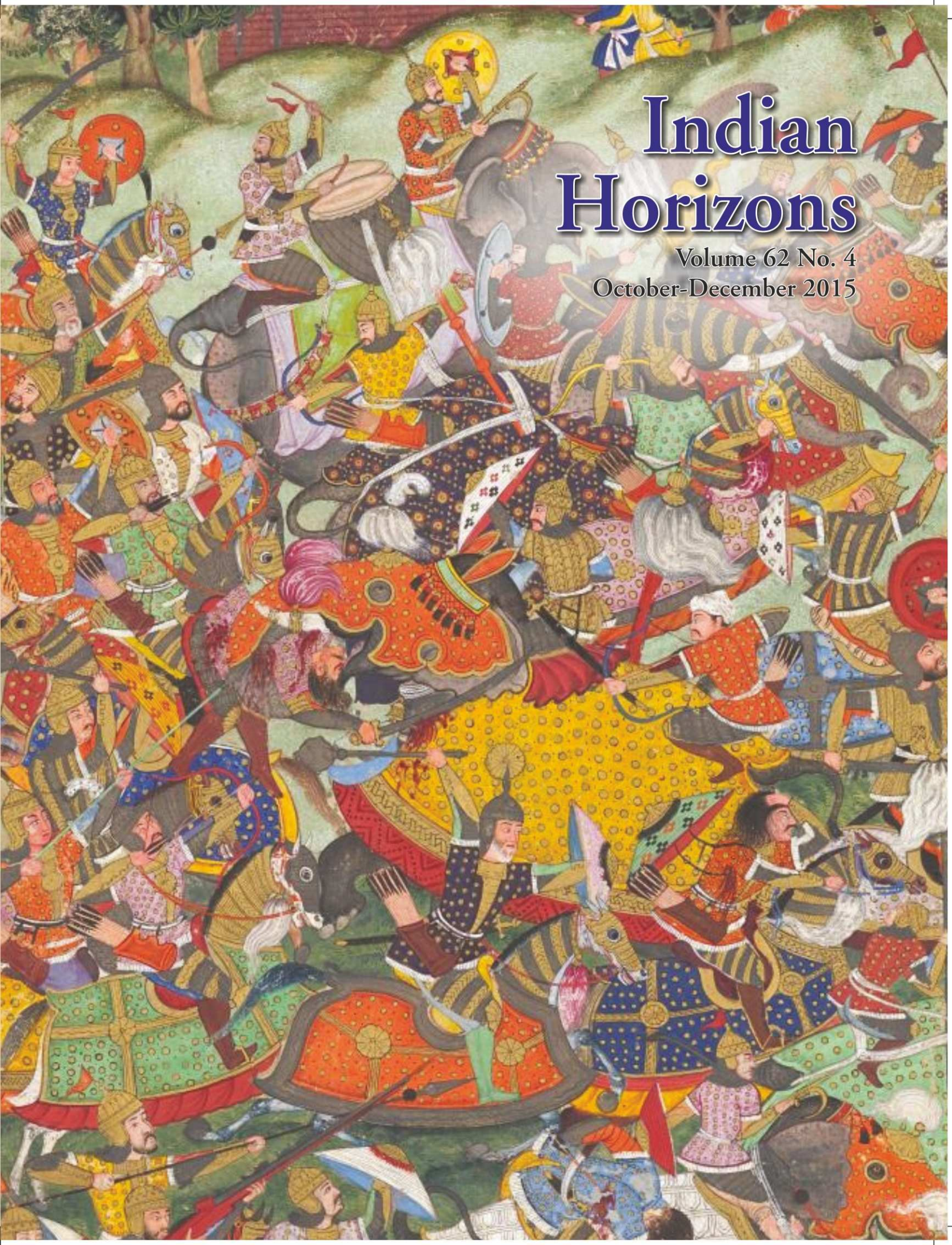




Indian Horizons

Volume 62 No. 4
October-December 2015

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Editor
Subhra Mazumdar

Published by the Director General,
Indian Council for Cultural Relations,
Azad Bhavan, Indraprastha Estate,
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Relations, Azad Bhavan, Indraprastha
Estate, New Delhi-110002.

E-mail : icr@vsnl.com
Website: www.iccr.gov.in

Indian Horizons is also available
on website

Designed and printed by M/s Sita Fine Arts
Pvt. Ltd., A-16, Naraina Industrial Area-II,
New Delhi-110028. www.sitafinearts.com

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A chance conversation with archaeologist Dr B R Mani of the Archaeological Society of India had set the ball rolling. Dr Mani had narrated the eventful discovery of Chinese pottery belonging to the royal kitchens of Emperor Firoz Shah Tuglagh that had been unearthed. One also learnt that reference to this exotic kitchenware had found a mention in the writings of the ancient traveler Ibn Batuta. Thereafter, I learnt from other scholars how chronicle and travel writing had been associated with almost every era of Indian history and thus an issue dedicated to such classics from the pens of famed travelers, merited attention in the form of an exclusive issue.

