

AREA OF META DATA	CONTENT
THEME	Time line of Foreign Travellers who visited India (Ancient and Early Medieval Period)
SUBJECT	History
LINKAGE OF THEME WITH CHAPTERS(NAME)	How, When, Where
CLASS/LEVEL	Class VI Our Past I
Target Audience	Students
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To realise the importance of travellers accounts in understanding the past.</li> <li>• To identify travellers who visited the sub-continent at different points of time.</li> </ul>
DESCRIPTION	<p>The Indian sub-continent has always attracted people from far off regions since early times. Traders, soldiers, envoys, pilgrims, travelers, goods and ideas have passed through the region, crossing frontiers and covering vast distances over land and sea. Some of them recorded their experiences and observations which become valuable sources of information in understanding the past. Their accounts reveal how people who belonged to different cultures viewed Indian society which was otherwise alien to them. In the ancient period Greek, Roman and Chinese visitors came to India either as travelers or pilgrims and left behind accounts of what they saw and worth recording. In the ancient period.</p>
Key Words	Foreign Traveller, Silk Route, Megasthenes, Faxian, Xuanzang, Yijing, Al-Biruni
Content Developer	Mily Roy
Subject Coordinator	Mily Roy

CIET Coordinator	Indu Kumar
------------------	------------

## WHAT ARE TRAVELLERS ACCOUNTS?

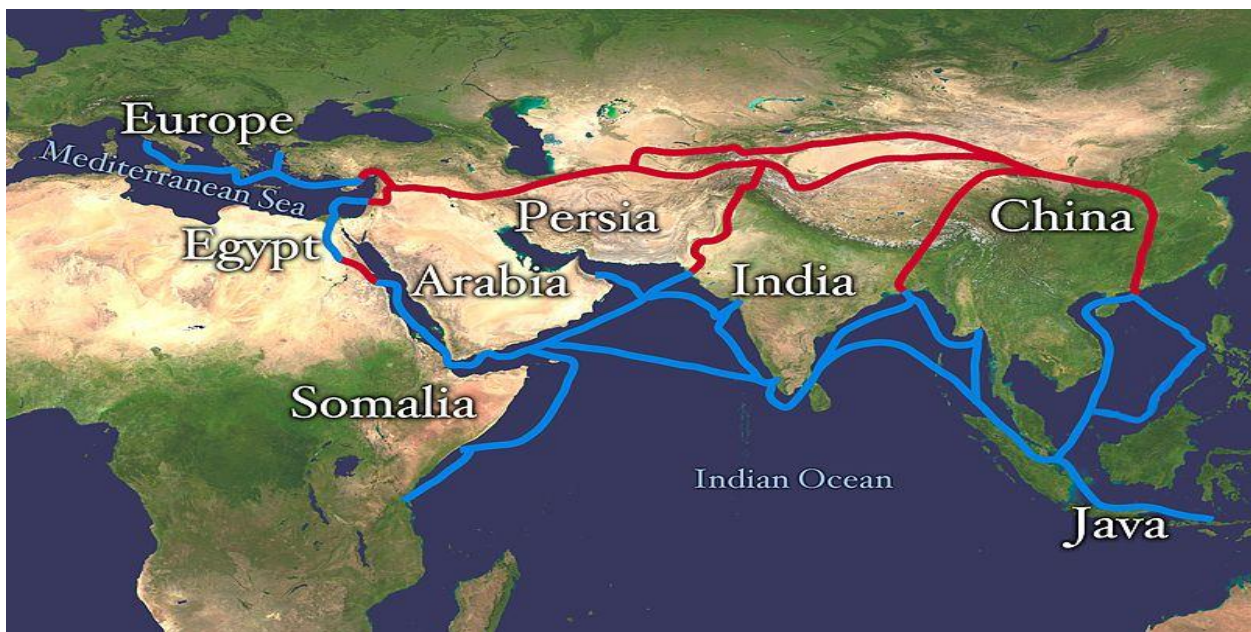
**Travellers Accounts is a first person account of foreigners who travelled across the seas and land as pilgrims, traders and as travellers to reach the sub-continent. They left descriptions and observations of historical events as well as of different aspects of a society which was otherwise alien to them. As outsiders they were fascinated with many facets and facts about people and the places they visited. The records and writings of these travellers open a window into the past, they help us to catch glimpse of a society they were trying to understand.**



