



Mains Practice Question

Q. Chinese pilgrims played a key role in the exchanges between ancient India and ancient China. Comment. (250 words)

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Approach

- Mention some of the key Chinese pilgrims who visited India in the introduction.
- Explain the kind of exchanges that took place and how these pilgrims played a key role.
- Give a suitable conclusion.

Introduction

- The exchanges between India and China have deep roots in the past with economic and cultural dimensions. While Indian cities constituted nodal points in the ancient silk route, China was our major partner in South East Asian Trade.
- The cultural exchanges between the two nations were inspired by the need to bolster trade between the two nations and also to spread Buddhism in China.
- Various Chinese scholars have visited India to either collect Buddhist canonical texts (Fa-Hein) or to study in prestigious Indian educational institutions (Nalanda, Taxila and Vikramshila.)

Body

The exchange of scholars between India and China had long term consequences for both the countries:

- The travelogues of Itsing who studied at Nalanda University and also of Huen Tsang (regarding the patronage to Buddhism by Harsha) attracted other students from outside India.
- The Indian scholars who visited China translated Sanskrit documents into Chinese (Buddhist texts mainly) and also actively contributed to the development of mathematics and science there. Distinguished Indian scientists like Gautama Siddhartha held important positions in Chinese scientific establishments.
- The intellectual interactions between the two nations facilitated by Chinese and Indian travelers had spread beyond religion to science, mathematics, literature, linguistics, architecture, medicine and music.
- The exchange (Chinese imports) also influenced the consumption habit, particularly of rich Indians. Indian important literary works 'Shakuntala' by Kalidasa mention the nature of Chinese products used in India.

Conclusion

The relation between India and China was a healthy relation which begun due to trade interactions and was later fostered through political exchanges and also the memoirs of pilgrims. While China was benefitting India in terms of trade and items of daily use, Indians exported their know-how in science, literature and religion. Chinese pilgrims played a significant role in these exchanges.