Beginning our saga of travelogues is Dr Shonalika Kaul's account of the *Rajatarangini* by the ancient Kashmiri poet and Sanskrit scholar Kalhan. More than straightforward accounts, Dr Kaul points out the volume 'adapted local motifs, locales and content to a trans-local poetics and stood in as the pre-eminent register of Kashmiri regional self-expression'. Reading further into her account, we realize that the *Rajatarangini* is also regarded as the first formal account of history on the subcontinent. Going beyond statehood, historicity and accounts of royal diktat, the work also contains vivid descriptions of the scenic land, making it a lyrical, historical and political treasure par excellence

The name of Abul Fazl and his chronology of the days of Emperor Akbar is as familiar to us as

cricket. But reading Dr Meena Bhargava's essay on it, gave me insights not just into the regal reign but also into the man behind the account. Abul Fazl one learns, went through a spate of inner conflict before accepting the responsibility, as he came from ascetic stock and a courtier's life was at cross purposes with his scholarly pursuits. Also, the fact that there were innumerable drafts of the chronology before it took final shape was news to my ears. That the effort was well worth it becomes clear when through the course of this article one learns the many facets of the volume, its sub divisions and its stylized arrangements of facts and circumstance.

Another chronicle of a royal persona that has gripped popular imagination is the *Harshacharita* by Banabhatta. Dr Kanika Kishore has made a detailed and exacting examination of the highlights of this treatise and the interesting manner in which the details give an insight into the realm. What this article further emphasizes is the relationship that the chronicler enjoys with his ruler-patron, gauged at best as a massive ego clash between the twain. The immediacy of the contents is not far to seek as the volume talks about the entire clan as though they were still around.

Since chronicle writing saw continuity during the medieval period of Mughal rule, Dr Najaf Haider has offered to us a comprehensive assessment of the chronicles from the time of Babur and its unbroken continuity by successive rulers.

This comparative study gave me the pleasure of examining the personalities of the royals who had commissioned these writings, and how each of them merited attention not only for the contents but also for ancillary information, such as the first chronicle written by a Mughal princess Gulbadan, the economic advantages of upholding manuscript writing and illustration, to mention a few.

Our regular Photo Essay is dedicated to specimens of the fine porcelain excavated in Delhi. Their freshness and delicacy of artistry, almost belies their antiquity and the fact that it is the largest collection excavated from a single site, worldwide, makes it even more significant. The signature behind the plate, detailing its documentation as it being part of the royal kitchen 'anoints' facts with the romance of fiction.

The essay on Sunderland's chronicle from the British era, made me sit up and take stock literally. That there were dissident voices from non-Indian groups advocating India's demand, becomes clear through this chronology, penned by the American Unitarian minister, a veteran of

the American Civil War. His sympathy for India's just cause gives the account forthrightness.

Concluding our pick of chronicles, is an account written by the famed scholar and traveler from Uzbekistan, popularly known as Al-Baruni. Dr Vinay Kumar has painstakingly pieced together the many references made in it. The observation made of the people and the countryside alongside philosophical comments, gives the volume a plebian familiarity and endears itself to us readers through its plainspeak.

In a slight departure we have chosen to present the international symposium on the Ruhi-Sufi traditions of Kashmir and its relevant context. Other conferences of cultural interest in this coverage include the conference on Indology held at Moscow, the conference on the Bhagvad Gita held at Nehru Centre, London, and the International Conference of Indologists held at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. The archival snapshots from the eighties and earlier decades as our opening pages is thus well balanced against the recent spate of conferences held globally.

Editor



Subhra Mazumdar

India as Described by Al-Biruni

Dr Vinay Kumar Gupta

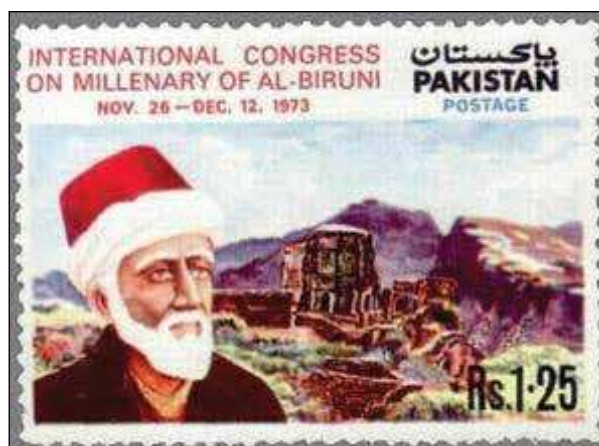
Ancient Indian literary sources mostly are religious or literary in nature and there is a general lack of written works for the acquaintance of Indian history in a proper chronological framework. There are only a few works available which can be considered to be of historical importance and leaving aside Kautilya's *Arthashastra* for its subject matter and Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, these chronological works generally are the contributions of non-Indians who either visited India or got information from some sources after coming in contact with people. Such records start with Megasthenes in Mauryan times (late 4th century BCE) followed by other Greek authors in subsequent centuries, Chinese pilgrims Faxian (4th century ACE) and Xuanzang (7th century ACE) followed by medieval Islamic

writers. The accounts of Chinese pilgrims were written more from a religious point of view, so, sometimes do not offer proper historical perspective but with the work of Al-Biruni, a radical change is observed in Indological studies.

