

CHAPTER 03

Silk Road

—by Nick Middleton

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Chapter Sketch

This chapter is part of a travelogue about the author's journey along the ancient trade route called 'Silk Road' regions as they are now. This account of the Silk Road, with its contrasts and exotic detail, describes the challenges and hardships the author faced while journeying to Mount Kailash on a pilgrimage.

Chapter Summary

Departure from Ravu

The author left Ravu along with Daniel, an interpreter, and Tsetan, a tourist guide. Before leaving, Lhamo, the lady who had provided them accommodation at Ravu, gave the author a gift of a long-sleeved sheepskin coat, as they were going to Mount Kailash where it would be very cold. Tsetan knew a short cut to reach the mountain. He added that the journey would be smooth if there was no snow.

Drokbas and Encounter with Tibetan Mastiffs

As they crossed the hills of Ravu, they saw open plains, and arid pastures. As they started climbing the hills again, they saw individual *drokbas* (nomad shepherds) looking after their flocks. Both men and women were seen wearing thick woollen clothes. They would stop and stare at their car, sometimes waving to them as they passed.

On their journey, they also passed isolated nomad tents. These tents were guarded by black dogs called Tibetan Mastiff. These dogs wore red collars and barked furiously with their big jaws. Whenever their car passed through, they would chase the car for some distance while barking furiously. Because of their nature, these dogs were popular in China as hunting dogs and they were brought along from Tibet on the Silk Road as a tribute.

Ice Blocks the Road

By now, the author could see the snow capped mountains. Their car entered a valley wherein the river was wide and clogged with ice. The turns were now more sharper and the ride became bumpier.

As they were climbing up, the author started feeling pressure in his ears. Suddenly, Tsetan stopped the car and got out of it. Snow was covering the area around them. They now could not move around the snow patch or could climb the steep mountain. So, they threw some dirt on the path. To avoid any mishap, the author and Daniel stayed out of the car while Tsetan slowly drove over the ice patch.

They came across a similar blockage in a short while. But this time Tsetan drove around the snow. Rapid ascent had caused a headache to the author who checked his watch to find that they were at the height of 5400 metres. When they reached the top of the pass at 5515 metres, Tsetan unscrewed the top of the car. He was glad that there was no smoking.

Back on the Highway

After making sure that their car was fine, they went down the other side of the pass. At 2 o'clock, they had lunch at a place which unlike other places was full of activity. Salt collectors were coming from the plateau that was full of salt flats.

By late afternoon, the author reached Hor, a place that falls on the old trade route from Lhasa to Kashmir. Daniel had to go to Lhasa so he left. Tsetan and the author got the punctured tyres repaired and moved forward on their journey.

Hor-a Miserable Town

The author finds Hor, a town that was located on the shore of holy lake Mansarovar, to be grim and miserable. It had no vegetation and was covered in just dust and rocks. The author now could see Mount Kailash and was eager to move ahead.

However, Tsetan left the author to drink tea for some time. For this solitary time, the author felt his experience at Hor to be in contrast with the emotional outburst of other people.

The Author's Mysterious Experience

It was 10:30 pm when the author reached Darchen. At night, they stayed in a guest house. As the author went down to sleep, his nostrils got clogged. His cold had reappeared and he had trouble breathing. So, the author started breathing from his mouth. When the author felt comfortable and was drifting off to sleep, he woke up. Mysteriously, whenever he laid down to sleep, he could not breathe. He felt that he was not allowed to go to sleep and that if he did, he would die.

The next day Tsetan took the author to the Darchen Medical College. The doctor told him it was just the cold and the altitude which were giving him trouble. He gave him some medicine and that night, after taking one full day course of medicine, the author was able to sleep well.

Tsetan left the author in Darchen and returned to Lhasa. When the author informed him of his experience, Tsetan told him that it didn't really matter if the author died but it would be bad for his business.

Darchen

Darchen, although dusty, was surrounded by a picturesque scene of the Himalayas. It also had some general stores and cafes and was full of people. For the author, it was a relaxed place but there were no pilgrims there.

