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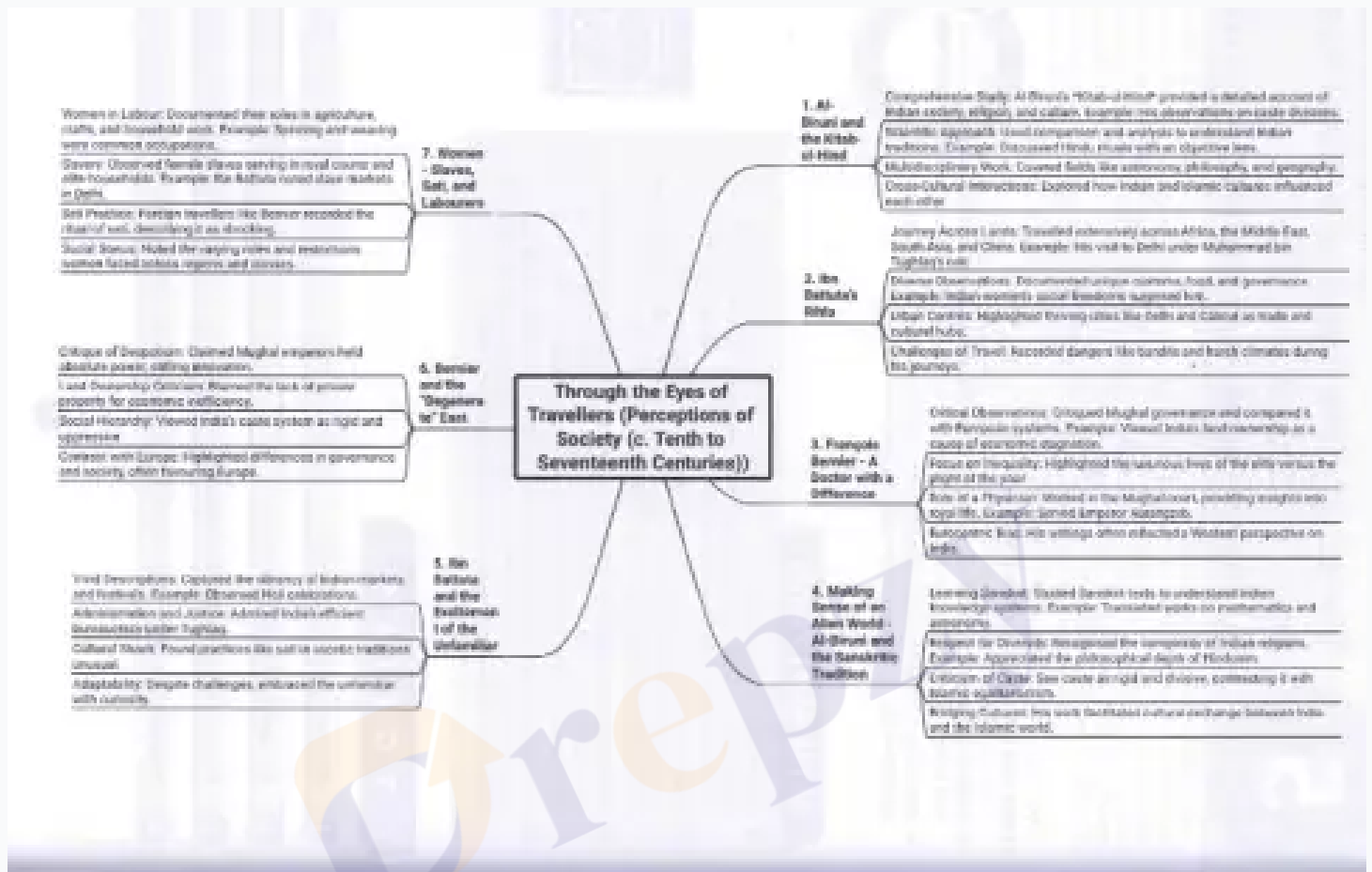
## Through the Eyes of Travellers Perceptions of Society (c. Tenth to Seventeenth Centuries)

Travellers from the tenth to seventeenth centuries provided valuable accounts of the societies they visited, especially in India. Their observations covered various aspects such as cities, governance, religions, social life, and economic activities. These accounts help us understand how different cultures were perceived during this period, though they reflect the travellers' own cultural backgrounds and biases.

### Study Alert Points

- Each traveller had unique objectives: Al-Biruni focused on scholarly study, Ibn Battuta was fascinated by novelty, and Bernier critiqued India by comparing it with Europe.
- Travellers described cultural practices with their own perspectives, such as Al-Biruni's reliance on Brahmanical texts and Bernier's critique of land ownership.
- Language and translation played a key role, especially in Al-Biruni's work, where his multilingual skills helped but also posed challenges in conveying Sanskrit concepts.