## WHY ARE TRAVELLERS ACCOUNTS IMPORTANT FOR STUDYING THE PAST?

Accounts of foreign travelers form an important category of literary evidence. Descriptions of their journeys and the lands they visited are important sources in understanding the past. They documented their experiences and therefore their writings help us to catch glimpses of a society they were trying to understand. But historians do not rely solely on their accounts of the past because these travelers often noticed and recorded what they found worthy of description. They were more attentive to everyday activities and practices which were considered as routine matters by indigenous writers and thus not worthy of being recorded. It is possible that their observations were based on their own perceptions of what they witnessed or experienced.

## THE SILK ROUTE AND THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND GOODS

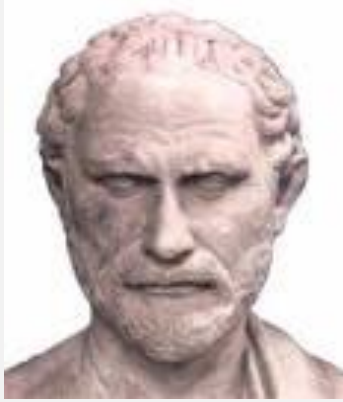


## Main Routes of the Silk Route

The Silk Route or Silk Road played a very important role not only in the exchange of goods but also in exchange of ideas between civilizations. It was a network of trade routes that extended from China through India, Asia Minor, throughout Mesopotamia (present day Iraq), to Egypt, the African continent, Greece and Rome, thus connecting the East with the West. Deriving its name from the lucrative silk trade of China it was firmly established during the rule of the Han dynasty in China (207-220 BCE). Besides commercial goods, this route facilitated the exchange of religious ideas, language, philosophy, science, art and other cultural aspects through merchants, explorers, pilgrims, monks, traders, etc. Religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism spread through the Silk Route, as travelers absorbed the cultures they observed and carried them back to their lands.

## TIME LINE OF SOME FOREIGN TRAVELLERS WHO VISITED INDIA IN THE ANCIENT PERIOD

NAME	COUNTRY	PERIOD OF VISIT	INFORMATION
<b>MEGASTHENES</b>	<b>GREECE</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> c.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A Greek chronicler and diplomat who</li></ul>

		<p><b>B.C.E</b></p>	<p>visited India during the period of the Mauryas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was sent by the Greek king Seleucus Nikator to the court of Chandragupta Maurya.</li> <li>• He lived in Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital for nearly five years.</li> <li>• His book <i>Indika</i> provides valuable information on administration under Mauryas, about different social classes and economic activities in the Maurya period.</li> <li>• But his book is not free from exaggerations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>FAXIAN</b></p>	<p><b>CHINA</b></p>	<p><b>399-414 C.E.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Buddhist monk who is believed to have travelled by foot from China to India</li> </ul>



via Central Asia and visited many Buddhist sites on the way.

- Visited India during the reign of the Gupta king Chandragupta II.
- Main objective of his visit was to procure copies of Buddhist manuscripts.
- Visited a number of places such as Kasi, Kanauj, Sravasti, Kapilavastu, Lumbini Kushinagara, Vaishali, Pataliputra, Gaya, and Bodhgaya.
- His journey is described in the book *A Record of Buddhistic*



Faxian at the ruins of [Ashoka's](#) palace

***Kingdoms  
Being an  
Account by the  
Chinese Monk  
Fa-Hien of His  
Travels in India  
and Ceylon  
(A.D. 399-414)  
in Search of  
the Buddhist  
Books of  
Discipline .***

- His works provide interesting information on social customs, land revenue, internal and external trade, popularity of Buddhism, taxation system, and administrative system.