The author was told that during pilgrimage season, the town was full of tourists. The author had felt that he would reach at the beginning of the season but was in fact early.

One day while drinking tea, the author thought about his pilgrimage. He did not want to do the Kora alone for the fear of ice even though, he could see the pilgrimage alone. He also did not find anyone to clear his doubts.

Meeting Norbu

The author finally found someone to accompany him on his Kora. The author was reading a book in a cafe when Norbu sat with him. Norbu spoke English and so they started a conversation.

Norbu was a Tibetan who worked in Beijing at the Chinese Academy of Social Science in the Institute of Ethnic Literature. He was writing academic papers on Kora and had come to do it himself for the first time. It was he who gave the idea of them being a team. He suggested that they could hire Yaks to carry their luggage while they did their Kora.

Word Meanings

The given page numbers correspond to the pages in the prescribed NCERT textbook.

Word	Meaning
Page 74	
French loaves	thin loaf of French bread commonly made from basic lean dough
ducking back	quickly going inside
<i>kora</i>	pilgrimage (in Tibetan language)
<i>drokba</i>	nomad shepherd (here it means, "You look like a nomad shepherd.")
Changtang	plateau in Western Tibet
gazelles	small antelopes
Page 75	
<i>kyang</i>	wild asses
pall	cloud
<i>en masse</i>	together
manoeuvres	exercises involving a large number of animals
billowed	swelled out and went
mastiff	large and strong breed of dog
Page 76	
tribute	payment for tax
clogged	jammed
meanders	winding curves or bends of the river
daubed	spread on the surface
snorted	made a loud sound by forcing breath through a nostril
swathe	long strip
petered out	gradually came to an end
wristwatch	a watch having an altimeter worn on the wrist

Word	Meaning
Page 77	
four wheel drive	having a transmission system to provide power directly to all four wheels
lurching	moving unsteadily
cairn of rocks	pile of stones marking a special place
festooned	ornamentally decorated
careered down	descended
salt flats	areas of flat land covered with a layer of salt
brackish	slightly salty
vestiges	remains
a hive of activity	full of people working hard
as smooth as my bald head	totally worn out
Page 78	
venerated	respected
cosmology	ancient history
headwaters	streams forming the source
striking distance	a distance from which it can be easily reached
draught	current of air
spread the grease around on	cleaned
solitary confinement	loneliness
prone	inclined

Word	Meaning
kicking around	passing time aimlessly
drifting off	going to sleep
Page 79	
disappearing into the land of nod	going to fall asleep
put my finger on	pinpoint
paraphernalia	dress identifying his profession
screws of paper	small paper packets
Page 80	
derelict	run down
pool	a game similar to billiards
supremely incongruous	totally out of place
babbled	flowed with a babbling sound
cavernous	like a cave
Page 81	
struck up	started
escaped from the library	removed themselves from academic work
tempered	weakened
envisaged	thought of
yaks	Tibetan ox
prostrating	stretching and lying down with face down

Chapter Practice

PART 1

Objective Questions

• Multiple Choice Questions

1. What is the chapter 'Silk Road' about?
- (a) About the author's journey to complete the kora
 - (b) About the author's journey to Ravu
 - (c) About the author's journey to Kashmir
 - (d) None of the above

Ans. (a) 'Silk Road' is about the author's journey to complete the kora, which starts from slopes of Ravu and ends on Mount Kailash.

2. What is meant by 'kora'?
- (a) Yoga Aasana
 - (b) Medication
 - (c) Name of a small town
 - (d) Meditation performed by Buddhist believers

Ans. (d) Kora is a meditation that is performed by the Buddhist believers and is a core religious activity that they complete.