Abu Raihan Muhammad ibn Ahmad, popularly known as Al-Biruni (or Al-Beruni) was one of the greatest scholars of the medieval Islamic world. He was born at Kath (in modern day Uzbekistan), then part of Khwarizmian Persia under the Samanid Empire in 973 ACE and died in 1048 ACE at Ghazni (in modern Afghanistan) under the Ghaznavid Empire. It is believed that he was born outside the town (Persian *Birun*) or else his family was considered an outsider in the town. That's why he is known as Al-Biruni. Now, a town in Uzbekistan is named after him as Biruni. He had a great knowledge of mathematics, physics,



Al-Biruni



Al-Biruni on a Pakistan Stamp

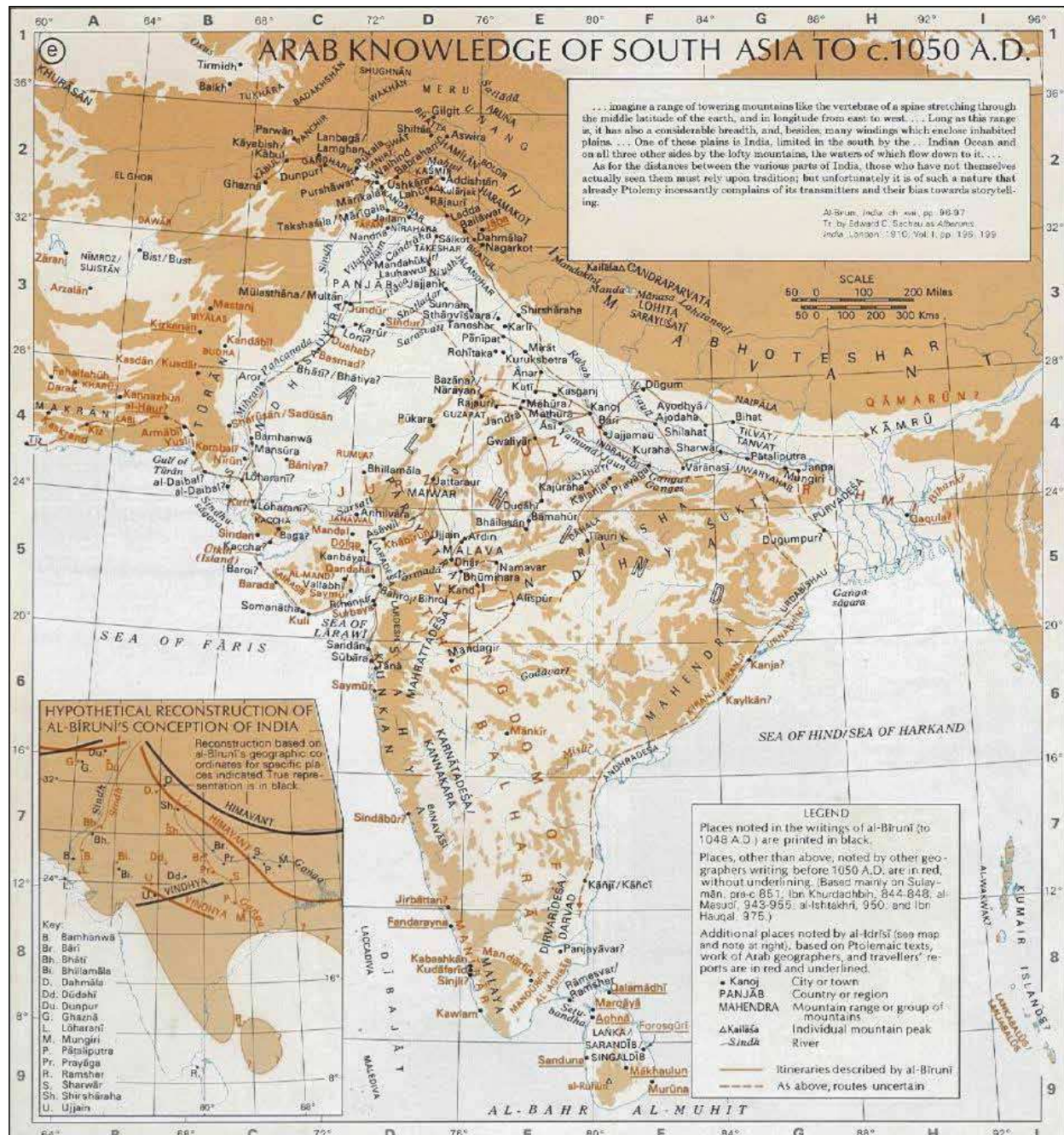
astronomy, medicine, natural science, astrology, earth science, history and philosophy. He was conversant in many languages; that include Arabic, Persian, Khwarezmian, Sanskrit and he also knew Hebrew, Syriac and probably Greek, to name a few. He is credited with *hairaq* written over a hundred books (according to Kennedy the number stands at 146) of which most of the works are unavailable. His book entitled *Kitab fi Tahqiq mali'l Hind min Maqala Maqbola fil' Aql ao Mardhula*, popularly known as *Kitabu'l Hind* or *Tarikh Al-Hind* is one of the most illustrious accounts of India by a non-Indian. This book was made available to the readers worldwide by Edward C. Sachau who first translated it into German and then to English, in the last quarter of nineteenth century.

