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XII Themes in Indian History-II

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Develop Trees

1. Through the Eyes of Travellers

Perceptions of Society

(C.tenth to seventeenth century)

2 Mark Questions:

1. Write a note on the Kitab-ul-Hind.

Ans: Kitab-ul-Hind was written by Al-Biruni in 1031. It was considered with India and also known by the name of Tarikh-ul-Hind and Tahqiq-ma-ul-Hind. It was written in Arabic. It is divided into 80 Chapters. They have thrown a detailed light on Hindu religions and philosophy, festivals, customs and tradition, the social and economic as well as political life of the people. In each chapter he adopted a distinctive style and had a question in the beginning. It was followed by a description based on Sanskrit tradition, At last he compare the India culture with other culture. This geometric structure he followed is known for its precision and predictability. The main reason for this structure was Al-Biruni's mathematical orientation.

2. What were the elements of the practice of sati that drew the attention of Bernier?

Ans: The practice of sati according to Bernier showed the difference in the treatment of women in western and eastern society. He noticed how a child widow were forcefully burnt screaming on the funeral pyre while many of the older women were resigned their fate.

The following elements drew his attention.

- (i) Under this cruel practices an alive widow was forcibly made to sit on the pyre of her husband.
- (ii) People had no sympathy for her.
- (iii) The widow was an unwilling victim of the sati-practice. She was forced to be a Sati.

4 Mark Questions:

3. Analyse the evidence for slavery provided by Ibn Battuta.

Ans: Battuta has given a detailed description on the practice of slavery prevalent in India. Delhi Sultan-Muhammad bin Tughlaq had a large number of slaves. Most of these slaves were forcibly captured during the aggressions. Many people sold their children as a slave, because of acute poverty. Slaves were also offered as a gift during this time. Battuta when visited him, also brought many horses, camels and slaves for the Sultan to present him. Sultan Muhammad bin Tuglaq, himself had presented two hundred slaves to Nasiruddin a religious preacher. Nobels are used to keep slave those days. Through these slaves, the Sultan used to get information about the activities of the noble and all other important events of the empire.

The woman slaves served as servants in the house of the rich (nobles). These women informed the Sultan about the activities of their masters (i.e., nobles). Most of the slaves used to do domestic works and there was a lot of difference between the status of these slaves and the court slaves.

4. Discuss the extent to which Bernier's accounts enables historians to reconstruct contemporary rural society.

Ans: Bernier's assessment about Indian rural society was not correct. It was far away from the truth, but it is not acceptable. There is some truth in his description which is evident from the following facts.

- (i) According to his account, Mughal Empire was the owner of the land and distributed among its nobles. It had a disastrous impact on the society.
- (ii) According to him the system of crown of ownership of land was good. It was because; the land holders could not pass on their land to their children. They did not make any long term investment on the land.
- (iii) As there was no private property in land, there was not any improvement in the landlord class. This system ruins agriculture and led to opinion of peasants. Bernier's view regarding Indian society had the following features:
 - (i) The rich people Were in minority.
 - (ii) It had the poorest of the poor and the richest of the rich, no middle class existed there.
 - (iii) All the cities and towns were reined and had contaminated air.

5. Read this excerpt from Bernier:

Numerous are the instances of handsome pieces of workmanship made by persons destitute of tools, and who can scarcely be said to have received instruction from a master. Sometimes they imitate so perfectly articles of European manufacture that the difference between the original and copy can hardly be discerned. Among other things, the Indians make excellent muskets, and fowling-pieces, and such beautiful gold ornaments that it may be doubted if the exquisite workmanship of those articles can be exceeded by any European goldsmith. I have often admired the beauty, softness and delicacy of their paintings.

List the crafts mentioned in the passage. Compare these with the descriptions of artisanal activity in the chapter.

Ans: I. Names of the crafts mentioned in this passage.

In this passage the crafts such as making of muskets and following pieces and making beautiful gold ornaments are mentioned. These products were beautifully made. Bernier was amazed to see these products.