3. Why is Mount Kailash important for the author's long journey in the mountains?
- (a) To show his essential display in Buddhist beliefs
 - (b) To show his friends that he is adventurous
 - (c) To meet a friend that lived in the mountains
 - (d) None of the above

Ans. (a) Mount Kailash is important for the author's long journey in the mountains as it completes the kora, which is an essential display in Buddhist beliefs. Buddhists believers are to perform meditation in this process as it is important for their religious identity.

4. What does Lhamo's act of giving the coat made of sheepskin reflect on her?
- (a) She was charitable
 - (b) She was native
 - (c) She was wasteful
 - (d) She cared for the author

Ans. (d) Lhamo's act of giving the author a long sleeve sheepskin coat as a farewell gift shows that she is a compassionate woman who knew that the author wasn't prepared for the cold of the mountains.

5. Select the statement(s) that justify(s) the title of the chapter 'Silk Road'.

- I. Silk is the lake's name that the author crosses.
 - II. The author explored the old silk route which was one of the historical routes for trade.
 - III. The author enjoyed buying silk for his wife.
 - IV. The author sees the creation of the silk cloth on his entire journey.
- (a) II and IV (b) Only II (c) I and III (d) Only IV

Ans. (b) The chapter has been titled 'Silk Road' because the author explored the region of the old silk route which was one of the historical routes for trade.

6. Select the suitable option for the given statements, based on your reading of 'Silk Road'.

- (i) The author looks at the passing landscape with childlike curiosity and excitement.
 - (ii) The author has not expected the landscape to be so beautiful yet grim.
- (a) Both (i) and (ii) can be inferred
(b) Both (i) and (ii) cannot be inferred
(c) (i) can be inferred but (ii) cannot be inferred
(d) (i) cannot be inferred but (ii) can be inferred

Ans. (b)

7. Select the option that can be used to describe a Tibetan Mastiff.

- (i) Ferocious (ii) Alert
 - (iii) Friendly (iv) Goofy
 - (v) Loyal
- (a) (i) and (ii) (b) (iii) and (iv)
(c) (iv) and (v) (d) (i) and (v)

Ans. (a) The description of the Tibetan Mastiff by the author places them as 'ferocious' and 'alert' dogs who are wary of strange people and cars.

8. Why did the driver stop the car at a sharp turn?

- (a) He was tired and wanted to rest
- (b) Because the author was feeling sick
- (c) As the car's tyre got punctured
- (d) As a long track of snow was in front of them

Ans. (d) The driver stopped the car at a sharp turn as a long track of snow was in front of them and it would be difficult for them to cross it.

9. 'The slope was steep and studded with major rocks, but somehow Tsetan negotiated them, his four-wheel drive vehicle lurching from one obstacle to the next.

The given line shows that

- (a) the journey to do the Kora was not easy
- (b) the time chosen by the author to do the Kora was not correct
- (c) Tsetan was an expert driver who knew how to journey through the roads
- (d) Tsetan was bound to damage his vehicle in driving his car in such rough patches.

Ans. (c) The given lines show that Tsetan was an expert in tackling the icy roads that one can encounter on the journey to do the Kora.

10. Why was Hor an ugly and miserable place?

- (a) It had no modern markets
- (b) It had no vegetation or people
- (c) It didn't had any proper medical facilities
- (d) It had no place to live

Ans. (b) Hor was an ugly and miserable place as it was devoid of vegetation. It only had dust and rocks, along with garbage.

11. Classify (1) to (4) as Fact (F) or Opinion (O), based on your reading of Silk Road.

- 1. The author had expected Hor to be a beautiful and spiritual place.
- 2. The lack of pilgrims made the place look so lonely and miserable.
- 3. The description he had read about the place also led to his dissatisfaction.
- 4. Hor was located on a draughted land where the only respite was the lake.

- (a) F-1,4; O-2, 3
- (b) F-2, 3; O-1, 4
- (c) F-2; O-1, 3, 4
- (d) F-3, 4; O-1, 2

Ans. (a)

12. What happened when they reached Darchen at night to stay in the Guest House?

- (a) The author slept well
- (b) Tsetan went missing
- (c) The author was sad
- (d) The author wasn't able to breathe properly

Ans. (d) When they reached Darchen at night to stay in the guest house, the author wasn't able to breathe properly and demanded urgent medical assistance.