Al-Biruni considers himself free of prejudices while giving the account of India but at times it is observed that he was too proud of his Khwarezmian Islamic origin and viewed Indian practices with disgrace as is clear from his usage of words haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited and stolid for the Hindus in general terms. These were not exclusive to Indians but were used for Greek practices of which he thought as lowly. Also, various Arab practices prior to the rise of Islam in Arabia have been so desired. He blasts the Arabs by telling that they cohabited with menstruating and pregnant women; several men agreed to cohabit with the same woman in the same period of menstruation etc.. He also refrained himself from going into details of Mahmud's exploits in India and the great devastation he caused on Indian territory. It is only from his compatriot Al-Utbi's accounts that the details of havoc caused by Mahmud's army at Somanath, Mathura, Kannauj and Nagarkot are known. In spite of these shortcomings, Al-Biruni's account is an invaluable source of information of India, particularly of the medieval period. Al-Biruni got the opportunity to read various Sanskrit texts and discuss various issues with learned Indians, through which he could develop his knowledge of India. It seems that he

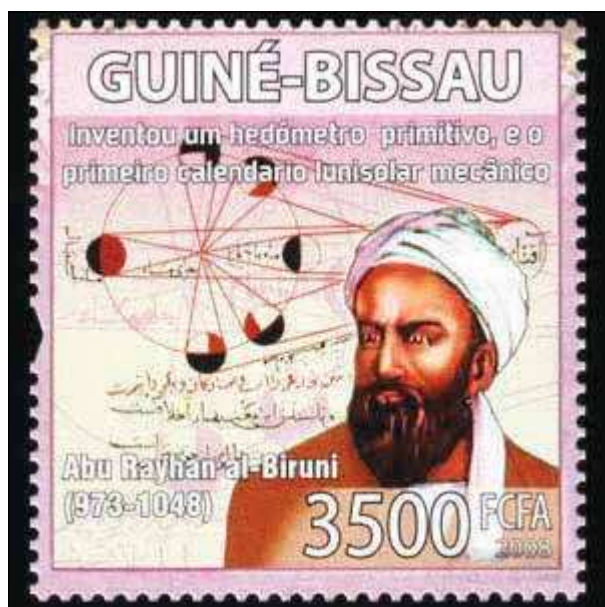
did not visit India proper except for those parts which were annexed into the Ghaznavid empire (territory of modern Pakistan). This is clear from his account of various festivities of India which appear somewhat different from those which are practised in northern India. This becomes further clear when he talks of special days of veneration and mentions *bihku* or *shibu* for *samkranti*. In fact, he would have heard of it from someone from Assam as Bihu is the most popular festival there. Otherwise he would have mentioned Makara samkranti, an important festival of northern India.

Doubts are sometimes raised about the concept of India as a nation prior to the British occupation and Al-Biruni provides a definite information on this issue. He mentions various parts of India as different states and regions but is categorical about the boundaries of the country of India. He informs that the mountain Kularjak near Kashmir and mountains Unang from where the river Sindh originates (at that time the region was under the Turks), form the northern frontier of India. This may refer to the Karakoram range in the Himalayas and area to its east. In the western frontier mountains of India there lived various tribes of Afghans and extended up to the neighbourhood of the Sindh valley. This would mean the area on the Af-Pak border on the upper side and the area up to Seistan on the lower side, as the western frontiers of India. He further informs that the southern border of India is formed by the ocean and the coast of India begins with Tiz, the capital of Makran. He does not specify the eastern frontier of India but elsewhere he mentions Vanga, Pragjyotisha and Lohita (Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, respectively) as part of India. While talking about Sarandib (Ceylon), he also mentions Rameshwaram and Setubandha. For the latter, he mentions that it is the dike of Rama, the son of Dasaratha which he built from the continent to the castle Lanka.

Al-Biruni also informs that in former times, Khurasan, Persis, Iraq, Mosul, the country up to the frontier of Syria was Buddhist, but



Al-Biruni's India



Al-Biruni Astro

then Zarathustra went forth from Adharbaijan and preached Magism in Balkh (Bactria). In consequence, the Buddhists were banished from those countries, and had to emigrate to the countries east of Balkh. About the belief of the Hindus in God, Al-Biruni informs that the belief of educated and uneducated people differs in every nation; for the former strive to conceive abstract ideas and to define general principles, whilst the latter do not pass beyond the apprehension of the senses, and are content with derived rules. The Hindus believe with regard to God that He is one, eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free will, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving; one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness. Some Hindu scholar calls God a *point*, meaning to say thereby that the qualities of bodies do not apply to him. Al-Biruni criticizes the uneducated man who read this and imagines, God is as small as a *point*.

Al-Biruni explains the meaning of the word "Sufi" as being derived from the Greek word '*suf*' meaning wisdom and talks of the ignorance of some people who could not understand its meaning when the word philosopher (i.e. loving

wisdom) was adopted in Islam. These people take the word Sufi to be identical with the so-called '*Ahl-assufa*' among the companions of Muhammad. In later times the word was corrupted by misspelling, so that finally it was taken for a derivation from '*suf*', i.e. the wool of goats. Abu-alfath Albusti made a laudable effort to solve the problem by claiming the derivation of word '*sufi*' from '*safi*' i.e. pure. The doctrine of Patanjali is akin to that of the Sufi regarding being occupied in meditation on the Truth (i.e. God), for they say, "as long as you point to something, you are not a monist; but when the Truth seizes upon the object of your pointing and annihilates it, then there is no longer an indicating person nor an object indicated."

Al-Biruni mentions four *varnas* (castes) among the Hindus which are Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. After the Sudra follow the people called *Antyaja*, who have eight classes of them: fuller, shoemaker, juggler, the basket and shield maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds and the weaver. The four castes do not live together with them in one and the same place. These eight guilds live near the villages and towns of the four castes, but outside them. The people called Hadi, Doma, Candala and Badhatau are not reckoned amongst any caste or guild. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleansing of the villages and other services.



