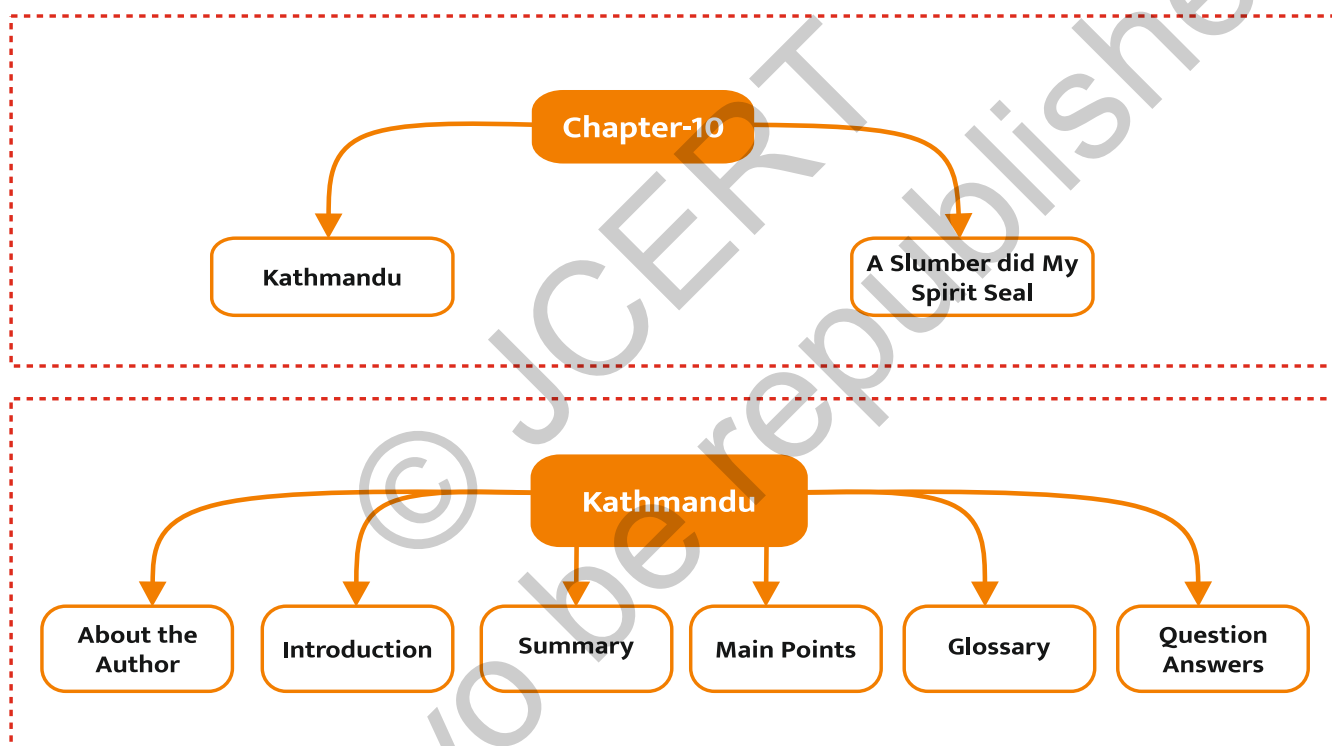


Kathmandu



About the author:



Name: Vikram Seth

Born: 20 June 1952 Kolkata, West Bengal, India

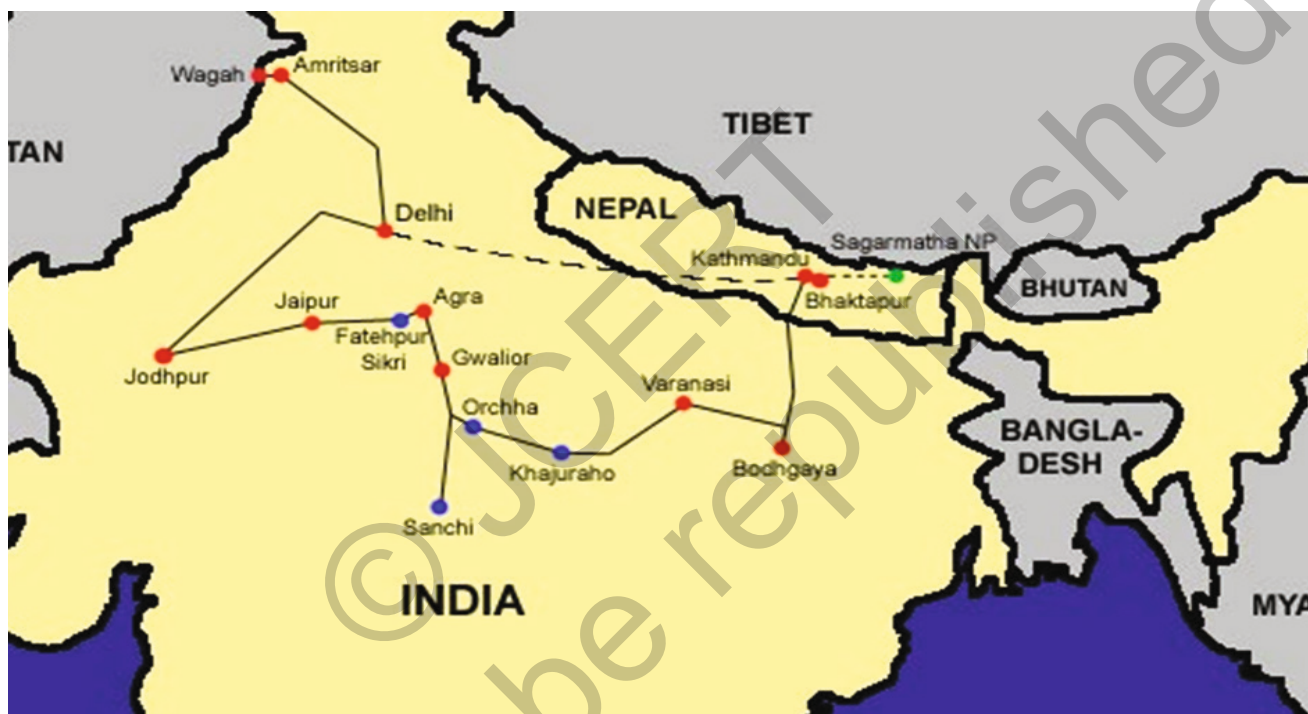
Occupation: Indian novelist and poet

Genre: Novels, poetry, libretto, travel writing, children's literature, biography/ memoir

Works: The Golden Gate (1986) A Suitable Boy (1993) An Equal Music (1999), Mappings (1980), The Tale Of Melon City (1981), Three Chinese Poets (1992), Beastly Tales (1991), Arion and the Dolphin (1994), The

Louse and the Mosquito (2020), From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet (1983), Two Lives (2005), The Rivered Earth (2011) etc

Awards: Padma Shri, Sahitya Academy Award, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, WH Smith Literary Award and Crossword Book Award.



Introduction:

Vikram Seth's story 'Kathmandu' is an excerpt from the author's book 'Heaven Lake'. The story narrates the tale of the author visiting Kathmandu, Nepal's capital city. The author had been hitchhiking from China towards India, in the middle of which he was supposed to cross Nepal and Tibet. His visit to Kathmandu, Nepal during

this phase has been brought out as a story where he shares his experience of the city.

Summary:

Vikram Seth describes his visit to the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu through this excerpt from his book 'Heaven Lake'. During his trip, he visits two temples where notice stark

differences between them. One temple was a pilgrimage for Hindus, the Pashupatinath temple.



(Pashupatinath temple)

After that, there was the Baudhnath temple which is for the Buddhists. He notices that they restricted entry at the Pashupatinath temple to only Hindus. Thus, there was quite a chaos amongst the tourists, priests and the pilgrims. To top it all, people were polluting the River Bagmati by washing clothes in it, bathing in it and throwing away dry flowers in it.



(Baudhnath temple)

After that, he went to Baudhnath

temple. He saw that the scenario here was completely different from what he saw at the Pashupatinath temple. This Buddhist temple had a huge dome which is white in colour. The place was very calm and serene. Outside the temple, there was a Tibetan market and people were selling bags, clothes, ornaments and more.

He notices the numerous things Kathmandu offers from religious places to many tourist destinations. Moreover, it also has various shops of antiques, cameras, cosmetics, chocolates and more. Nonetheless, it is also a very noisy city from the car horns to the music and vendors. He enjoyed having a Marzipan bar, corn, coca-cola in the city. After that, he also read love stories, comics and Reader's Digest books.



On returning to Delhi, he thought of taking an adventurous route which

comprises of a bus or train journey and then a boat ride, but he dropped the idea for that would have been too tiring. Thus, he booked a flight back. He saw an interesting flute seller outside his hotel. He had a pole with a lot of flutes on it and seemed like a porcupine body.