13. "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." Select the option that explains it.

- (a) Tsetan's beliefs and business are in contradiction to each other.
- (b) Tsetan had become deeply attached to the author.
- (c) Tsetan did not believe that it was wrong to die in pilgrimage.
- (d) Tsetan as a hospitable man cannot let a guest die under his supervision.

Ans. (a) Tsetan was a Buddhist who believed that death is not the end. He might have gone directly to heaven as Kailash is a holy place. But at the same time he thought it would be bad if the author died because it might affect his business and he could have lost his credibility.

14. Why was meeting Norbu a relief for the author?

- (a) Because he finally found some company
- (b) Because Norbu could play with him
- (c) Because Norbu was a lost friend of his
- (d) The author was not relieved to meet Norbu

Ans. (a) The author felt relieved at meeting Norbu because he finally found some company and wouldn't be left alone. He also suggests hiring yaks to carry their luggages, which the author saw as a good sign.

15. What is the tone employed by the author in the chapter?

- (a) Informative
- (b) Formal
- (c) Informal
- (d) Serious

Ans. (c) The author employs an informal tone to convey his adventures and a compelling story of himself on the silk route.

● Extract Based MCQs

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

"Now that we were leaving Ravu, Lhamo said she wanted to give me a farewell present. One evening I'd told her through Daniel that I was heading towards Mount Kailash to complete the kora and she'd said that I ought to get some warmer clothes. After ducking back into her tent, she emerged carrying one of the long-sleeved sheepskin coats that all the men wore. Tsetan sized me up as we clambered into his car. "Ah, yes," he declared, "drokba, sir." We took a short cut to get off the Changtang. Tsetan knew a route that would take us South-West, almost directly towards Mount Kailash. It involved crossing several fairly high mountain passes, he said. "But no problem, sir", he assured us, "if there is no snow." What was the likelihood of that I asked. "Not knowing, sir, until we get there."

- (i) Why does the author communicate via Daniel as can be understood by when he says "I'd told her through Daniel"?

- (a) They did not speak the same language
- (b) They were not on speaking terms
- (c) They were afraid to see each other
- (d) None of the above

Ans. (a) As Lhamo and the author did not speak the same language, Daniel assisted the conversation between them.

- (ii) Tsetan says that there will be no problem in their journey if there is no snow.

He means that snow

- (a) can hasten their movement
- (b) determines the smoothness of their journey
- (c) can tell if they can reach Mount Kailash
- (d) will increase their difficulties in the journey

Ans. (b) Snow determines whether their journey through the short cut would be easy or difficult as it has the power to hamper their travel.

- (iii) Choose the correct statement(s) that can be inferred from the passage.

I. Lhamo was kind and generous to travellers.

II. Tsetan knew the roads quite well.

III. Daniel does not know any other language than the author's.

- (a) Only III
- (b) Only II
- (c) I and II
- (d) All of these

Ans. (c) Lhamo was kind and generous to the travellers. Tsetan knew the roads well as he suggested a short cut to travel through to reach quicker. However, Daniel knows more languages than the author's as he is able to communicate in Tibetan with Lhamo, a language unknown to the author.

- (iv) "Ah, yes," he declared, "drokba, sir." Select the option that explains it.

- (a) Tsetan says this as the author is looking like a drokba
- (b) Tsetan had complimented the author
- (c) Tsetan wants to point what the author was going to see
- (d) Tsetan wants to thank Lhamo for the coat

Ans. (a) The given line is said by Tsetan who states that the author is looking like a drokba.

- (v) Which of the following can be said about Tsetan?

- (a) He was an amiable man.
- (b) He was expert at his job.
- (c) He was going on the first journey of the season.
- (d) All of the above.