Al-Biruni Timbre



Al-Biruni Russian

Hindus differ among themselves as to which of these castes is capable of attaining to liberation. According to the Hindu philosophers, liberation is common to all castes and to the whole human race, if their intention of obtaining it is perfect. This view is based on the saying of Vyasa: "Learn to know the twenty-five things thoroughly. Then you may follow whatever religion you like; you will no doubt be liberated."

On the issue of the beginning of idol-worship, Al-Biruni opines that the popular mind leans towards the sensible world, and has an aversion to the world of abstract thought which is only understood by highly educated people, of whom in every time and every place there are very few. For those who march on the path to liberation, or those who study philosophy and theology, and who desire abstract truth, are entirely free from worshipping anything but God alone and

would never dream of worshipping an image manufactured to represent him. He talks about the famous wooden idol of the Sun God at Multan and its desecration by Muhammad Ibn Alkasim. The idol was the cause of the prosperity of the town for there came pilgrims from all sides to visit it. A mosque was built on the site of the temple and later on Jalam Ibn Shaiban broke the idol into pieces and killed its priests. He also talks about the famous bronze idol of Lord Cakrasvamin at Kurukshetra (Thanesar), nearly the size of a man. This was desecrated by Mahmud and taken to the hippodrome in Ghazni, together with the idol of Somanath. In inner Kashmir, there is a wooden idol called Sarada, which is much venerated and frequented by pilgrims. Al-Biruni shows his hatred for idol worshippers saying, "When the heathen Arabs had imported into their country idols from Syria, they also worshipped them, hoping that they would intercede for them with God."

Al-Biruni gives a list of eighteen Puranas and twenty Smritis. The interesting fact is that the list of Puranas includes names of *Brahmavaivarta* and *Varaha Purana* which are generally considered later composition. *Brahmavaivarta* in particular is believed to have been written by Rupa Gosvami in the sixteenth century by scholars. Al-Biruni's account makes it difficult to agree with such a postulation. Al-Biruni also gives details of the epic *Mahabharata* which he mentions as *Bharata* having 1,00,000 *slokas* divided in eighteen parts (*parvas*). He elsewhere has elaborated the life of Vasudeva and the war of Bharata. About the handbooks of mathematical astronomy, he mentions five Siddhantas and these are: *Surya-siddhanta*, composed by Lata; *Vasishtha-siddhanta*, composed by Vishnucandra; *Pulisa-siddhanta*, composed by Pulisa (Paulisa, the Greek); *Romaka-siddhanta*, composed by Srishena and *Brahma-siddhanta*, composed by Brahmagupta. He further informs that the authors of these books drew from one and the same source, the book *Paithamaha*. Al-Biruni also talks of *Panca-siddhantika*, composed by Varahamihira, but not in great esteem. He also

mentions two famous *Tantras* by Aryabhatta and Balabhadra, besides the *Rasayana-tantra* by Bhanuyasas. Sugriva, the Buddhist, had composed an astronomical handbook which he called *Dadhi-sagara* and *Lavana-mushti* and a pupil of his composed *Kura-babaya*. Thereafter, Brahmagupta composed *Khanda-khadyaka*. Few of these books are not known from any other source, so the information provided by Al-Biruni is significant. He also informs of Caraka's book on medicine which according to him was already translated into Arabic. The book of *Pancatantra* was known among them as the book of Kalila and Dimna. Al-Biruni also provides an insight into the Hindu metrology, the measures of measurement and weighing. According to him, 1 *mana* is equal to 180 *dirham*.

Al-Biruni is a very important source as far as the ancient Indian writing system is concerned. He informs that the Hindus had lost the knowledge of writing and alphabets but Vyasa, the son of Parasara, rediscover their alphabet of fifty letters by an inspiration from God. He informs that in the past Greeks and Muslims used to write on animal hides but not the Hindus. The *kirtas* made out in Egypt of papyrus stalk was also an important material for writing in the Islamic world before the discovery of paper by the Chinese. The paper reached the Islamic world from China through Chinese prisoners in Samarkand who introduced the fabrication of paper. The writing material for Hindus used to be *tala* (palm) leaves in south India whereas in central and northern India, the bark of the *tuz* tree (*bhurja*) was used for writing. He also details the process of making books from these writing material. For scripts, he informs that *Siddhamatrika* which originated in Kashmir, was popular in Kashmir and also Varanasi, two high schools of Hindu sciences. In the middle country (Aryavarta) around Kanauj, the same writing was used. In Malava, the script used was *Nagara*, *Ardhanagari* in Bhatiya and Sindh, *Malwari* in Malwashau (southern Sindh), *Saindhava* in Bahmanwa or Almansura (near Karachi), *Karnata* in Karnatadesa, *Andhri* in Andhradesa, *Dravidi* in Dravidadesa, *Lari* in Laradesa, *Gaudi*

