

Ibn Battuta's Rihla

Ibn Battuta, was born in Tangier in Morocco, into one of the most educated and respectable family. He received literary and scholastic education when he was quite young. He considered experience gained through travels to be more important source of knowledge than books. He loved traveling and went to far-off places, exploring new worlds and peoples. Before coming to India he had already travelled extensively in Syria, Iraq, Persia, Yemen, Oman, and a few trading ports on the coast of East Africa.

Travelling through Central Asia, Ibn Battuta reached Sind in 1333. He had heard about Mohammed-bin-Tughluq, the Sultan of Delhi, as a generous patron of Arts and letters, set off for Delhi, passing through Multan and Uch. The Sultan was impressed by his scholarship, and appointed him the qazi or judge of Delhi. He remained in that position for several years. He was ordered in 1342 to proceed to China as the Sultan's envoy to the Mongol ruler. Before resuming his mission to China, he also visited Bengal and Assam as well.

Ibn Battuta meticulously recorded his observations about new cultures, peoples, beliefs, values, etc. We need to bear in mind that this global-trotter was travelling in the fourteenth century, when it was much more arduous and hazardous to travel than it is today. He was attacked by bands of robbers several times. Therefore, he preferred travelling in caravan along with companions, but this did not deter highway robbers. While travelling from Multan to Delhi, for instance, his caravan was attacked and many of his fellow travellers lost their lives; those travellers who survived, including Ibn Battuta, were severely wounded.

Ibn Battuta's book of travels, called Rihla, written in Arabic, provides extremely rich and interesting details about the social and cultural life in the subcontinent in the fourteenth century.