Ans. (d)

- 2.** Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

"It's a cold," he said finally through Tsetan. "A cold and the effects of altitude. I'll give you something for it." I asked him if he thought I'd recover enough to be able to do the kora. "Oh yes," he said, "you'll be fine."

I walked out of the medical college clutching a brown envelope stuffed with fifteen screws of paper. I had a five-day course of Tibetan medicine which I started right away. I opened an after-breakfast package and found it contained a brown powder that I had to take with hot water. It tasted just like cinnamon. The contents of the lunchtime and bedtime packages were less

obviously identifiable. Both contained small, spherical brown pellets. They looked suspiciously like sheep dung, but of course I took them. That night, after my first full day's course, I slept very soundly. Like a log, not a dead man.

- (i) What is the author's reaction to the medicine he is offered?

- (a) He is happy to get the treatment
- (b) He is doubtful about the treatment but succumbs to it
- (c) He is strongly against the medication
- (d) He did not believe that it was real medication

Ans. (b) The author is doubtful about the treatment as the pellets looked like sheep dung but he, despite the suspicion, takes the medication to heal himself.

- (ii) What is meant by the utterance: 'It's a cold,' in the beginning of the extract?

- (a) Tsetan knew English but chose not to talk to the author
- (b) The doctor was unhelpful and selfish towards the author, so he talked through Tsetan
- (c) Tsetan translated the conversation between the doctor and the author
- (d) None of the above

Ans. (c) As the author only knew English and the doctor only knew Tibetan, Tsetan translated the conversation between the doctor and the author.

- (iii) The author was suspicious about the medicine yet he took it. Why?

This was so because

- (a) he would not have been able to survive another sleepless night.
- (b) he was desperate to complete his kora.
- (c) he wanted relief from the cold.
- (d) he did not want Tsetan to worry about him and wanted him to continue his journey.

Ans. (b) The author was suspicious but he still took the medicine because he wanted to complete his kora for which he had come there.

- (iv) Which of the following describes the author's view about the Medical College?

- (a) Scantly maintained
- (b) Monastery like
- (c) Spiritual
- (d) Eye pleasing

Ans. (b) The author finds the Medical College at Darchen to be like a monastery.

- (v) Explain the phrase: 'Like a log, not a dead man'.

- (a) He slept peacefully
- (b) He felt lifeless
- (c) He dreamt about dying
- (d) He felt disturbed in his sleep

Ans. (a) The phrase meant that he slept peacefully. After going to the Tibetan doctor the author soon recovered. Unpalatable as it seemed, the medicine led him to a quick recovery. Hence, the author had a healthy and sound sleep unlike when he was ailing and restless.

PART 2

Subjective Questions

• Short Answer Type Questions

1. What was the farewell present given by Lhamo to the author when he told her that he was going to Mount Kailash?

Ans. The farewell present given by Lhamo to the author when he told her that he was going to Mount Kailash was a long-sleeved sheepskin coat that normally shepherds wore. She felt that the coat would protect him from the cold weather on the mountain.

2. What did Tsetan say would be the only hurdle while they were on their way to Mount Kailash?

Ans. Tsetan said that their journey to Mount Kailash would involve crossing several high mountain passes. He knew the way very well, but the only hurdle would be snow on the way. He could not say anything for sure until they reached there.

3. Tibetan mastiffs were popular in China's imperial courts. Explain [NCERT]

Ans. Tibetan mastiffs were popular in China's imperial courts as hunting dogs. They were brought along the Silk Road in ancient times as payment of tax from Tibet. They were huge black dogs also used as watchdogs. They exploded into action like bullets when roused. They were furious and fearless.

4. Describe the appearance of Hor.

Ans. Hor, although a town at the shore of the holy lake Mansarovar, was a grim and miserable place. There was no vegetation whatsoever; only dust and rocks, liberally scattered with years of accumulated rubbish left by tourists. There was only one cafe in Hor which also was poorly maintained. The author found no population there except for one youth of Chinese military.

