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Q2

Assess the importance of the accounts of the Chinese and Arab travellers in the reconstruction of the history of India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · GS I · 10 marks · World's Physical Geography

Salient features of world's physical geography.

Core demand of the question

- Assess the importance of the accounts of the Chinese and Arab travellers in the reconstruction of the history of India
- Cover what they saw, what they missed, and how historians use them with other sources
- Keep the explanation within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Faxian and **Xuanzang** supply dated pictures of Gupta and Harsha India and of Buddhist monasteries.

Al-Biruni studies Indian science and society; **Ibn Battuta** describes Tughlaq Delhi and travel.

Arab geographers map monsoon ports on the west coast.

All travellers carry religious and court bias and miss much of rural life.

They matter most when read with inscriptions and excavation.

Flow diagram

Faxian Xuanzang Yijing -> Buddhism Harsha Nalanda

Al-Biruni Ibn Battuta -> Learning ports Sultanate

Buddhism Harsha Nalanda -> History of India

Learning ports Sultanate -> History of India

Inscriptions archaeology -> History of India

Conclusion

- Read Chinese and Arab texts as one layer with epigraphy, archaeology, and Indian literature, not as a substitute for them.
- Use them especially for chronology, foreign trade, and the outsider's view of caste, law, and faith.

Chinese pilgrims reconstruct Buddhist India and Harsha's world; Arab scholars and envoys reconstruct learning, ports, and the Sultanate. Reconstruction is sound only when these voices are weighed against Indian records and the ground.

Facts & figures

Faxian

Chinese monk who travelled in India in the early fifth century and wrote on Magadha and Buddhist sites.

Xuanzang

Seventh-century pilgrim at Nalanda who described Harsha's kingdom and many Indian regions.

Al-Biruni, Kitab al-Hind

Eleventh-century Arabic study of Indian religion, sciences, and social order.

Ibn Battuta

Fourteenth-century traveller who served Muhammad bin Tughlaq and wrote the Rihla.

Nalanda

Mahavihara in Bihar that Chinese monks treated as a centre of Buddhist learning.

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