



CHAPTER:5

THROUGH THE EYES OF TRAVELLERS (PERCEPTION OF SOCIETY) 10TH TO 17TH CENTURIES

Our Knowledge of the past can be enriched through the descriptions of social life provided by travellers who visited the sub-continent. Generally, they recorded everyone activities and practices of common men along with the descriptions of the kings. Al-Biruni, Ibn Battuta and Francois Bernier were three famous travellers who visited the sub-continent from 11th century to 17th century.

Unfortunately, we have not found any account of travel left by women travellers, though we know that they visited India.

Topic-I

Al-Biruni and his accounts

Al-Biruni was born in Khwarezm (in present day Uzbekistan) in 973 CE.

Al-Biruni (Abu Rehang) was the most prominent mathematics philosopher, Astrologer and historian at the court of Mahmud Ghaznavi.

Mahmud Ghaznavi attacked Khwarizm in 1017 CE and took many poets and scholars back to his capital Ghazni. Al-Biruni was one of them.

Al-Biruni came to India with Mahmud Ghazni and stayed in different parts of India.

Being well versed in many languages, Al-Biruni could translate texts successfully, he translated several Sanskrit works in Arabic, including Patanjali's grammar.

Al-Biruni wrote a book in Arabic called Kitab Ul-hind. It was divided into 80 chapters covering many subjects like Astronomy, Philosophy, religion, Festivals, Alchemy, Weight and Measures, Social life, Iconography, Laws and Metrology. Kitab-Ul-hind was also known as Tahrik-E-Hind.

Topic-2

Ibn Battuta and his accounts

Ibn Battuta's travelling account "Rihla" gives very interesting information about Social and Cultural life of India and written in Arabic.

Ibn Battuta was a globe trotter around 1332-33, he went to Mecca, travelled to Syria, Yemen, Oman, Persia, Iraq, India and China. He stayed in India and his visit to China was extensive, but didn't stay over there for long. He decided to go back to his house in 1347 CE.

He came to India to get patronage of Muhammad bin Tughluq and became Qazi or judge in emperor's court over a period of time. Due to a misunderstanding, he was sent behind the bars. Later, he was released and sent to China as the envoy of the emperor.

Topic-3



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Francois Bernier and his accounts

He was a Doctor, Historian, Political Philosopher and Frenchman, he came to the Mughal court in search of opportunities and stayed in India from 1656 to 1668 (for 12 years).

He was closely associated with the Mughal court as a physician to prince dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan.

He was constantly comparing 'East' and 'West'. He travelled to several parts of the country and wrote accounts of what he saw and comparing India with the situation in Europe.

He dedicated his Major writing to the king of France, Louis XIV.

According to Bernier, one of the Fundamental differences between Mughal India and Europe was the lack of Private Property in Land.

According to him, king distributed it among his nobles that resulted in disastrous consequences for the economy and society.

Bernier felt that artisans had no incentive to improve the quality of their manufactures and the profit was taken by the state.

Bernier wrote in detail about the inhuman practice of Sati.

His works were published in France in 1670-71 and translated into English, Dutch, German and Italian his writings became extremely popular.

Topic-4

Various Travellers' and their accounts

Some foreign travelers also visited South India during the Medieval period. Travellers like Noccolo, Paes and Abdul Razak give us information about Vijayanagara kingdom.

William Hawkins who lived at Mughal court from 1608 to 1611, left records of his experiences in India. This account is mainly confined to the description of the personal character of Jahangir and his daily routine.

But the most famous of the English representative who visited Jahangir's court was Sir Thomas Roe. Roe's journal gives a vivid picture of Jahangir's court.