5. The author's experience at Hor was in stark contrast to earlier accounts of the place. [NCERT]

Ans. According to the earlier accounts, the town, on the shore of Lake Mansarovar, was abundant in natural beauty. A Japanese monk who had arrived there in 1900 was so moved by the sanctity of the lake that he burst into tears. A couple of years later, the hallowed waters had a similar effect on another traveller. However, now it was a grim and miserable place. There was no vegetation whatsoever, but only dust and rocks liberally scattered with years of accumulated rubbish left by tourists.

6. What troubled the author at Darchen?

Ans. A bad cold troubled the author at Darchen. He was unable to go to sleep at night as his nostrils were blocked. When he was just dozing off, he woke up suddenly. He felt his chest becoming very heavy, as he was not able to breathe-in enough oxygen.

7. How did the author find relief from his breathing troubles?

Ans. The author found relief from his breathing troubles after taking a full day's course prescribed by the doctor at Darchen medical college. The author was diagnosed with cold and the effects of altitude.

8. "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." Comment. [NCERT]

Ans. These were Tsetan's words spoken to the author. After the author's sickness was cured, Tsetan wanted to go back to Lhasa. By saying these words, Tsetan firmly stated that he was a Buddhist, who believed that physical death was not death in the real sense. However, he thought that the death of a tourist could affect his business as his credibility will be at stake in looking after the tourists, due to which he may not get customers anymore.

9. The author was disappointed with Darchen. Explain.

Ans. The author was indeed disappointed in Darchen as the place was dusty, partially derelict and punctuated by heaps of rubble and rubbish left behind by tourists. Further, even though the place was full of people, there were no tourists or pilgrims in whose company he could complete his kora.

10. Briefly comment on the author's meeting with Norbu.

Ans. The author was feeling rather lonely without Tsetan, who had gone back with the car to Lhasa. There weren't any pilgrims at Darchen as he had reached the place too early in the pilgrimage season. The author was sitting in the only cafe in Darchen when he met Norbu. The author was delighted to meet Norbu since he was also planning to do the kora. Now, he had a companion with whom he could also complete his pilgrimage.

11. Why had Norbu come to Kailash?

Ans. Norbu had been writing academic papers about the Kailash kora and its importance in various works of Buddhist literature for many years, but he had actually never done it himself. Hence, he also was there to do kora.

12. The author thought that his positive thinking strategy worked well after all. Justify [NCERT]

Ans. The author felt that his positive strategy was working because, all the while he was in Darchen, he had been worried about completing his kora. He had no companion and no person to clear his doubts. So, he had been trying to convince himself that he would be successful in his endeavour. His positive thinking worked as soon he met Norbu who would be his companion while doing kora.

13. How did Norbu become an ideal companion for the author?

Ans. Norbu was an ideal companion for the author as both were academicians who had come away from their academic work. Both were not devout believers and they did not intend to prostrate themselves all round the mountain like other pilgrims.

14. Explain the purpose of the author's journey to Mount Kailash. (NCERT)

Ans. Nick Middleton is an Oxford Professor as well as an adventurer. He follows the most difficult terrain through the Silk Road and reaches the foot of Mount Kailash. The purpose of the author's journey to Mount Kailash was to complete the *kora*, which was a sacred religious ritual according to Hindu and Buddhist tradition.

15. Tsetan's support to the author during the journey. Elaborate. (NCERT)

Ans. Tsetan was a good and efficient driver. He drove the car very carefully. During the journey, he spoke to the author giving information about the places they were visiting. He was very caring. At Darchen when he found that the author was not well, Tsetan took him to the medical college and got medicine for him. He was also a good Buddhist.

• Long Answer Type Questions

1. Describe the author's experiences at Darchen.

Ans. Both the author and Tsetan reached Darchen during the late night. They found a guesthouse to stay in. However, the author had serious sleep problems at night as he was suffering from the effects of the high altitude as well as a blocked nose. The next day, Tsetan took him to the Darchen Medical College for getting him treated. The doctor there told them that it was a common problem in this area and gave some medicine for him.

