

THROUGH THE EYES OF TRAVELLERS

Multiple Choice Type Questions

1. Which of these French travelers came to during 17th century?
(a) Al-Biruni
(b) Ibn-Battuta
(c) Abul Fail
(d) Francois Bernier
2. Who among the following belonged to Morocco?
(a) Ibn Battuta
(b) Al-Biruni
(c) Francois Bernier
(d) Abdul Samarandi
3. Who Wrote 'Kitab-ul-Hind'?
(a) Callin Mcenzie
(b) Al-Biruni
(c) Abdul Samad Lahori
(d) Ibn-Battuta
4. Islamic Law is known as _____
(a) Shariya
(b) Samr
(c) Ulema
(d) All of these
5. Ibn Battuta remained in India for _____ years.
(a) 12
(b) 14
(e) 16
(d) 18

Answer

1. (d) 2. (a) 3. (b) 4. (a) 5. (a)

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Briefly describe the life sketch of Al-Biruni.

Answer: Al-Biruni was born in 973 C.E., in Khwarizm in present-day Uzbekistan. Khwarizm was an important centre of education. Al-Biruni received the best available education over there and was well versed in many languages including Syrian, Persian, Hebrew and Sanskrit. Although he was not aware of the Greek language he was completely familiar with the works of Plato and other Greek philosophers. He read their works through their Arabic translations. Mahmud of Ghazni attacked Khwarizm in 101 C.E. and took back many scholars and poets to his capital. Al-Biruni was one of them. He came over there as a hostage but gradually developed a liking for the city. He spent the rest of his life over there and died at the age of 70.

2. The travels of Ibn-Battuta were arduous and hazardous. Why was he called an inveterate traveler?

Answer: Ibn-Battuta has beautifully written about the new cultures, peoples, beliefs and values in India. He travelled to India in the fourteenth century. It was the time when travel was more arduous and hazardous than it is today. Ibn-Battuta travelled from Multan to Delhi in forty days.

❖ He completed his travel from Sindh to Delhi in about fifty days. Besides travelling was also more insecure. Ibn-Battuta was attacked by robbers many a time. So he preferred to travel along with other companions. But it was not a guarantee of any safety. Many of his companions had lost their lives on the way. He himself was badly wounded.

A Persistent Traveler. Ibn-Battuta was an inveterate traveler. Before coming to India in 1332—33 CE, he had made pilgrimage trips to Mecca besides travelling extensively in Syria, Iraq, Persia, Yemen and Oman. On his return, the ruler of Morocco ordered him to record all his stories.

3. According to Al-Biruni, what were the barriers that obstructed his understanding?

Or

Explain briefly the barriers, felt by Al-Biruni, in understanding what he observed in India. (C.B.S.E. 2010 (D))

Answer: Al-Biruni was aware of the problems that he could face during his travel. He felt that many barriers obstructed his understanding. These barriers can be studied as under :

1. The first barrier was that of the language. He found a lot of difference between Sanskrit and Arabic or Persian. He found it hard to translate ideas and concepts of one language into another.
2. Secondly, he found a lot of difference in religious beliefs and practices.
3. The third barrier was the self-absorption and insularity of the local population.

4. What were the views of European travelers and writers about the condition of women in the medieval period?

Or

Explain how the accounts of Ibn, Battuta and Bernier provide us with tantalizing glimpses of the life of Indian women during the 16th and 17th century (C.B.S.E. 2013 (D))

Answer: All the contemporary European travelers and writers had written about the treatment of women which according to them was a crucial point of difference between western and eastern societies. That's why Bernier specifically mentioned in detail about the inhuman practice of Sati.

Life of women was circled around a few other things as well except the practice of Sati. Their labour was important for both agriculture and non-agriculture production. Women of merchant families were also often engaged in commercial activities and sometimes took mercantile disputes to the court of law. Therefore, it hardly seems that women were only confined to four walls of their homes.

5. Explain in the real intentions of Buchanan's journey to India. (C.B.S.E. 2009 (D))

Answer: Francis Buchanan came to India in 1794. He was a physician and served in the Bengal Medical Service till 1815. He also served as a surgeon to Lord Wellesley, the Governor-General of India for a few years.

But on the request of the Bengal Government, he undertook detailed surveys of the areas under the control of East India Company. He had become an employee of the East India Company.

Buchanan was a keen observer of things. Wherever he went, he saw the stones and rocks. He also observed the different strata and layers of soil. He searched for minerals and invaluable stones. He also recorded the sites where iron-ore, mica, granite and saltpetre were available. He carefully noted the local practices of salt making and non-ore mining.

LONG ANSWER QUESTION

1. Give information about Francois Bernier and other writers who visited India after 1500 C.E.

Answer: The Portuguese came to India after 1500 C.E. They wrote a lot about the social customs and religious practices of India. Roberto Nobili even translated many Indian books into European languages.