The flute seller kept playing his flutes and also did so in different tunes. But, what set him apart from the other flute sellers was that he played the flute thoughtfully. He did not scream to attract customers, he played it. This attracted the author and he wondered why the flute is so common all over. Then, he compares it to the human voice and says how he is noticing even the little things now.

Main Points:

- The author visited two temples in Kathmandu. He visited the famous Hindu mandir of Nepal which is “Pashupatinath” and the famous Buddhist temple of Buddhist “The Boudhanath Stupa.”

- Outside of Pashupatinath temple there was written as “For only Hindus”. There was a lot of chaos around the temple.
- There were many priests, shopkeepers, and devotees. The devotees came from different corners of the country to worship God.
- When a Princess from the Nepal royal family arrives there, everyone salutes her and gives her way. The priests were mostly in the saffron color.
- Monkeys were fighting. One of the monkeys climbed on the Shivling during their fighting. The Bagmati River is flowing nearby. There was cremation going on and some of the ladies were washing the clothes. Some of the boys were also bathing in the river. There were small platforms near the beach of rivers for the worship of God.
- There is the mythology that when a small shrine will come up fully, then goddess Durga will appear and will end the period of evil.
- Other than Boudhnath it, the Buddha pilgrimage Stupa has an opposite atmosphere.

There is a big white dome. There was also a road around the dome. On its outer edge, there were also many small shops. Mostly the owners of their shops were Tibetan immigrants.

- There was no crowd. The shops were of belt bags and Tibetan-style clothes. There was a complete piece.
- Narrating Kathmandu, the writer describes that there were many priests and Mercenaries.
- The roads were crowded and very busy. There were many fruit sellers and hawkers. Shops were having different types of arts and Nepalese antiques. Also, some were selling film rolls, copper utensils, and cosmetics.
- Stray cows were meowing and the car horns were also producing a lot of noise. The writer also describes Marzipan, a sweet, and the books which he bought there.
- The writer also describes his return journey. Near the hotel in which he was staying, he saw a flute seller. He was carrying fifty to sixty flutes. He was playing slowly and meditatively with his flute.
- The writer also found it interesting to talk about flutes. He describes

different types of flutes in different countries. Although, each of them requires a specific technique to play it.

Glossary:

Proclaims: make known publicly or officially

Febrile confusion: hurried activity; complete chaos

Saffron – clad westerners: foreigners dressed as sadhus

Corpse: dead body

Wilted: dry and withered

Shrine: a place of worship

Protrudes: comes out

Kalyug: it is the fourth and last stage or time period of a Mahayuga. It started with the end of Mahabharata when Lord Krishna left the Earth.

Immigrants: a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

Haven: a safe place

Deities: gods and goddesses

Cows low: the 'moo' sound made by cows

Marzipan: a sweet made with grated almonds

Brazier: open stove

Wash down: to drink something after a meal to digest it

Nauseating: sickening

Propelled: drive or push something forward

Per se: by itself

Meditatively: thoughtfully

Offhanded: casual; not showing much interest in something

Fingering: way of placing the fingers to play different notes

Compass: here, range

Homesick: Experiencing a longing for one's home during a period of absence from it

Square: An open, typically four-sided, area surrounded by buildings in a village, town, or city

Pole: A long, thin stick of wood or metal, often used standing straight up in the ground to support things

Porcupine: A large rodent with defensive spines or quills on the body and tail

Wares: Articles offered for sale

Commonality: The fact of sharing interests, experiences, or other characteristics with someone or something

MCQ:

1. Who is the author?

- (a) Vikram Basu

(b) Vikram Seth

(c) Vikram Goyal

(d) Vikram Sharma

Answer: (b) Vikram Seth

2. The chapter is taken from the book

(a) Lake Heaven

(b) Heaven and Beyond

(c) Heaven Lake

(d) Heaven's Beauty

Answer: (c) Heaven Lake

3. Who were the author's companions for visiting two temples in Kathmandu, the next morning?

(a) Mr Shah's son and nephew

(b) Mr Shah's niece

(c) Mr Shah's daughter

(d) Mr Shah's friend

Answer: (a) Mr Shah's son and nephew

4. The two temples that the author had planned to visit are most sacred to

(a) Hindus

(b) Muslims

(c) Buddhists

(d) Both (a) and ©

Answer: (d) Both (a) and ©

5. What does the sign outside Pashupatinath temple proclaim?

- (a) Entrance for Hindus only
- (b) Entrance for Muslims only
- (c) Entrance for Buddhists only
- (d) Entrance for Jains only

