

Lesson-5

Through the Eyes of Travellers

High order Thinking Skill Question and Answers :

Q.1 What are the comparisons that Ibn Battula makes to give his readers an idea about what coconuts looked like?

Ans The following is how Ibn Battuta described the coconut :

- (i) These trees are among the most peculiar trees in kind and most astonishing in habit. They look exactly like date palms, without any difference between them except that the one produces nuts as its fruits and the other produces dates.
- (ii) The nut of a coconut tree resembles a man's head, for in it are what look like two eyes and a mouth, and the inside of it when it is green looks like the brain and attached to it is a fibre which looks like hair. They make from this cards with which they sew up ships instead of (using) iron nails, and they (also) make from it cables for vessels.

Q.2 What, according to Bernier, were the problems faced by peasants in the subcontinent ? Do you think his description would have served to strengthen his case ?

Ans Yes, I think his description would have served to strengthen his case. Following problems were faced by peasants in the subcontinent :

- (i) Owing to crown ownership of land, landholders could not pass on their land to their children. So they were averse to any long, term investment in the sustenance and expansion of production.
- (ii) It had led to the uniform ruination of agriculture excessive appression of the peasantry and a continuous decline in the living standards of all sections of society.
- (iii) Of the vast tracts of country constituting the empire of Hindustan, many are little more than sand, or barren mountains.
- (iv) Even a considerable portion of the good land remains untilled for want of labourers.
- (v) Many of whom perish in consequence of the bad treatment they experience from Governors.
- (vi) The poor people, when they become incapable of discharging the demands of their rapacious lords, are not only often deprived of the means of subsistence, but are also made to lose their children, who are carried away as slaves. Thus, it happens that the peasantry, driven to despair by excessive a tyranny, abandon the country.

Q.3 Do you think Al-Biruni depended only on Sanskrit texts for his information and understanding of Indian Society ?

Ans. No, Al-Biruni did not depend only on Sanskrit texts for his information and understanding of Indian history for it be mention following facts.

- (i) Travellers often compared what they saw in the subcontinent with practices with which they were familiar.
- (ii) Each traveller adopted distinct strategies to understand what they observed. Al-Biruni for instance, was aware of the problems inherent in the task he had set himself.
- (iii) According to him, Sanskrit was so different from Arabic and persian that ideas and concepts could not be easily translated from one language into another.
- (iv) In spite of his acceptance of the Brahmanical description of the caste system. Al-Biruni disapproved of the notion of pollution.
- (v) Al-Biruni's description of the caste system was deeply influenced by his study of normative Sanskrit texts which laid down the rules governing the system from the point of view of the Brahmanas.

q 4- 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. Yes, it explain in following points :-

I. Description - Ibn-Battuta's description about Indian cities is more useful to know about their population, roads, markets and other properious facilities.

II. Delhi - When Ibn-Battuta reached in Delhi in 14th Century. He found such type of Delhi.

(i) The city of Delhi covers a wide area and has a large population. The rampart round the city is without pallel.

(ii) Inside the ramparts, there are store-houses for storing edibles, magazines, ammunition, ballistas and siege machines.

(iii) There are twenty eight gates of this city which are called darwaza, and of these, the Budaun darwaza is the greatest.

III. Ibn Battuta and Indian Cities - Ibn-Bututa found cities in the subcontinent full of exciting opportunities for those who had the necessary drive, resources and skills. They were densely populated and prosperous. It appears from Ibn-Battuta's account that most cities had crowded streets and bright and colourful markets that were stacked with a wide variety of goods. Ibn Battuta described Delhi as a vast city with a great population, the largest in India.

IV. Markets - The bazaars were not only places of economic transactions but also the hub of social and cultural activities. Most bazaars had a mosque and a temple and in some of them at least spaces were marked for public performances by dancers, musicians and singers.