- Travelogues influenced historical understanding, for example, Bernier's writings impacted European ideas like oriental despotism and interest in Indian crafts and trade.



The image is a mind map illustrating travellers' views from the 10th to 17th centuries about different societies. It categorizes observations into themes such as Asia, British Isles, Islamic tradition, Rim Barter relations, and social groups like women and slaves. This helps us understand the focus areas of travellers and their cultural perceptions.

## Al-Biruni and His Accounts

Al-Biruni was born in Khwarizm (present-day Uzbekistan) in 973 CE, a major centre of learning. He was proficient in many languages including Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Syrian, and Sanskrit, and studied Greek philosophy through Arabic translations.

After Sultan Mahmud Ghazni invaded Khwarizm in 1017 CE, Al-Biruni was taken to Ghazni, where he spent the rest of his life. He was a mathematician, philosopher, astrologer, and Sanskrit scholar. Mahmud valued his knowledge and included him in his court. Al-Biruni

accompanied Mahmud on invasions into India and stayed in various parts of the subcontinent.

He translated Sanskrit works into Arabic, including Patanjali's grammar. His major work, "Kitab-ul-Hind" (also known as "Tarikh-ul-Hind"), written in Arabic, covered astronomy, philosophy, religion, festivals, alchemy, weights and measures, social life, iconography, laws, and metrology.

Al-Biruni's approach was precise and systematic, reflecting his mathematical orientation. He wrote for people on the frontiers of the subcontinent and was critical of the ways Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit texts were translated and adapted into Arabic.

He discussed social divisions like the caste system, noting that social pollution was against natural laws and that groups like Antyaja, born outside the caste system, were economically integrated despite social marginalization.

#### Drawbacks of Al-Biruni's accounts:

1. He did not provide detailed political descriptions of India.
2. His accounts were based mainly on Indian texts rather than personal observations.

## Key Terms

- **Iconography:** Collection of illustrations or portraits.
- **Metrology:** Science of measurement.
- **Antyaja:** People born outside the caste system.

## Exam Question

Q: What was the significance of Al-Biruni's "Kitab-ul-Hind" and what were its limitations?

**A:** "Kitab-ul-Hind" was a comprehensive study of Indian culture, religion, science, and social life, written in Arabic for frontier audiences. It was precise and systematic but limited by its reliance on texts rather than personal experience and lacked detailed political analysis.

## Ibn Battuta and His Accounts

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Ibn Battuta was a Moroccan traveller whose travelogue "Rihla" provides rich information about the social and cultural life of India and other regions. He valued experience from travel over book knowledge.

Between 1332 and 1347 CE, he travelled extensively across the Islamic world, India, and China. In India, he served as a Qazi (judge) in the court of Mohammad bin Tughlaq but was imprisoned due to a misunderstanding and later sent as an envoy to China.

His travels were hazardous, involving attacks and long journeys. He described Indian cities as populous and prosperous, with vibrant markets that were centers of economic and cultural activity. He noted the presence of mosques and temples in bazaars and spaces for public performances.

Ibn Battuta admired Indian agriculture and the efficient postal system that facilitated trade and communication.

### Exam Question

**Q:** How did Ibn Battuta describe Indian cities and society during his travels?

**A:** Ibn Battuta described Indian cities as large, densely populated, and prosperous with colorful markets that were hubs of social and cultural life. He praised the productivity of agriculture and the efficiency of the postal system.

# Francois Bernier and His Accounts

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Francois Bernier was a French doctor, historian, and political philosopher who stayed in India from 1656 to 1668. He served as physician to Prince Dara Shukoh and wrote extensively comparing India with Europe.

Bernier criticized the Mughal system of crown land ownership, arguing that lack of private property harmed the economy and society. He believed artisans lacked incentives to improve products because profits were taken by the state.

He noted the flow of precious metals into India due to exports and described the merchant community as organized into caste-based occupational groups with leadership roles such as Mahajans, Sheth, and Nagarsheth, alongside professionals like Pandits, Hakims, and Wakils.

## Key Terms

- **Crown ownership:** Land owned by the king.
- **Mahajans:** Caste-based occupational groups of merchants in western India.
- **Sheth:** Chief of Mahajans.
- **Nagarsheth:** Chief of the merchant community in cities.
- **Pandit/Mulla:** Teacher.
- **Hakim/Vaid:** Physician.
- **Wakil:** Lawyer.

## Exam Question

**Q:** What were Francois Bernier's main criticisms of the Mughal economic system?

**A:** Bernier criticized the lack of private land ownership, which he believed harmed the economy. He argued that artisans had no incentive to improve products because profits were taken by the state, and that crown ownership led to economic and social problems.

