Ancient History · GS - I

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

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2018	GS - I	Ancient History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Foreign travel accounts; contemporary observations; political history; religious institutions; trade networks; social customs; cultural exchanges; source criticism

Model Answer

Introduction

Accounts of Chinese and Arab travellers are valuable historical sources because they offer external observations of Indian society, politics, religion and economy across different periods.

Importance of Chinese Travellers' Accounts

1. **Religious history:** Faxian and Xuanzang documented Buddhist monasteries, pilgrimage centres and the condition of Buddhism.
2. **Political history:** Xuanzang's account provides information about Harshavardhana's reign and contemporary political conditions.
3. **Education:** Descriptions of Nalanda illuminate India's ancient educational institutions and intellectual traditions.
4. **Social conditions:** Their observations help reconstruct customs, charitable practices and everyday life.

Importance of Arab Travellers' Accounts

1. **Economic history:** Sulaiman and other Arab writers described maritime commerce, ports and India’s trading connections.
2. **Cultural understanding:** Al-Biruni examined Indian philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and religious traditions.
3. **Political developments:** Their writings provide information about regional kingdoms and interactions with the Islamic world.
4. **Geographical knowledge:** Their observations help trace routes, settlements and commercial networks.

Limitations

These accounts reflected individual interests, cultural assumptions and varying levels of access. Therefore, they must be corroborated with inscriptions, archaeological evidence, coins and indigenous literary sources.

Conclusion

Chinese and Arab travel accounts enrich historical reconstruction by providing comparative, external perspectives. Their critical use helps develop a more comprehensive understanding of India’s past.

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