## Xuanzang



Dunhuang cave, 9th century



Xuanzang's former residence in Chenhe Village near **Luoyang, Henan**

**CHINA**

**629-645  
CE**

- A Buddhist scholar and traveler who came from China during the rule of the Tang dynasty.
- He was an ardent student of Buddhist scriptures and became a monk at a very early age.
- He journeyed for about 10,000 miles through the Silk Road, travelling through regions that are now Krygizstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and back to China.
- His main aim was to search for Buddhist texts and to study in the Buddhist





An illustration of Xuanzang from *Journey to the West*, a fictional account of travels.

monastery in Nalanda now in Bihar.

- He came to India during the rule of king Harshavardhan and spent many years in his court. He travelled the length and breadth of the country visiting many places such as Lumbini, Sarnath, Pataliputra, Vaishali, Bodhgaya, Amaravati, Kanchi, Kamrupa ,etc.
- Harsha became a great supporter of Buddhism owing to Xuanzang's influence and made generous endowments.
- Xuanzang 's vivid description of



**Statue of Xuanzang near Wild Goose Pagoda in X'ian, China.**

life during the rule of Harsha sheds light on economic and social life as well as r various religious sects of the period. Some interesting observations of Xuanzang:

- Pataliputra and Vaishali were in a state of decline; Priests and nobles led luxurious lives while brahmanas and kshatriyas led simple lives; People who were considered as untouchables lived outside the village; Nalanda monastery was supported from the revenues of 100 villages.
- During his stay in Nalanda, he



**Xuanzang Memorial Hall, Nava  
Nalanda Mahavira, Nalanda, Bihar**

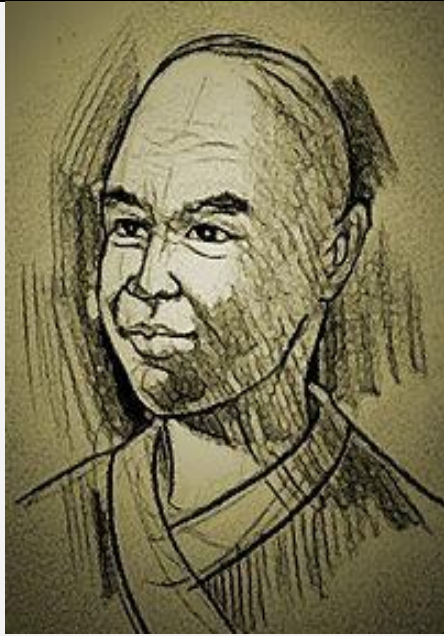


**8<sup>th</sup> century Dunhuang cave mural  
depicting Xuanzang's return from  
India**

interacted with many Buddhist scholars and studied Grammar, Logic, Sanskrit and *Yogacara* school of Buddhism.

- He returned to China in 645 CE with about 650 Sanskrit texts and several statues of the Buddha.
- After his return he extensively translated a number of Indian Buddhist texts into Chinese.
- He completed his book *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* which is an important historical source for the study of Central Asia and India.

<b>YIJING</b>	<b>CHINA</b>	<b>671-695 BCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A Buddhist monk who travelled from China during the rule of the Tang dynasty.</li><li>• He was very much inspired by the travels of Faxian and Xuanzang.</li></ul>



Artist's impression of Yijing



Excerpt of a scroll from Yijing's *Buddhist Monastic Traditions of Southern Asia*. Tenri, Nara, Japan

- The main purpose of his travel to India was to study Buddhism in Nalanda and to collect Buddhist texts.
- Before his arrival in India, Yijing spent some time in Srivajaya where he learned Sanskrit and Malay language.
- He then arrived in India in 673 and stayed for 14 years out of which 11 years were spent in Nalanda.
- He has given vivid descriptions about the practice of Buddhism in India, of customs and rules and regulations meant to be followed by monks in the



**Ruins of Nalanda Mahavira**

monastery.