Answer: (a) Entrance for Hindus only

6. The atmosphere at the Pashupatinath temple was

- (a) Calm and quiet
- (b) Utterly chaotic
- (c) Quite uncanny
- (d) Both (a) and (c)

Answer: (b) Utterly chaotic

7. On whose appearance did everyone bow and made way at the temple?

- (a) The Nepalese actress
- (b) Prime Minister of Nepal
- (c) The priest of the temple
- (d) The princess of the Nepalese royal house

Answer: (d) The princess of the Nepalese royal house

8. Who was struggling at the main gate to enter the temple?

- (a) The poor people
- (b) A party of saffron wearing children

(c) A party of saffron-clad Westerners

(d) A political party with saffron as the color code

Answer: (c) A party of saffron-clad Westerners

9. Why were they struggling?

- (a) The policeman saw them stealing
- (b) They were not Hindus
- (c) The policeman was not convinced that they were Hindus
- (d) The temple was already very filled up

Answer: (c) The policeman was not convinced that they were Hindus

10. Amidst the chaos at the temple entrance, a fight broke out between

- (a) The policeman and the saffron-clad westerners
- (b) Two monkeys
- (c) Two dogs
- (d) The monkey and the policeman

Answer: (b) Two monkeys

11. According to the author, the music of the flute displays the _____ of mankind

- (a) Uniqueness
- (b) Talent
- (c) Humanity
- (d) Commonality

Answer: (d) Commonality

12. How many kinds of flutes are mentioned in the chapter

- (a) 4 (b) 2
- (c) 3 (d) 5

Answer: (d) 5

13. The author realized that he can get very much affected by a familiar phrase on bansuri after visiting

- (a) Kalimpong
- (b) Kathmandu
- (c) Kerala
- (d) Kanyakumari

Answer: (b) Kathmandu

14. Once in an enthusiastic mood, the author thought he would take a bus and train to _____ on his way back home

- (a) Allahabad
- (b) Varanasi
- (c) Patna
- (d) Asansol

Answer: (c) Patna

15. The corn on the cob that was roasted on an open stove was served after rubbing it with

- (a) Salt
- (b) Chilli powder
- (c) Lemon
- (d) All of the above

Answer: (d) All of the above

16. The streets of Kathmandu were

- (a) Narrow
- (b) Busy
- (c) Broad
- (d) Both (a) and (b)

Answer: (d) Both (a) and (b)

17. The shops near the stupa sold bags with

- (a) Tiger prints
- (b) Tibetan prints
- (c) Jaipur prints
- (d) Floral prints

Answer: (b) Tibetan prints

18. "...this is a haven of quietness in the busy streets around." Which place is referred to here?

- (a) Kathmandu city
- (b) Baudhnath Stupa
- (c) Pashupatinath temple
- (d) The square near the hotel

Answer: (b) Baudhnath Stupa

19. While roaming around the city, the author took a sip of

- (a) Almond milk
- (b) Coffee
- (c) Coca Cola
- (d) Fruit juice

Answer:(c) Coca Cola

20. The flute seller played

- (a) With attention
- (b) With an excessive display
- (c) Fast
- (d) Without any interest

Answer:(a) With attention

21. In his enthusiastic mind of travelling, the author thought of sailing up

- (a) The Yamuna
- (b) The Brahmaputra
- (c) The Ganges
- (d) The Godavari

Answer:(c) The Ganges

22. The author drew a comparison of the protrusion of bansuris with the

- (a) The flying balloons
- (b) The spikes of a cactus
- (c) The quills of a porcupine
- (d) The hair of a bear

Answer:(c) The quills of a porcupine

23. The bansuris were made of

- (a) Oak
- (b) Bamboo
- (c) Paper
- (d) Straw

Answer:(b) Bamboo

24. What were the two kinds of musical instruments made from bamboo as mentioned by the author?

- (a) Sitar and cross-flutes
- (b) Recorders and cross-flutes
- (c) Recorders and whistles
- (d) Cross flutes and radios

Answer:(b) Recorders and cross-flutes

25. Sometimes the flute seller would take a break and talk to

- (a) Another flute seller
- (b) A fruit seller
- (c) A policeman
- (d) The author