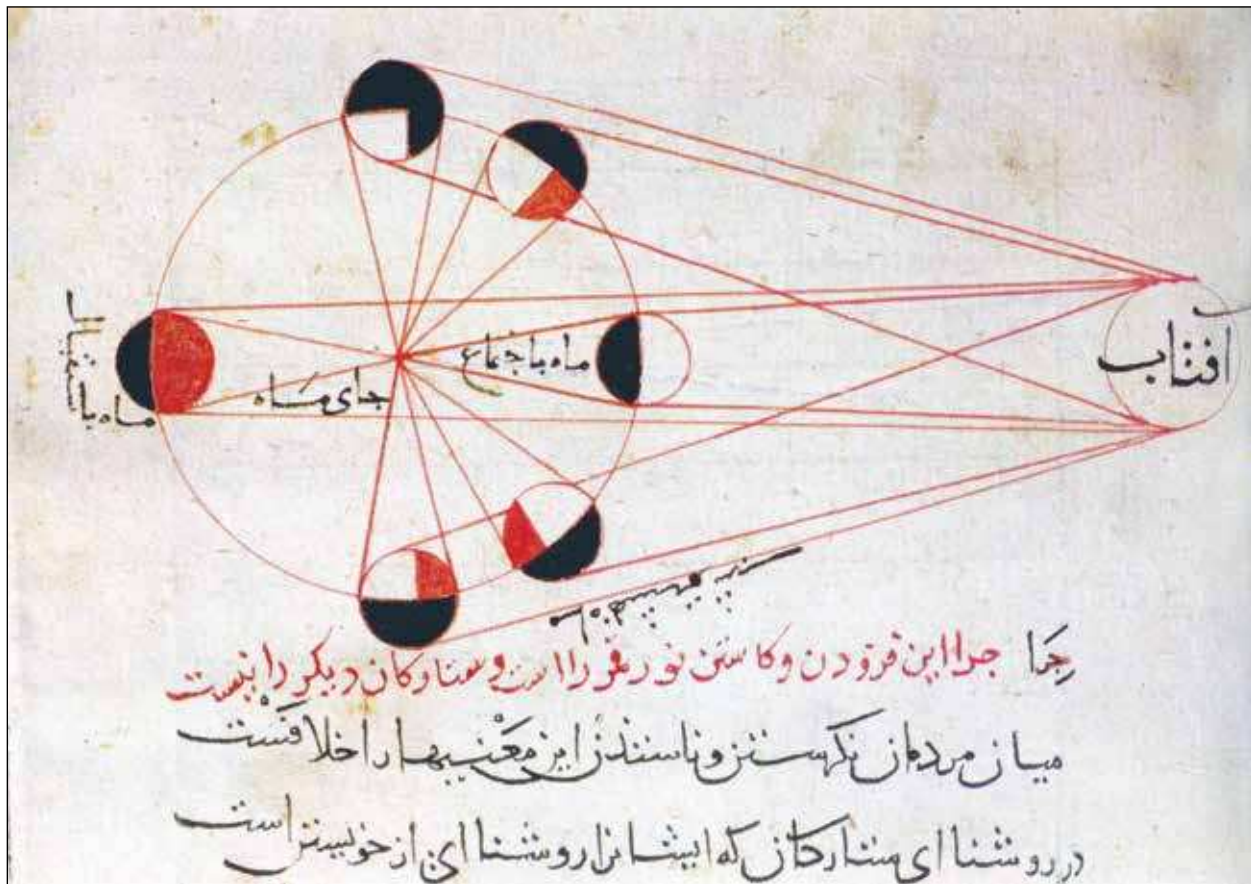
in Purvadesa (Bengal), *Bhaikshuki* in Udunpur in Purvadesa which is the writing of Buddha (i.e. Buddhist monasteries like Oddantapuri and Vikramasila). He also informs about the eighteen orders of numbers starting from *ekam* (1) to *parardha* (1,00,000,000,000,000,000) and that the numeral signs which Muslims use are derived from the finest forms of Hindu signs. As per him, no nation including the Arabs went beyond the thousand heembea except the Hindus. He also calculates the length of nychthemeron of Brahman at 3,110,400,000,000 of our years and nychthemeron of Purusha at 622,080,000,000, 000 of our years. The month of *Kha* has 9,497,498,700,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 civil days. He calculates one day of Siva at 37,264,147,126,589,458,187,550,720,000,000, 000,000,000,000,000,000,000 *kalpas*. Undoubtedly, Hindu arithmetic was at such a high pedestal at that time and Al-Biruni was a master of all these sciences. Similarly he writes about the division of the nychthemeron into minor particles of time. A day is divided into *Ghati*; *Nadi*; *Kshana*; *Cashaka*, *Vinadi*; *Kala*; *Prana*; *Nimesha*; *Lava*; *Truti* and *Anu* in decreasing order. *Anu* is the smallest unit of time and he calculates one day as having 88,473,600 *Anus*. Hindus call the hour *hora*. Quoting Yakub Ibn Tarik, he informs of four kinds of measures (*mana*) which are: *Saura-mana*, *Savana-mana*, *Chandra-mana* and *Nakshatra-mana*.

Al-Biruni gives an interesting account of a Hindu science similar to alchemy which was called *Rasayana*. It means an art which is restricted to certain operations, drugs, and compound medicines, most of which are taken from plants. Its principles restore the health of those who are ill beyond hope, and give back youth to fading old age, so that people become again what they were in the age near puberty; white hair becomes black again, the keenness of the senses is restored as well as the capacity for juvenile agility, and even for cohabitation, and the life of people in this world is even extended to a long period. A famous representative of this art was Nagarjuna, a native

of fort Daihak, near Somanath. He excelled in it and composed a book on the subject.