# Women, Slavery and Social Realities: Insights from Travellers' Accounts

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Travellers documented social realities such as slavery and the status of women. Slaves were openly sold and gifted, some serving in the Sultan's court as musicians or guards. Female slaves were employed to monitor nobles, and slaves were used for domestic work.

Travellers noted differences in the treatment of women between eastern and western societies. Bernier wrote about the inhuman practice of Sati, where widows were immolated on their husbands' funeral pyres.

These accounts provide glimpses into social life but are influenced by the travellers' cultural backgrounds and limited perspectives.

## Exam Question

**Q:** What do travellers' accounts reveal about the social status of women and slaves in medieval India?

**A:** Travellers reported that slaves were openly traded and used in various roles including court service and domestic work. Women's treatment varied, with practices like Sati noted as inhuman. These accounts highlight social realities but are shaped by travellers' own cultural views.

## Solved Examples

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1. **Example:** Explain the significance of Al-Biruni's multilingual skills in his study of India.

**Answer:** Al-Biruni's knowledge of multiple languages, including Sanskrit, allowed him to access and translate Indian texts accurately. This enabled him to provide detailed and scholarly accounts of Indian culture, religion, and science, making his work a valuable source for understanding medieval India.

2. **Example:** Describe the economic observations made by Francois Bernier about Mughal India.

**Answer:** Bernier observed that the lack of private land ownership under the Mughal crown harmed economic incentives. He noted that artisans had little motivation to improve their products since profits were taken by the state, and that precious metals flowed into India due to exports.

## Practice Set

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### Easy

1. Who was Al-Biruni and what was his major work?
2. What did Ibn Battuta admire about Indian agriculture?

### Moderate

1. Explain the role of language in Al-Biruni's study of India.
2. Describe the organization of the merchant community according to Francois Bernier.

### Challenging

1. Compare and contrast the perspectives of Ibn Battuta and Francois Bernier on Indian society.
2. Discuss the limitations of travellers' accounts as historical sources.

## Answer Key

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### Easy

1. Al-Biruni was a scholar from Khwarizm who wrote "Kitab-ul-Hind", a detailed study of Indian culture and science.
2. Ibn Battuta admired the fertility of Indian soil and the productivity of agriculture.

## Moderate

1. Language was crucial for Al-Biruni as it allowed him to translate Sanskrit texts into Arabic, facilitating his understanding of Indian culture and religion.
2. Bernier described the merchant community as organized into caste-based groups with leaders like Mahajans, Sheth, and Nagarsheth, alongside professionals such as Pandits and Hakims.

## Challenging

1. Ibn Battuta focused on personal experiences and described Indian cities as prosperous and culturally vibrant, while Bernier critically compared Indian economic and social systems with Europe, highlighting issues like crown land ownership.
2. Travellers' accounts are limited by their cultural biases, incomplete observations, and sometimes reliance on second-hand information, which can affect their accuracy and comprehensiveness.

## Quick Reference

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- **Al-Biruni:** Scholar, multilingual, author of "Kitab-ul-Hind".
- **Ibn Battuta:** Traveller, author of "Rihla", observer of social and cultural life.
- **Francois Bernier:** French physician and historian, critic of Mughal economic policies.
- **Key Concepts:** Caste system, crown ownership, merchant communities, slavery, Sati.

## Glossary

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- **Antyajja:** People born outside the caste system.
- **Crown ownership:** Land owned by the king.

- **Iconography:** Collection of illustrations or portraits.
- **Mahajans:** Caste-based occupational groups of merchants in western India.
- **Metrology:** Science of measurement.
- **Nagarsheth:** Chief of the merchant community in cities.
- **Pandit/Mulla:** Teacher.
- **Sati:** The practice of widow immolation.
- **Sheth:** Chief of Mahajans.
- **Wakil:** Lawyer.

## Chronology of Travellers and Their Accounts

Year	Event	Significance
973 CE	Birth of Al-Biruni in Khwarizm	Beginning of a scholar who would write detailed accounts of India
1017 CE	Al-Biruni taken to Ghazni by Sultan Mahmud Ghazni	Start of Al-Biruni's direct engagement with Indian culture
c. 1030 CE	Al-Biruni writes "Kitab-ul-Hind"	Comprehensive study of Indian society and culture
1332-1347 CE	Ibn Battuta's travels including India and China	First-hand observations of social and cultural life in India
1656-1668 CE	Francois Bernier's stay in Mughal India	Critical European perspective on Mughal economic and social systems
1670-1671 CE	Publication of Bernier's works in France	Influence on European understanding of India