Answer: (b) A fruit seller

26. The flute seller makes sale

- (a) Frequently
- (b) Once in two weeks
- (c) Once in a month

(d) Occasionally

Answer: (d) Occasionally

27. The flute seller plays the flute in such a way that overpowers

- (a) Author's music
- (b) The radio music
- (c) The noise of traffic
- (d) The call of policeman

Answer: (c) The noise of traffic

28. The sound of _____ makes it difficult for the author go away from the square

- (a) Traffic
- (b) Flute
- (c) Train
- (d) Songs playing in a radio

Answer: (b) Flute

29. According to the author, the music of flute is

- (a) Shrill
- (b) Blunt
- (c) Universal
- (d) Depressing

Answer: (c) Universal

30. What's the Japanese form of the flute as mentioned by the author

- (a) Bansuri
- (b) Recorder
- (c) Shakuhachi

(d) Sitarachi

Answer: (c) Shakuhachi

31. While fighting, one of the monkeys jumped onto

- (a) The policeman
- (b) The statue of the Nepalese princess
- (c) Shivalinga
- (d) The roof of the temple

Answer: (c) Shivalinga

32. The monkeys screamed around the temple and down the river of

- (a) Padma
- (b) Yamuna
- (c) Bagmati
- (d) Bhagirathi

Answer: (c) Bagmati

33. Across the riverside, there is a view of _____ dropped into the river.

- (a) Old dried offerings
- (b) Snowballs
- (c) Stones
- (d) Food items

Answer: (a) Old dried offerings

34. What protrudes from the stone platform of the riverbank?

- (a) A rocky shield
- (b) A round pebble
- (c) A small shrine

(d) None of the above

Answer:(c) A small shrine

35. What was the usual belief about the protrusion coming out from the stone platform of the riverbank?

(a) The evil period of Kaliyuga will finish as soon as the protrusion emerges fully

(b) The evil period of Kaliyug will begin as soon as the protrusion emerges fully

(c) There will be floods as soon as the protrusion emerges fully

(d) There will be pandemics as soon as the protrusion emerges fully

Answer:(a) The evil period of Kaliyuga will finish as soon as the protrusion emerges fully

36. The Boudhanath stupa is also known as the

(a) The great temple of Kathmandu

(b) The Buddhist shrine of Kathmandu

(c) The Buddhist community point of Kathmandu

(d) A visitor point for Buddhists in Kathmandu

Answer:(b) The Buddhist shrine of Kathmandu

37. How was the atmosphere of Baudhnath stupa?

(a) Calm and still

(b) Messy

(c) Chaotic

(d) Both (b) and ©

Answer:(a) Calm and still

38. The dome of the Boudhanath stupa is

(a) White

(b) Immense

(c) Grey

(d) Both (a) and (b)

Answer: (d) Both (a) and (b)

39. The dome of this stupa is ringed by a

(a) Field

(b) Garden

(c) Road

(d) Vast garage

Answer:(c) Road

40. Many of the shops around the stupa are mostly owned by

(a) The Nepalese

(b) The Burmese Immigrants

(c) The Tibetan Immigrants

(d) The Bhutanese

Answer:(c) The Tibetan Immigrants

41. There are hardly any _____ at the stupa
- (a) Crowds
 - (b) Saints
 - (c) Policeman
 - (d) Monkeys

Answer:(a) Crowds

42. Overall, Kathmandu is a
- (a) Poor city
 - (b) Religious city
 - (c) City with beaches and oceans
 - (d) None of the above

Answer:(b) Religious city

43. What is Marzipan?
- (a) A spicy Nepalese food
 - (b) A non veg delicacy
 - (c) A kind of sweet
 - (d) A fruit

Answer:(c) A kind of sweet

44. The author indulged himself _____ into the lively city of Kathmandu
- (a) Mindlessly
 - (b) Carefully
 - (c) Greedily
 - (d) Reluctantly

Answer:(a) Mindlessly

45. Which English magazine did the author refer to in the chapter?
- (a) The ABC of Life
 - (b) Tintin
 - (c) Reader's digest
 - (d) Ghostly Cow

Answer:(c) Reader's digest

46. The author was enthusiastic about exploring more places on the way back home, but ultimately resolved to
- (a) Take a train back
 - (b) Take a flight back
 - (c) Take a bus back
 - (d) Take a boat back

Answer:(b) Take a flight back

47. While exploring Kathmandu, the author became
- (a) Homesick
 - (b) Exhausted
 - (c) Enthusiastic
 - (d) Both (a) and (b)

Answer: (d) Both (a) and (b)

48. It was already the last day of _____, when the author planned to go back home
- (a) July
 - (b) August
 - (c) June

(d) September

Answer: (b) August

49. Whom did the author see standing in a corner of the square near the hotel?

- (a) A musician
- (b) A policeman
- (c) A flute seller
- (d) A fruit seller

Answer: (c) A flute seller

50. Approximately how many bansuris could be seen protruding from the hands of the seller near the hotel?

- (a) 40-50
- (b) 50-60
- (c) 60-70
- (d) 70-80

Answer: (b) 50-60

Answer these questions in one or two words or in short phrases.