An important contribution of Al-Biruni is his information on various places and the distances between them. A number of these places still need to be identified. He has given the measurement of distance in *farsakh*, a Persian unit of measurement. He informs that by that time, the capital of Madhyadesa was transferred from Kanauj to Bari in the east. He provides significant information about the locations of Prayaga and Pataliputra which leaves no scope for consideration of Prayag with Pataliputra as argued by some scholars. He informs that the opposite Tilwat to the left is the realm of Naipal (Nepal). From Nepal is reached Bhoteshar which is the first frontier of Tibet. He gives a description

of places as far south as Sri Lanka and provides a list of Indian rivers along with their sources, mountains etc. An important point to be noted here is the one which relates to river Sarsati (Sarasvati) as Al-Biruni tells that this river falls into the sea at the distance of a bowshoot east of Somanath. This statement confirms the view of archaeologists that in the past the river Sarasvati used to flow through Rajasthan somewhat parallel to the Sindhu and fell into the sea near Kachchha. Al-Biruni also talks of an animal called *sharava* in the Konkan region which has four feet, but also on the back it had something like four feet directed upwards. It had a small proboscis, but two big horns with which it attacked the elephant and cleaved it in two. Another unique animal which he mentions is from the rivers of Southern India called by various names as *graha*, *jaltantu* and *tandua*. It is thin, but very long.



An illustration from Al-Biruni's astronomical works explains the different phases of the moon (Source: Wikipedia)

He mentions a number of eras which were used in Hindu writings. Some of these are: the era of the beginning of the existence of Brahman; the beginning of present *kalpa*; the beginning of the seventh *manvantara* in which we are now; the beginning of the twenty-eighth *caturyuga*, in which we are now; the beginning of the fourth *caturyuga*, i.e. the present Kaliyuga; Pandavakala; the era of Kalayavana. He calculates the conjectural date of Rama on the basis of the Vishnudharmottara Purana at 18,148,132 years before the gauge-year (when Al-Biruni composed his work). The eras which he mentions as being in vogue at that time are: Sri Harsha, Vikramaditya, Saka, Valabha and Gupta. His information on Indian eras is quite valuable and sometimes helps in solving various issues of dating. About the Sakakala (Saka samvat) he tells that it falls 135 years later than that of Vikramaditya (Vikram samvat). He further informs that the year of destruction of Somanath by Mahmud is 416 Hijra, or 947 Sakakala. That clearly places the beginning of the Saka samvat in 78/79 ACE. This issue of the beginning of the Saka samvat is one of ongoing debates in the academic world and Al-Biruni's information can put the debate to rest. Al-Biruni also gives the list of Hindushahi rulers and the extinction of this dynasty at the hands of Mahmud.

About the duties of the Brahmanas, Al-Biruni gives an account. Quoting *Vishnu Purana*, he informs that the life of a Brahmana is divided into four periods which are according to the *asrama* system. The fourth period starts from the age of 76 and lasts till the end of life. The universal duties of the Brahmana throughout his whole life are works of piety, giving alms and receiving them. He must continually read, perform the sacrifices, take care of the fire which he lights, offer before it, worship it, and preserve it from being extinguished, that he may be burned by it after his death. It is called *homa*. A Brahmana is obliged to dwell between the river Sindh in the north and river Carmanvati (Chambal) in the

south. He is not allowed to cross either of these frontiers so as to enter the country of the Turks or of the Karnata. About few important places of pilgrimage he informs that Mount Meru is such a place and in its vicinity there are pilgrim sites. From the mountain Nishadha comes the river Sarasvati and Gandharvi. From mountain Kailasa comes the river Mandakini. There are other mountains near the Kailasa which include Candraparvata, Lohita, Sarayusati, Aruna, Gaura from where comes rivers Acud, Lohitanadi, Sarayu and Sailoda. In Multan and Thanesar there are ponds in which Hindus worship by washing themselves. Among the important pilgrimage cities, he makes mention of Varanasi, Kurukshetra (Thanesar), Mathura, Multan and Kashmir.

An idea of the condition of females is also achieved from the accounts of Al-Biruni. At one place he informs that Hindus discuss all matters with the ladies of the house. That would mean the advice of females was respected and they enjoyed certain rights. About the right of inheritance of women, he quotes Manu saying that a daughter inherited a fourth part of the share of a son. In case of a widow who does not commit *sati* (suicide), the heir of her deceased husband has to provide her with nourishment and clothing as long as she lives.

Al-Biruni also informs of some pious duties of the Hindus when he tells that it is obligatory with them every day to give alms as much as possible. They do not let money become a year or even a month old, for this would be a draft on an unknown future, of which a man does not know whether he reaches it or not. One-ninth of the total income after deduction of taxes was destined for alms. About the eating habits of the Hindus, he informs that killing in general was forbidden to them. Killing of certain animals like sheep, goats, gazelles, hares etc. was allowed by means of strangulation only. He also mentions

with the value of the stolen object. About the disposal of dead bodies, he informs that in the most ancient times the bodies of the dead were exposed to the air by being thrown on the fields without any covering. Thereupon there appeared a legislator who ordered people to expose their dead to the wind. In consequence they constructed roofed buildings with walls of rails, through which the wind blew, passing over the dead, as something similar is the case in the grave-towers of the Zoroastrians. Lastly, Narayana prescribed to them to hand the dead over to the fire. He also informs that Slovenians, too, burn their dead, whilst the ancient Greeks seem to have had both customs, that of burning and that of burying. Among the Hindus, burning oneself is forbidden, especially to Brahmanas and Kshatriyas by a special law. Therefore these, if they want to kill themselves, do so at the time of an eclipse. Sometimes, they hire somebody to drown them in the Ganges, keeping them under water till they are dead. At Prayaga, they commit suicide by climbing up the *vata* tree and throwing themselves into the Ganges.

