13. A Shelter so High!

A traveller's tale



Gaurav Jani

I am Gaurav Jani and this is 'Loner' – my partner – my motorcycle. But, Loner is never lonely. We are together all the time.

I and my motorcycle wait for a chance to get away from the busy, crowded and noisy city of Mumbai. We like to travel to different parts of this wonderful country. Let me tell you about our amazing journey on the highest roads in India.

Getting ready

This journey took about two months. I had to carry everything on my motorcycle. I had to plan and collect all the things I needed. I packed a small tent, sleeping bag, plastic sheet, warm clothes and food that would remain fresh for some days. I also took my camera and extra cans for petrol. Loner and I left Mumbai, passing through small villages and towns of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan to reach Delhi.

It took me three days to cover 1400 kilometers from Mumbai to Delhi. I was hoping to see something new and different in Delhi. But Delhi looked just like Mumbai! I am tired of looking at the same kinds of houses, made of cement, bricks, glass and steel. I was looking forward to my journey ahead. I was

excited that I would be able to see wooden houses, houses with sloping roofs and those covered with snow. I had seen pictures of such houses in many books.

I packed more things in Delhi and continued. In two days we were in Manali. It was so refreshing to be in the mountains and breathe the clean air! Now the real journey was to begin. We had to travel through difficult roads of the state of Jammu and Kashmir to reach Leh in Ladakh.



Find out

- Check in your map. Which states would one pass through while travelling from Mumbai to Kashmir?
- Gaurav Jani passed through several states while going from Mumbai to Delhi. Find the capital cities of these states. Was there any other big town on his way?
- Is Manali a plain or a hilly area? In which state is it?



Gaurav Jani

New home

Loner and I were covering long distances each day. All I needed was food and a tent to protect myself from the cold night air. My nylon tent was so small that I could just about fit in it to sleep.

Loner stood guard outside the tent. The breeze and the sound of the birds woke me up to see the sunrise.

Tell

- Have you ever stayed in a tent? Where? What was it like?
- Imagine that you were to stay alone in a small tent for two days and could take with you only ten things. Make a list of those ten things.
- What are the different types of houses that you have seen? Tell your friends about it. Make drawings too.



Gaurav Jani

Cold desert

At last Loner and I reached Leh. For the first time I saw such an area – high, dry and flat called a cold desert. Ladakh gets very little rainfall. Here there are high snowcapped mountains and a cold, flat ground.

In Leh, I found myself in a quiet street with beautiful white houses. As I rode slowly, I found that I was being followed by a group of children. They called out 'jule, jule', meaning 'welcome, welcome'. They were all amazed to see my 'Loner'. Everyone wanted me to come to their home.

At home with Tashi

Tashi dragged me to his home. It was a building with two floors. The house was made of stones which were kept one over the other. The walls were coated with a thick layer of mud and lime. The house looked like a shed from inside with a lot of hay

Teacher's Note : Discuss with children that all the deserts are not hot and sandy. Encourage students to look at the map and find all the states mentioned in the chapter.

stored there. We took the wooden steps and reached the first floor. "This is where we stay," explained Tashi. "The ground floor is for our animals and for storing necessary things. Sometimes when it gets too cold, we also move downstairs." I noticed that the ground floor had no windows. Thick tree trunks were used to make the roof strong.


Gaurav Jani

Tashi then took me to the roof of his house. What a view! I could see the same flat roofs all around. On some red chillies were, laid out to dry and on some there were orange pumpkins and golden yellow corn. Some had stacks of paddy and on some cow dung cakes were laid out to dry.

"This is the most important part of our house," said Tashi. "During summer season we dry many fruits and vegetables. We store them for winters when we do not get fresh fruits and vegetables."

As I stood there with Tashi I could see how every part of the house was built specially to suit the needs of his people. I could understand how the thick walls, a wooden floor and a wooden ceiling protected them from the cold.



Write

- During winters, Tashi and his family live on the ground floor. Why would they be doing so?
- What is the roof of your house like? What all is the roof used for?



People living on top of the world

Now was the time to climb higher. Loner had a tough time zigzagging along narrow, rocky mountain roads. At many places there were no roads at all.

I was moving towards the rocky plains of 'Changthang'. This place is at a height of almost 5000 metres. It is so high that it is difficult to breathe normally. I had a headache and felt weak. Then I slowly got used to breathing in such air. For many days we kept wandering in this area with not a single human being in sight. No petrol pumps, no mechanics! Only clear blue sky and many beautiful lakes around.

