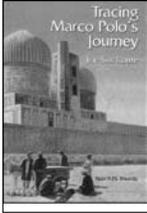


Tracing Marco Polo's Journey: The Silk Route

Review by RC Patial*



Tracing Marco Polo's Journey: The Silk Route

Major HPS Ahluwalia

Niyogi Books

Pp : 236

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I have always admired Maj HPS Ahluwalia who because of a bullet injury was handicapped and remains wheel chair borne. In spite of this major handicap he has not lost the spirit of Adventure and in fact is a source of inspiration for all adventure lovers. Maj Ahluwalia while on the summit of Everest on **29 May 1965** had dreamt to explore one day the Tibetan Plateau and Central Asian Lands.

'**Tracing Marco Polo's Journey**' his dream project was fulfilled in *1994* almost after three decades. The author's first hand vivid account takes the reader on the trip along with him as an integral part of his team. Travelling on the '*Old Silk Trade Route*' on a fascinating, adventurous trip the reader feels himself viewing the varied terrain of open country, hills, deserts, plateau culminating into the mighty Himalayas. The travelogue successfully brings out the importance of the region, historical linkages of the rulers, military campaigns of the famous Mongol General Genghis Khan, the Mughals, Gazni and other invaders. Tracing Marco Polo's Journey partially also traces the famous, legendary, fascinating yet hazardous '*Old Silk Trade Route*' linking west to east through the '*Asian Heartland*'. For centuries travelers, traders, historians, explorers and warriors have left their footprints across the sands and snow of the region. One can well imagine the difficulties of the traders travelling with the caravans must have experienced when the present day communication infrastructure was nonexistent.

The author's narrative is also successful in making the reader aware of the little known interesting facts of the region. Amazing to still witness the advancement in the irrigation system of underground wells connected by canals through tunneling. Existence of hundreds of caves having Buddha related rock carvings looking like multi-storied buildings. It is mindboggling how the monks and artisans would have sculptured such a large number of figures! The region

has an abundance of a variety of both fresh and dry fruits. Ancient monuments, monasteries, mosques showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the region have been exceptionally captured by the camera team.

Hats off to Maj Ahluwalia to have undertaken the hazardous yet breath taking journey to trace the footprints of Marco Polo. Overall the vivid account of a diverse, adventurous trip through five countries of the '*Heartland of Asia*', exotic cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, Anchijan, Xian, Yarkand, Kashgar and Lhasa. I wish the author had included an easy to understand map to correlate the historical facts especially for those interested in the study of ancient military history. Overall the book is an interesting, well laid out, correlates to ancient times, its politics, mythology and history. Must read for mountain lovers, those interested in military history and recommended especially for army officers.

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