- He also observed that the revenue from 200 villages was assigned for the maintenance of Nalanda.
- He returned to China in 695 carrying with him about 400 Sanskrit texts which were subsequently translated.
- Two of his travel diaries *Account of Buddhism Sent from the South Seas* and *Buddhist Monk's Pilgrimage of the Tang Dynasty* throw light on his journey to *Srivajaya and India*.

•

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Al-Biruni</b></p>   <p>An illustration from al-Biruni's astronomical works, explains the different phases of the moon.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Khwarizm</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>(Present Day Uzbekistan)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1017 CE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Khwarizm was an important centre of learning where Al-Biruni received the best education.</li> <li>• He was proficient in many languages- Arabic, Persian, Hebrew and Sanskrit.</li> <li>• After the conquest of Khwarizm by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1017, Al-Biruni along with other scholars was taken by Mahmud to Khwarizm.</li> <li>• It was in Ghazni that Al-Biruni developed an interest in India. Sanskrit works on astronomy, mathematics and medicine had already been translated</li> </ul>

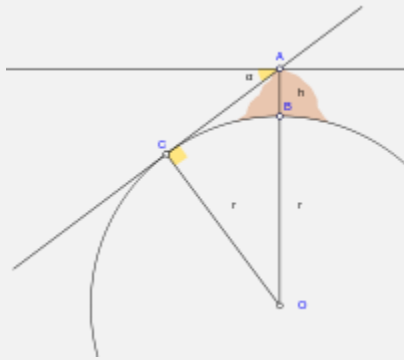


Diagram illustrating a method proposed and used by Al-Biruni to estimate the radius and circumference of the Earth




The statue of Al-Biruni in Persian Scholars Pavilion, United Nations Office in Vienna, Austria

into Arabic.

- He was familiar with translations and adaptations of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit texts into Arabic.
- When Punjab became a part of the Ghaznavid empire, it is likely that Al-Biruni travelled in Punjab and other parts of northern India.
- In the ten years he spent in India, he observed various aspects of Indian society, systems of knowledge, religion and social norms.
- He wrote a number of books such as *Al Kanun Al Masudi*, *Athar Al Baqiyah*, *Kitab as Saydalah*, etc.
- The book *Kitab-ul-Hind in Arabic*, is a



 <p>An imaginary rendition of Al Biruni on a 1973 Soviet post stamp</p>			<p>voluminous text divided into 80 chapters. The book discusses a wide range of subjects such as religion, philosophy, festivals, astronomy, customs, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In many respects <i>Kitab-ul-Hind</i> is an important source to study Indian history and culture.</li> </ul>

## ACTIVITY: QUIZ TIME

**CIET : Correct answer is highlighted in green.**

**1. Accounts of foreign travelers form an important category of which of the following:**

**(a) Literary evidence**

- (b) Monumental evidence
- (c) Epigraphical evidence
- (d) Numismatics

**2. Which one of the following was not a part of the Silk Route?**

- (a) China
- (b) Egypt
- (c) India
- (d) Australia

**3. The book *Indika* provides valuable information on administration of which of the following?**

- (a) Rajputs
- (b) Mauryas
- (c) Guptas
- (d) Palas

**4. Which ruler became a great supporter of Buddhism under the influence of Xuanzang?**

- (a) Harsha
- (b) Chandragupta II
- (c) Ashoka
- (d) Samudragupta

**5. Nalanda Mahavira was a :**

- (a) Rock shelter
- (b) Temple
- (c) Monastery
- (d) Capital of Bihar

**6. Which of the following travelers was taken to Ghazni by Mahmud ?**

- (a) Al Biruni
- (b) Al Masudi
- (c) Ibn Batuta
- (d) Bernier

**7. Who amongst the following wrote books on astronomy?**

- (a) Xuanzang
- (b) Megasthenes
- (c) Yijing
- (d) Al Biruni

**8. Beside the exchange of commodities the Silk Route also facilitated exchange of:**

- (a) Ideas
- (b) Animals
- (c) People
- (d) Inscriptions

**9. Which amongst the following travelers stayed in Nalanda Mahavira?**

- (a) Xuanzang and Faxian
- (b) Yijing and Xuanzang
- (c) Faxian and Yijing
- (d) Al-Biruni and Faxian