Many days and nights passed. Loner and I kept moving ahead. Suddenly one morning I saw before me flat grassy land. Many sheep and goats were grazing there. Far in the distance I saw some tents. I wondered who lived there and what they were doing in this far out place.





Find out

- At what height is the place where you live?
- Why did Gaurav Jani say - "This place is so high that it is difficult to breathe normally?"
- Have you ever been to a hilly place? Where?
- At what height was it? Did you have any difficulty in breathing there?
- Which is the highest place you have been to?

The Changpa

There I met Namgyal and came to know about the Changpa – a tribe living on the mountains. The Changpa tribe has only about 5000 people. The Changpas are always on the move with their goats and

sheep. It is from these that they get all that they need – milk, meat, skin for tents and wool for coats and sweaters. Their goats are their only treasure. If a family has more animals it is considered more rich and important. From these special goats they get wool for making the world famous pashmina wool. The Changpa graze their goats at higher and colder places so that the goats have more and softer hair (fur). They stay high up on these mountains in very difficult conditions because that is where these goats can live. This is their life and their livelihood.



Gaurav Jani

I was carrying very little of my belongings on my motorcycle. But the Changpas carry everything that they own on their horses and yaks. It takes them only two and a half hours to pack everything and move ahead. Within no time they put up their tents at the chosen place, the luggage is unpacked and their homes are ready.

"You are most welcome into our home," said Namgyal as he led me to the big cone-shaped tent. They call their tent *Rebo*. Yak hair is woven to make strips which are stitched together. These are strong and warm and protect them from the icy strong winds. I saw that the strips were tightly tied with nine sticks. The ground is dug about 2 feet deep. The tent is then put up around this on the higher part of the ground.

Teacher's Note : In the language of the Changpa 'changthang' means a place where very few people live. Are there words like this in different languages spoken by children? As you go up the mountain, the level of oxygen in air becomes less and at times people have to carry oxygen cylinders. It is not expected that children understand the concept of 'oxygen'. But children may have some idea that it is difficult to breathe on high altitudes. This will make them sensitive towards people living in such conditions. Through this they will also understand all kinds of difficulties people have to face for a living.

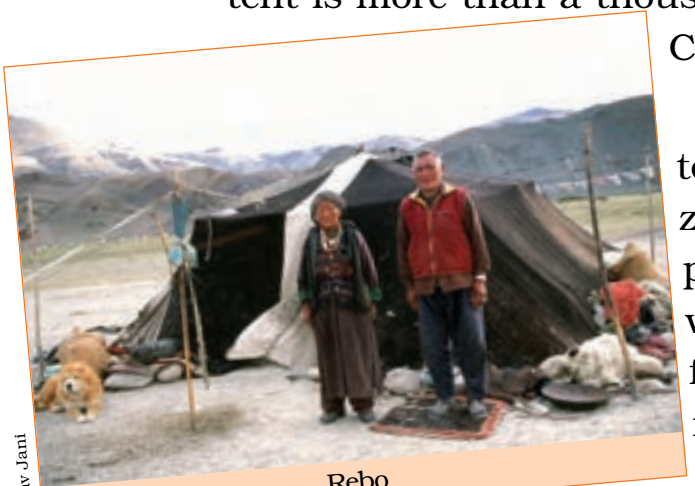
The world famous pashmina



It is believed that a pashmina shawl is as warm as six sweaters! It is very thin yet very warm. The goats from which the soft pashmina wool is collected, are found on very high altitudes of 5000 metres. In winter, the temperature here drops below 0° C (–40° C). A coat of warm hair grows on the goat's body which protects it from extreme cold. The goats shed some of their hair (fur) in summer. This hair is so fine that six of these would be as thick as one hair of yours!

The fine hair cannot be woven on machines and so weavers of Kashmir make these shawls by hand. This is a long and difficult process. After almost 250 hours of weaving, one plain pashmina shawl is made. Imagine how long it would take to make a shawl with embroidery.

As we stepped into the tent I realised that I could stand up straight. It was not like my tent. I also saw that the *Rebo* was as big as a room of my flat in Mumbai! It was held up by two wooden poles in the middle. There was an opening to let out the smoke from the *chulah*. Namgyal told that, the design of this tent is more than a thousand years old. The tent protected the Changpas from extreme cold.



Gaurav Jani

Rebo

How cold must it be? In winters the temperature drops many degrees below zero! The wind blows at 70 kilometres per hour. Imagine–if you were on a bus which was going at this speed, how far from your house would you reach in one hour?