II. Comparison of crafts referred in the passage with the description of artisanal activity in the chapter.

- (i) In the chapter boat manufacturing and terracotta sculpture and temple architecture has been mentioned.
- (ii) Art of painting has been referred.
- (iii) Art of carpet manufacturing has been referred.
- (iv) Art of dance, music and calligraphy have been referred in the chapter.
- (v) Description about Rajal Khamos have also been mentioned.

6. On an outline map of the world, mark the countries visited by Ibn Battuta. What are the seas that he might have crossed?

Ans: Countries visited by Ibn Battuta:

- (i) Morocco
- (ii) Mecca
- (iii) Syria
- (iv) Iraq
- (v) Persia
- (vi) Yamen
- (vii) Oman
- (viii) China
- (ix) India

- (x) Maldives
- (xi) Sri Lanka
- (xii) Sumatra (Indonesia)

Name of Seas:

- (i) North Atlantic Ocean
- (ii) South Atlantic Ocean
- (iii) Indian Ocean
- (iv) Red Sea
- (v) Arabian Sea
- (vi) Bay of Bengal
- (vii) South China Sea
- (viii) East China Sea

7 Mark Questions:

7. Do you think Ibn Battuta's account is useful in arriving at an understanding of life in contemporary urban centres ? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans: Ibn Battuta found cities full of opportunities for those who had the necessary drive, resources and skills. They were densely populated and prosperous, except for the occasional disruptions caused by wars and invasions. According to Ibn Battuta, it appears that most cities had crowded streets and bright and colourful markets. He described Delhi as a vast city, with a great population, the largest in India. In his description of Delhi, he stated, "The rampart around the city is without parallel. ... It has many towers There are twenty eight gates of this city which are called darwaza." The bazaars were centres of economic, social and cultural activities.

1. The Ibn Battuta's account is useful in arriving at an understanding of life in contemporary urban centres because the description seems to be correct. For example, the older cities in India have crowded streets and bazaars full of variety of goods. Delhi was and still is a vast city. The older portion of Delhi has crowded streets and its bazaars are full of all types of goods.
2. In addition to above it may be stated that when Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi in the fourteenth century, the subcontinent was part of a global network of communication that stretched from China in the east to north-west Africa and Europe in the west.

3. The Indian agriculture was also productive due to fertility of the soil. This led to prosperity of towns because the towns derived a significant portion of their wealth through the appropriation of surplus from villages.
4. The Indian goods were in great demand in both West Asia and Southeast Asia which fetched huge profits for artisans, merchants and Indian textiles.

8. Discuss Al-Biruni's understanding of the caste system.

Ans: Al-Biruni's description about caste system as he understood. Al-Biruni tried to explain the caste system by looking for parallels in other societies. He described that in ancient Persia, four social categories were recognised.

(i) knight and princes.

(ii) Monks

(iii) fire-priests and lawyers; physicians, astronomers, other scientists;

(iv) Finally, peasants and artisans. He attempted to suggest that social divisions were not unique to India.

(v) His description of the caste system in India was deeply influenced by his study of Sanskrit texts. According to these texts, the highest castes were the Brahmins as they were created from the head of the Brahmins.

The Kshatriyas were the next caste created from the shoulders and hands of the Brahmin. The Vaishyas and Shudras were created from the thighs and feet of the Brahmin respectively.

Thus, he sought to understand the Indian caste system by looking for parallels in other societies. Nothing that ancient Persian society was divided into four categories he realized that social division was not unique to India.

But despite accepting the caste system he was against the notion of pollution. He believed that according to the laws of nature anything which becomes impure ultimately becomes pure again, e.g. the sun clears the air. The concept of social pollution is the bedrock of the caste system. Thus, the caste system was according to him contrary to the laws of nature.

He failed to realize that the caste system was not as rigid as portrayed in the Sanskrit texts.