Then Tsetan left him to return to Lhasa as, from here onwards, the author would have to go on foot. At Darchen, he found people very relaxed and unhurried, but he could not find pilgrimage there as he had reached there very early in the pilgrimage season. Then he met Norbu, who was a Tibetan working in Beijing. He also had come for *kora*. They decided to climb Kailash together, as both were not devout pilgrims and had no desire to prostrate themselves all round the mountain.

2. How was his experience of Hor a stark contrast to the accounts he had read of the earlier travellers?

Ans. Hor was a small town placed in the back on the main East-West highway that followed the old trade route from Lhasa to Kashmir. The author found the place very grim and miserable. There was no vegetation whatsoever, just dust and rocks, scattered all around along with heaps of garbage left behind by people. The town sat on the shore of lake Manasarovar, Tibet's holiest stretch of water. Ancient Hindu and Buddhist scriptures tell that Lake Manasarovar was the source of four great Indian rivers: Indus, Ganges, Sutlej and Brahmaputra. Actually only the Sutlej flows from the lake, the headwaters of the others rise nearby on the slopes of Mount Kailash.

His experience in Hor came as a stark contrast to accounts he had read of earlier travellers' first encounters with Lake Manasarovar. Ekai Kawaguchi, a Japanese monk who had arrived there in 1900, was so moved by the sanctity of the lake that he burst into tears. Similarly, in 1902, Sven Hedin from Sweden was also moved by the vision of the lake. However, now you could only find open-air dumps of rubbish in the town.

3. Justify the title 'Silk Road'.

Ans. The 'Silk Road' is not single highway, but a network of overland routes linking Europe with Asia, making trade possible between those with a passion for silk, horses and exotic fauna and flora. Just about every transaction imaginable has occurred along its many trails over the centuries. It's a thread that links East and West, a network of veins that pumped new lifeblood into mighty empires, a fabled route trodden by innumerable adventurers through the ages.

Yet, underlying this romantic trail is one of the most extraordinary tracts of land on this planet, a vast region separating China from the Mediterranean world that rates as one of the least hospitable areas on Earth. It was the difficulty of crossing such unforgiving territory that kept East and West apart for so long, allowing them to develop in their own distinct ways.

The author records the challenges and hardships he faced in the Silk Road regions as they are now. The reader finds it refreshing to traverse such vast tracts of the natural world that remain largely unchanged from earlier days.

4. "He's an adventurer, but at heart more a meticulous academic than a daredevil". Explain the truth of the statement about the author based on your reading of the travelogue 'Silk Road' by Nick Middleton.

Ans. Oxford professor and travel writer, Nick Middleton is truly an adventurer, but at heart more a meticulous academic than a daredevil adventurer. He is an environmental consultant who has written many articles in journals, magazines and newspapers as well as 16 books. Nick Middleton teaches geography at Oxford University. His main research interest is in the nature and human use of deserts and their margins.

After reaching Hor, what he was struck by was not the natural beauty of the place but the litter all around the area left by tourists. He was disappointed to see how man was ruining the environment. Being an environmental consultant, he was much disturbed at how the environment is slowly deteriorating due to human activity.

He gives a graphic detail of the mountain terrain, the snow covered mountains and the calm and relaxed people he met there. He strongly believes that travelling broadens our mind.

• Extract Based Questions

1. Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow.

"He had opened his door and jumped out of his seat before I realised what was going on. 'Snow,' said Daniel as he too exited the vehicle, letting in a breath of cold air as he did so. A swathe of the white stuff lay across the track in front of us, stretching for maybe fifteen metres before it petered out and the dirt trail reappeared. The snow continued on either side of us, smoothing the abrupt bank on the upslope side. The bank was too steep for our vehicle to scale, so there was no way

round the snow patch. I joined Daniel as Tsetan stepped on to the encrusted snow and began to slither and slide forward, stamping his foot from time to time to ascertain how sturdy it was. I looked at my wristwatch. We were at 5,210 metres above sea level.”