Near the *Rebo* there was a place to keep sheep and goats. Changpas call

Teacher's Note : We can discuss with children that there are different kinds of houses in different regions. The same area may also have different kind of houses. The reasons include climate, economic conditions and also the availability of local raw material (stone, mud, wood).

this *lekha*. The walls of a *lekha* are made with stones. Each family puts a special mark on their own animals. The women and young girls count and take the animals out of the *lekha*.

– For the Changpas their animals are a very important part of their life. Is any animal part of your life? For example, as a pet, or as helpers in farming.

– List five ways in which different animals are a part of your life.

– Do goat and sheep need their own fur and wool? Discuss.



Find out

- You read that in Changthang the temperature drops below 0°C. Look at newspapers on the TV to find cities in India or abroad where the temperature drops below 0°C. In which months do you expect to see this?

Towards Srinagar

I spent a few days with the Changpas but, sadly, it was time to move on. My return journey would take me away from this special part of the world, towards towns which looked like a totally different world. This time I took a different route from Leh. I was going towards Srinagar via Kargil. I saw many more amazing buildings and different houses.

I stayed in Srinagar for a few days. I was amazed by the houses there. They took my heart away! Some houses are on the mountains, while some are on water. I took many pictures of these. See my photo album (p. 128).

Teacher's Note : Children at this age are not expected to understand the concept of temperature. But using newspaper reports and linking °C with their experiences of hot or cold will help them make some associations. This also provides an opportunity to know the names of some new cities in which the temperature drops below 0°C.



Houses of Srinagar – My photo album



Vinod Raina

Tourists who come to Srinagar love to stay in houseboats. Houseboats can be as long as 80 feet and around 8 to 9 feet wide.



Afaq Ghada

Many families in Srinagar live in a 'donga'. These boats can be seen in Dal Lake and Jhelum river. From inside the 'donga' is just like a house with different rooms.



Afaq Ghada

Beautiful carving on wood can be seen on the ceiling of houseboats and some big houses. This design is called 'khatamband', which has a pattern that look like a jigsaw puzzle.



Afaq Ghada

In villages of Kashmir, houses are made from stones cut and kept one on top of the other and coated with mud. Wood is also used. The houses have sloping roofs.



Afaq Ghada

Some old houses have a special type of window which comes out of the wall. This is called 'dab'. It has beautiful wood pattern. It is wonderful to sit here and enjoy the view!



Afaq Ghada

The old houses here are made of stone, bricks and wood. The doors and windows have beautiful arches (*mehraab*).

When I started my journey, I had not imagined that in one state I would see so many different kinds of houses and lifestyles. I had a wonderful experience of living on the mountains in Leh and another of living on water in Srinagar. I saw how both the houses in these areas were made to suit the climate.



Tourists enjoy the *Shikara* ride on the dal lake.

Vinod Raina

Return journey

Again it was time to move on. In Jammu I saw houses like I have been seeing in Mumbai. The same–cement, brick, steel and glass. These houses are very strong. But they are not as special as the houses I was lucky to see in Leh and Srinagar.

After a long journey Loner and I were about to reach Mumbai. My heart felt heavy. I also felt that my motorcycle did not want to come back. I was happy that I had learnt and experienced so many new things. I had also brought back some memories in my camera. And of course, this was not the end! Next time when Loner and I get bored of the city, we will again set out for a new journey!



Can you tell what is shown in this picture? Every lane in Kashmir has a bakery. Kashmiri people don't cook *roties* in their homes, they buy it from such bakeries.

Afaq Ghada



Tell

The houses in different parts of Jammu and Kashmir are made to suit the climate and the needs of the people there.

- Are there different types of houses in the place where you live? If yes, think about the reasons.
- Think of your own house. Is there something special in it – like a sloping roof as it rains a lot, or a courtyard where you can sleep when it is hot or where things are kept in the sun (for drying, etc.)? Make a drawing.
- What are the materials used for making your house? Is it mud, brick, stone, wood or cement?



Anita Rampal



Discuss and write

- Look at this picture. Can you see any houses in the picture? These houses are made of stone and mud. Nobody lives here in winter. In summer, the Bakarwal people live here when they bring their goats to higher lands for grazing.
- Can you guess the similarities and differences in the life of Bakarwal people and the life of the Changpas.



What we have learnt

You read about different kinds of shelters in Jammu and Kashmir – some on high mountains, some on water, some with beautiful designs in wood and stone, and some mobile shelters that can even be packed and carried to another place.

- Describe how these shelters suit the needs of the people who live there.
- How are these different from the house you live in?