- ❖ **Duarte Barftosa.** He was a famous Portuguese writer. He gave a detailed account of pf trade and society in south Indian. But after 1600 C.E., a lot of Dutch, English and French travelers came to India.
- ❖ **Jean-Baptiste Tavernier.** He was a French jeweler. He had visited India at least six times. He was fascinated with the trading conditions in India. He compared India to Iran and the Ottoman Empire.
- ❖ **Manucci.** He was an Italian doctor. He felt so impressed with India that he settled here and never went back to Europe.
- ❖ **Francois Bernier.** He was a Frenchman. He was a doctor as well as a historian and a political philosopher. He had come to the Mughal Empire in search of opportunities. He remained in India for twelve years, i.e., from 1656 to 1668. He was a physician to Prince Dara Shukoh, the eldest son of Emperor Shah Jahan. So he was closely associated with the Mughal court. As he was an intellectual and scientist, he also remained associated with Danishmand Khan, an Armenian noble at the Mughal court.

Conclusion: Comparing East and West. Bernier had visited many parts of India. He wrote accounts of what he saw in these parts of India. He compared his knowledge about India with the situation in Europe. He dedicated all his important writings to Louis XIV, the King of France. Most of his writings are in the form of letters written to ministers and influential officials.

He painted the situation in India as bleak in comparison to the development in Europe. However his assessment was not very accurate but his works became very popular. They were translated into English, Dutch, German and Italian. Between 1670 and 1725 C.E., his work was reprinted eight times in French and three times in English.

2. Explain giving examples of how the accounts of foreign travelers help in reconstructing the history of India from the 10th to 17th century.

Answer:

1. Most of the foreign travelers came from a diverse social environment.
2. The local writers remained indifferent towards them.
3. They compared the Indian environment and social scenario with the outside world.

4. They laid more stress on those things or statements in their descriptions which looked queer and strange to them. This fact made their description interesting and lively.
5. Their descriptions threw light on the contemporary proceedings of the royal court, religious beliefs and the features of architecture and sculpture. It helps in the writing of history.

Important Foreign Travellers

The three most important foreign travelers who visited India during the Middle Ages were Al-Biruni, Ibn-Battuta and Bernier.

(a) Al-Biruni.

1. The detailed description by Al-Biruni is found in his 'Kitab-ul-Hind' which provides information about the contemporary religion, philosophy and science. His description is very simple and straightforward.

2. Al-Biruni explained that the caste system was not only the characteristic of the Indian society but also of many other societies of the world. In other words, the caste system was prevalent in many countries of the world.

(b) Ibn-Battuta.

1. Ibn-Battuta wrote a book entitled 'Rihla'. In this book, he declined a beautiful picture of his experiences that he had gathered during his various visits and travels. From his book, we come to know a lot about various aspects of social values and new culture.

2. Ibn-Battuta found paan and coconut very strange. So he made a special mention of them.

3. He also wrote about the cities of India and an efficient postal system.

(c) Francois Bernier.

1. Bernier wrote a book entitled, 'Travels in Mughal Empire'.

2. Like the books of Al-Biruni and Ibn-Battuta, the book of Bernier is a gist of his experiences.

3. He especially compared the condition of India with that of Europe. He found the life of the people of India is worst in comparison to the life found in Europe.

4. In all his descriptions, he criticizes the control of the state over all the land. He considers it responsible for the miserable condition of Indian agriculture and the farmers.

3. "Bernier's accounts influenced western theorists from the 18th century. Give arguments to support the statement.

Or

"Bernier's description of imperial land ownership influenced western theorists like French philosopher Montesquieu and German Karl Marx." Justify it with suitable arguments.

Answer: (1) The descriptions of Bernier had a deep impact on many western thinkers. For example, Montesquieu, the French philosopher, used the descriptions of Bernier to develop his idea of oriental despotism. In other words, Montesquieu stated that the rulers in Asia enjoyed absolute authority over their subjects. All the people lived in subjugation and poverty. All the land belonged to the king and there was no private property.

(2) Karl Marx further developed this idea as the Asiatic mode of production. He stated that the surplus was taken by the state in India. This led to the emergence of society having a large number of autonomous and egalitarian village communities. The imperial court also respected their autonomy. It was considered as a stagnant system.

4. Why did travelers, who came to India, sometimes took social inequalities for granted as a natural state of affairs? Explain. (C.B.S.E. 2009 (D))

Answer: Travelers', who came to India, sometimes took social inequalities like a caste system for granted because they did not consider it unique. For example, Al-Biruni had explained the caste system in India. He did not consider it unique as such social divisions were prevalent in ancient Persia. He even accepted the Brahmanical description of the caste system. But he did not accept the notion of pollution as social pollution was contrary to the laws of nature. Actually, he tried to explain the caste system in comparison with its parallels in other societies. But he also expressed that all humans are treated equally in Islam and they differ only in their observance piety.