1. Name the two temples the author visited in Kathmandu.
2. The writer says, "All this I wash down with Coca Cola." What does 'all this' refer to ?
3. What does Vikram Seth compare to the quills of a porcupine ?
4. Name five kinds of flutes.

Answers:

1. These two temples are : Pashupatinath and Baudhnath stupa.
2. It is : com-on-the-cob and marzipan.
3. He compares flutes tied on the top of the flute seller's pole to the quills of a porcupine.
4. These are : the reed neh, the recorder, the Japanese shakuhachi, the deep bansuri, the breathy flutes of South America, the high-pitched Chinese flutes.

II. Answer each question in a short paragraph.

1. What difference does the author note between the flute seller and the other hawkers ?

Or

What is the difference between the behaviour of the flute seller and that of the other hawkers ?

2. What is the belief at Pashupatinath about the end of Kalyug ?
3. The author has drawn powerful images and pictures. Pick out three examples each of
 - (i) the atmosphere of febrile confusion outside the

temple of Pashupatinath (for example: some people trying to get the priest's attention are elbowed aside...)

(ii) the things he sees

(iii) the sounds he hears.

Answers:

1. The author sees the difference in how they are sold. Other sellers cry out their wares to sell. But the flute seller sells his wares in an off – handed way.
2. It is that when the small shrine on Bagmati river comes out fully, the goddess inside will escape. Then the Kaliyuga will end on the earth.
3. (i) Monkeys fight among themselves. They jump on to a Shivalinga. They run around the temples. They make a noise and show their teeth. Priests, hawkers, devotees, cows, pigeons, dogs roam here and there.
(ii) The author sees people, animals and birds roaming here and there. A princess of the Nepalese royal house appears. All bow and make way. He also sees a party of saffron-clad Westerners. They struggle to enter the temple.

(iii) He hears the sounds of songs. Cows low and vendors shout out their wares. He hears these sounds. He finds the flute sound of the flute seller sweet and melodious.

III. Answer the following questions in not more than 100-150 words each.

1. Compare and contrast the atmosphere in and around the Baudhnath shrine with the Pashupatinath temple.

Or

How does Vikram Seth find the atmosphere in and around the Baudhnath stupa quite in contrast to that of the Pashupatinath shrine ?

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

Or

What observations does the author make about the Kathmandu bazaar ?

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

Answers:

1. The atmosphere in and around Baudhnath shrine offers a contrast to that of the Pashupatinath temple. At Pashupatinath, the atmosphere is of febrile confusion. But at Baudhnath stupa there is stillness. At the road outside the Pashupatinath temple, it is all disorder and disquiet. Some people try to enter the temple. A policeman stops them.

He sees that they are not Hindus. Monkeys fight and chase each other. One monkey jumps on to a shivalinga. Then he runs screaming around the temples. The river Bagmati flows below the temple. The old offerings of flowers and leaves are dropped into it. On the other hand, the big dome of Baudhnath stupa is ringed by a road. But there are no crowds there.

2. The streets of Kathmandu are full of life. These are full of small shops and vendors. They sell things of tourists' interest. There are fruit sellers, flute sellers, hawkers of picture postcards and shops. These shops sell Western cosmetics. There are other shops also there. From them you can get film rolls and chocolates, or copper utensils and Nepalese

antiques.

There is a lot of noise. Radios blare out film music, car horns sound and bicycle bells ring. Stray cows low. Vendors shout out their wares. The author bought a roasted corn-cob from the pavement. He also bought a sweet dish, an orange drink and coca-cola. In fact, the bazaar is like a fair.

3. The author says so due to various reasons. For him or for anybody flute music is the most universal. It is also the most particular of sounds. The flute seller doesn't sell one type of flute only. Every culture has its own flute. They are different from each other. The flute seller does not shout out his wares. He simply plays different tunes on his flute. When he plays, the sound affects each and everyone. It touches everyone's heart. So that way the author is drawn into the commonality of all mankind.