- (i) What is going on in the given lines?
- (ii) How will the snow impact the journey?
- (iii) Do you think that the presence of snow hampered the author’s mood?
- (iv) Did the problem faced by the author in the given extract repeat itself?
- (v) How did Tsetan solve the problem?

- Ans.**
- (i) In the given lines, Tsetan has stopped the car because the path in front is covered in snow.
 - (ii) The snow would impact the journey undertaken by the author because it would be difficult for them to cross the snow easily. The presence of the snow thus would make the journey difficult.
 - (iii) I don’t think that the presence of snow hampered the author’s mood. In fact, he remains neutral following Tsetan to reach his destination.
 - (iv) Yes, the problem of snow repeated itself just after 10 minute of throwing dirt on the snow and driving away described in the given extract.
 - (v) To solve the problem, Tsetan threw a handful of dirt on the snow and drove along the path while the author and Daniel walked.

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

“My experience in Hor came as a stark contrast to accounts I’d read of earlier travellers’ first encounters with Lake Mansarovar. Ekai Kawaguchi, a Japanese monk who had arrived there in 1900, was so moved by the sanctity of the lake that he burst into tears. A couple of years later, the hallowed waters had a similar effect on Sven Hedin, a Swede who wasn’t prone to sentimental outbursts.

It was dark by the time we finally left again and after 10.30 p.m. we drew up outside a guest house in Darchen for what turned out to be another troubled night. Kicking around in the open-air rubbish dump that passed for the town of Hor had set off my cold once more, though if truth be told it had never quite disappeared with my herbal tea.”

- (i) How did the author feel about Hor?
- (ii) “My experience in Hor came in contrast to accounts I’d read.” Explain.
- (iii) Do you think that the author is dissatisfied with Hor?
- (iv) Explain the phrase ‘another troubled night’.
- (v) What is to be blamed for the author’s deteriorating cold according to him?

- Ans.**
- (i) The author felt that Hor was a grim and a miserable place without any vegetation of population.
 - (ii) The author could not see the spiritual beauty of Hor which had enamored the earlier travelers. He felt that it was dusty and dirty place in contrast to the earlier travelers who had emotional outbursts at seeing the place.
 - (iii) Yes, the author is dissatisfied with Hor as he had expected it to be full of spirituality and picturesque scenarios but the reality was completely different.
 - (iv) The phrase ‘another troubled night’ refers to the health problem suffered by the author due to his cold. The author was unable to sleep due to his cold.
 - (v) The author blames the dust found in Hor to be the cause of his deteriorating cold.

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

“‘You English?’” he enquired, after he’d ordered tea. I told him I was, and we struck up a conversation.

I didn’t think he was from those parts because he was wearing a windcheater and metal-rimmed spectacles of a Western style. He was Tibetan, he told me, but worked in Beijing at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in the Institute of Ethnic Literature. I assumed he was on some sort of fieldwork.

“Yes and no,” he said. “I have come to do the kora.” My heart jumped. Norbu had been writing academic papers about the Kailash kora and its importance in various works of Buddhist literature for many years, he told me, but he had never actually done it himself.”

- (i) Do you think Norbu was also looking for a companion?
- (ii) What was Norbu doing in Darchen?
- (iii) How do you think that the author and Norbu are similar?
- (iv) Was the author correct in saying that Norbu was doing some fieldwork?
- (v) How did the author feel about Norbu?

- Ans.**
- (i) Yes, I think that Norbu was also looking for a companion as it is he who suggests that they could be a team.
 - (ii) Norbu had come to Darchen to do the kora for the first time even though he was a Tibetan.
 - (iii) The author and Norbu are similar in many aspects. Both of them are academicians who are not well-equipped to do the kora by themselves.
 - (iv) Yes, the author was correct in saying that Norbu was doing some fieldwork as Norbu was not only doing the kora but was also writing academic paper on it.
 - (v) The author was excited to meet Norbu as he felt that he had a companion to complete his kora.