

# 5. Through the eyes of Travellers

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

**Ans.** Kitab-ul-Hind was the work of Al-Biruni which he wrote in 1031. The book was divided into 80 chapters. Some of the important things covered in the book are religious philosophy of the Hindus, their festivals and customs, social and economic life of the people. There is also an elaborative comparison of the Indian culture with the other cultures of the world.

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

**Ans.** Ibn Battuta was an extensive Moroccan traveler. His ideology was that a person can gain much Through the Eyes of Travellers | 149 wider experience during travelling rather than reading books. He used to record observations made by him during his travel to different parts of India. He wrote about the culture, beliefs, customs, of the people inhabiting the land. One of the features of his writing was that he highlighted several unfamiliar things to gain the attention of the people.

Francois Bernier had made a comparison of the social and political life of the people in India with the people living in France. His focus was on the conditions which was considered depressing. His idea was to influence the policies of the intelligentsia. He compared the situation of the Mughal Empire with the Europe

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

**Ans.** Bernier gave several important information about the urban centres in India:

1. According to an estimate 15% of the population was living in the towns and cities.
2. Bernier addressed Mughal towns as court towns which was dependent on the Mughal court for their economic and political decisions.
3. Some of the big towns described by him was Delhi, Mathura, Kashmir, Musalipattanam and Golconda.
4. These towns emerged as manufacturing centres, trading towns and sacred towns.

## 4. Analyse the evidence for slavery provided by Ibn Battuta.

**Ans.** Ibn Battuta has provided wide description about the state of slavery in India:

1. He wrote that Delhi Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughlaq maintained large number of slaves most of them are forcibly captured during the wars.
2. There were people who used to sell their children as slaves due to the acute poverty. There was also a tradition of gifting the slaves.
3. Slaves was also kept by the nobles who used to serve their needs and look after the manual affairs of the house.

**5. What were the elements of the practice of Sati that drew the attention of Bernier?**

**Ans.** Bernier used the example of practice of Sati to shows the difference in the in the way women is treated in the Eastern and Western society:

1. In this practice a women whose husband has died was made to sit on the holy pyre of her husband.
2. The people who witnessed all these events showed no mercy for the women.
3. All these events took place without the concern of the women.

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

**Ans.** Al-Biruni tried to understand the caste system in India by comparing it with the other places. He compared the caste system of India with that of Persia. There was four categories of people who existed in Persia. They are: Knights and Princes, Monks, fire-priests and lawyers, peasants and artisans.

His study of the caste system of India was influenced by the Sanskrit texts.

The highest caste was that of the Brahmins who were created from the head of the Brahmins. The next caste the Kshatriyas who came from the hands of the Brahmins. The next in the line is the Vaishyas who came from the feet of the Brahmins. The Shudras was on the last level and is believed to be appeared from the feet of the Brahmins.

**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 Batutta has given a detailed description of the lives of the people in the urban centres:

1. He has said that the cities offered diverse range of opportunities to the people who had the courage and skills to pursue their dream.
2. The cities were densely populated and there was prosperity in the cities. Only on some occasions like wars the cities suffered badly.

3. The cities had bright streets and colourful markets. There were also several monuments and architectural marvel in some of the prominent cities.

**8. Discuss the extent to which Bernier's account enables historians to reconstruct contemporary rural society.**

**Ans.** The assessment given by the Bernier about the rural society is not correct. He has presented the rural society is a negative picture. However, there were some truths in his accounts that helped the historians to reconstruct the history:

1. His accounts suggested that the Mughals held the ownership of the land and it was distributed among the nobles. This had a disastrous impact on the society.
2. Bernier supported the crown ownership of land due to the fact that it cannot be passed to the later generations.
3. He also said that the society generally had two classes of people: rich and poor. There was absence of middle classes.

**9. 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.** The crafts mentioned in the passage are making of muskets and beautiful gold ornaments and fowling pieces.

In the chapter the art of painting has been referred. The art of carpet manufacturing has also been discussed. The arts of dance, calligraphy and music have also found traces in the chapter.