9. Discuss the picture of urban centres that emerges from Bernier's account.

Ans: During the 17th century nearly 15% of population was living in town. This was average proportion of urban population of western Europe. Bernier described Mughal towns as court towns. By it he meant those towns which depended upon the imperial court for their existence and survival. These towns came into existence with the imperial court and declined with the imperial court when they moved to other places. In his travel accounts, Bernier described many big towns and cities such as Delhi, Mathura, Kashmir, Surat, Masulipatnam and Golconda. These gained importance as manufacturing centres, trading towns, and sacred towns. The merchant communities had deep influence in these cities. They remained organized due to their own caste and occupational bodies. These trading groups were known as Mahajans in western India. Their head was called Sheth. In Ahmedabad, the chief of Merchant community was known as nagarsheth. Besides the trading groups, musicians, architects, painters, lawyers, calligraphies, etc. lived in towns.

10. Compare and contrast the perspectives from which Ibn Battuta and Bernier wrote their accounts of their travels in India.

Ans: Ibn Battuta was an early globe-trotter. He considered experience gained through travels to be a more important source of knowledge than books. He meticulously recorded his observations about new cultures, peoples, beliefs and values. He enjoyed the cosmopolitan culture of urban centres where people who spoke Arabic, Persian, Turkish and other languages, shared ideas, information and anecdotes. He highlighted unfamiliar things in order to ensure that the listener or the reader was suitably impressed by accounts of distant yet accessible worlds. For example, he described the coconut and the paan which was completely unfamiliar to his readers. Thus, Ibn Battuta described everything that impressed and excited him because of its novelty.

Francois Bernier, on the other hand, belonged to a different intellectual tradition. He tried to compare and contrast what he saw in India with the situation in Europe in general and France in particular, focusing on situations which he considered depressing. His idea was to influence the policy makers and intelligentsia to ensure that they made what he considered to be the "right" decisions. He compared Mughal India with contemporary Europe. He emphasised the superiority of Europe. His representation of India works on the model of binary opposition, where India is presented as the inverse of Europe. He also ordered the perceived differences hierarchically, so that India appeared to be inferior to the Western world.

10 MCQs on Ch 1 - Through the Eyes of Travellers: Perceptions of Society (c. tenth to seventeenth century):

1. What is the time frame covered in Chapter 1 of "Themes in World History Part 2"?

1. c. tenth to seventeenth century
2. eighteenth to twentieth century
3. fourth to seventh century
4. twelfth to nineteenth century

2. In Chapter 1, the perceptions of society are explored through the eyes of:

1. Merchants
2. Travellers
3. Warriors
4. Farmers

3. The accounts of travellers in this chapter provide insights into:

1. Political history only
2. Economic history only
3. Social and cultural history
4. Religious history only

4. Which region is NOT discussed in the chapter as a destination explored by travellers?

1. China
2. West Asia
3. Europe
4. Sub-Saharan Africa

5. What motivated many travellers during this period to undertake long journeys?

1. Religious pilgrimage
2. Political conquest
3. Scientific exploration
4. Cultural isolation

6. The chapter explores the cultural encounters and exchanges between:

1. Only Europe and Asia
2. Only Africa and Asia
3. Multiple regions
4. Only the Americas and Europe

7. Travellers often wrote about the customs and rituals of the societies they visited, providing valuable insights into:

1. Economic systems
2. Social structures
3. Political ideologies
4. Military strategies

8. Which famous traveller's journey is discussed in the chapter, providing a vivid account of his travels in the thirteenth century?

1. Ibn Battuta
2. Marco Polo
3. Zheng He
4. Columbus

9. What is the name of Ibn Battuta's book of travels?

1. Rihla
2. Santhla
3. Qazi
4. None of the above

10. The travellers' accounts often reflected the biases and perspectives of their:

1. Political leaders
2. Religious beliefs
3. Economic interests
4. Cultural backgrounds

ANSWER KEY

1. a. c. tenth to seventeenth century

2. b. Travellers
3. c. Social and cultural history
4. d. Sub-Saharan Africa
5. a. Religious pilgrimage
6. c. Multiple regions
7. b. Social structures
8. b. Marco Polo
9. a. Rihla
- 10.d. Cultural backgrounds

THE END