Al-Biruni gives an interesting account of Hindu festivities too. He makes a mention of various festivals about which other sources don't provide information. He also applies his logic in explaining reasons for various festivities. One important festival of Kashmir of which he makes mention is *Agdus*, celebrated on the 2nd Caitra on account of victory of their king, Muttai, over the Turks. On the 11th Caitra, a festival named *Hindoli-caitra* is celebrated in which the Hindus meet in the *devagriha* of Vasudeva, and swing his image to and fro. This festival is still a popular festival among the Hindus but celebrated in some other month. It is also important to note that such activities related with the cult of Vasudeva are considered to be of quite late origin by the scholars. They associate them with the arrival of *bhakti* through Caitanya and Vallabha, but Al-Biruni's account

pushes back their antiquity and popularity over a wider region. He mentions the day of Caitra purnima (full moon) as *Bahand*, a festival for the women. The 22nd Caitra is *Caitra-cashati* festival, a day of merriment holy to Bhagavati. The 3rd of Vaisakha is a festival *Gauri-tritiya*, holy to Gauri and popular among the women. The 10th Vaisakha is a day related with Brahmanas who are invited by the kings to perform sacrifices in honour of the Vedas. On the 1st Jyaishta is celebrated a festival when the Hindus throw the first-fruits of all the seeds into the water in order to gain thereby a favourable prognostic. The Jyeshtha Purnima is a festival for women, named *rupa-pancha*. The whole month of Ashadha is devoted to alms-giving. During this time the household is provided with new vessels. On the full moon day of Sravana, Hindus give banquets to the Brahmanas. On the 8th Asvayuja, begins the sucking of the sugarcane and this festival is holy to Mahanavami. On the 15th Asvayuja is the festival Puhai in which Hindus wrangle with each other remembering the wrangling of Vasudeva when asked by Kamsa to fight. On the 23rd Asvayuja is the festival Asoka, also called Ahoi. In the month of Bhadrapada, the Hindus celebrate *pritrpaksha* for a period of 15 days. On the 3rd Bhadrapada is the festival Harbali, for the women. It is their custom that a number of days before they sow all kinds of seeds in baskets, and they bring the baskets forward on this day after they have commenced growing. They throw roses and perfumes on them and play with each other during the whole night. On the following morning they bring them to the ponds, wash them, wash themselves, and give alms. On the 6th Bhadrapada, the day is called Gaihat when people give food to those who are in prison. On the 8th Bhadrapada is the festival *dhruvagriha* which is related with the well being of children. The festive day of Bhadrapada Ekadasi is called *Parvati* which is a much venerated festival related with the cult of Vasudeva. From 16th Bhadrapada, the Hindus celebrate a festival *karara* for seven

days. When the moon stands in her fourth station, Rohini, they call this time *Gunalahid*, celebrating a festival for three days over the birth of Vasudeva (*Srikrishna Janmashtmi*). On the 26th and 27th Bhadrapada (or in Vaisakha), Kashmiris celebrate a festival related to pieces of a wood 'gana' and Vitasta (Jhelum river) flowing through the capital city of Adhishtana as associated with Mahadeva. In the Swat region, there is a valley in which fifty-three streams unite. It is called Tranjai and in those two days, the water of this valley becomes white, in consequence of Mahadeva's washing in it, as people believe. On the 1st Karttika is the festival *Dibali* which is also called Balirajya as on the night of this festival Lakshmi is believed to liberate Bali who is a prisoner in the seventh earth, once a year. He also informs that in the night the Hindus light a great number of lamps. This account of Al-Biruni confirms the antiquity of *Dipavali* festival as the festival of lights and that Al-Biruni got this information from someone belonging to the southern part of India since Balirajya is a concept popular in Kerala. Al-Biruni further informs that the 3rd Margasirsha is the festival *Guvana-batrij* which is dedicated to Gauri. The 8th Pausha is Ashtaka day when Brahmanas are presented with dishes prepared from a plant *Atriplex hortensis*. On the 8th Pausha (Krishna), the day is called *Sakartam* and turnips are eaten. The 3rd Magha is called *Mahatrij* and is a festival sacred to Gauri. The 15th Magha is called *Camaha* and on this day Hindus light lamps on all high places. The 23rd Magha is *Mansartaku* or *Mahatan*, the day on

which Hindus receive guests and feed them on meat and large black peas. The 8th Phalguna is *Purartaku*. The *Phalguna Purnima* is festival *Odaa* or *Dhola* when the Hindus make fire on places lower than those on which they make it on the festival *Camaha*, and they throw the fire out of the village. The next day, i.e. 16th Phalguna is *Sivaratri* when Mahadeva is worshipped during the whole night. The Hindus of Multan celebrate a festival *Sambapurayatra* which is dedicated to the Sun.

The account given by Al-Biruni is a rich source of information on medieval Hindu India. Many of the information given are such as are not found from any other source. The information is of course sometimes not reliable for some of its contents but is valuable as it still gives an idea of the times. For one fact, Al-Biruni must be appreciated and that is in spite of his prejudices, he did not comment adversely on the religious beliefs of the Hindus even when the chronological framework provided for certain incidents, like the dyke of Rama, is beyond one's comprehension. A major part of his writings is related with astronomy and various calculations like that of the radius of the earth, distances of poles, longitudes of places, number of rotation of planets, etc. His knowledge of world civilizations, their philosophy and sciences and combining them with the studies of Indian sciences and mathematics makes his contribution really unique. From a historical perspective too, his account is precious and helps in solving various problems of history.

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