**10. Which traveler stayed in Srivijaya before his arrival in India?**

- (a) Al-Biruni
- (b) Faxian
- (c) Megasthenes
- (d) Yijing

**11. What was the main objective of foreign travelers from China to visit India?**

- (a) To collect Buddhist texts
- (b) To procure spices

- (c) To exchange goods
- (d) To advise Indian rulers

**12. Who provided important information on the social and economic conditions under the Mauryas?**

- (a) Al-Biruni
- (b) Megasthenes**
- (c) Yijing
- (d) Xuanzang.

.

Url

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/74/Silk\\_route.jpg/290px-Silk\\_route.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/74/Silk_route.jpg/290px-Silk_route.jpg)

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/ff/Biruni-russian.jpg/220px-Biruni-russian.jpg>

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0b/Abu\\_Reyhan\\_Biruni-Earth\\_Circumference.svg/200px-Abu\\_Reyhan\\_Biruni-Earth\\_Circumference.svg.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0b/Abu_Reyhan_Biruni-Earth_Circumference.svg/200px-Abu_Reyhan_Biruni-Earth_Circumference.svg.png)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4c/Nalanda\\_University\\_India\\_ruins.jpg/290px-Nalanda\\_University\\_India\\_ruins.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4c/Nalanda_University_India_ruins.jpg/290px-Nalanda_University_India_ruins.jpg)

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/42/Al\\_biruni\\_28-02-2010.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/42/Al_biruni_28-02-2010.jpg)

[http://t3.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQtFsPbbFzs0hOthk1nNtVUUFp\\_NL6-ksOvEMltjj40mA1eSN7kRi8Dj6M](http://t3.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQtFsPbbFzs0hOthk1nNtVUUFp_NL6-ksOvEMltjj40mA1eSN7kRi8Dj6M)

<https://tse1.mm.bing.net/th?id=OIP.6dedtSUpDM0kflna1D3YPACwEs&pid=15.1&P=0&w=300&h=300>

[http://junglekey.in/images/zs/17\\_faxian-0n8pel.jpg](http://junglekey.in/images/zs/17_faxian-0n8pel.jpg)

Daniel C. Waugh ,The Journey of Faxian to India, 1999,  
<https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/faxian.html>.

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f6/Xuan\\_Zang.jpg/220px-Xuan\\_Zang.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f6/Xuan_Zang.jpg/220px-Xuan_Zang.jpg)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/07/Yi\\_Jing.JPG/200px-Yi\\_Jing.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/07/Yi_Jing.JPG/200px-Yi_Jing.JPG)

Xuanzang Memorial Hall in Nalanda, Bihar, India.

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/e/e5/Xuanzang\\_Memorial\\_Hall\\_Nalanda.jpg/255px-Xuanzang\\_Memorial\\_Hall\\_Nalanda.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/e/e5/Xuanzang_Memorial_Hall_Nalanda.jpg/255px-Xuanzang_Memorial_Hall_Nalanda.jpg)

Statue of Xuanzang. [Great Wild Goose Pagoda](#), Xi'an.

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4c/Statue\\_of\\_Xuanzang\\_Wild\\_Goose\\_Pagoda%2C\\_Xi%27an.jpg/220px-Statue\\_of\\_Xuanzang\\_Wild\\_Goose\\_Pagoda%2C\\_Xi%27an.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4c/Statue_of_Xuanzang_Wild_Goose_Pagoda%2C_Xi%27an.jpg/220px-Statue_of_Xuanzang_Wild_Goose_Pagoda%2C_Xi%27an.jpg)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/60/Xuanzang\\_statue.jpg/371px-Xuanzang\\_statue.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/60/Xuanzang_statue.jpg/371px-Xuanzang_statue.jpg)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/74/Silk\\_route.jpg/800px-Silk\\_route.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/74/Silk_route.jpg/800px-Silk_route.jpg)