

## UPSC Preparation

### Fa-Hien [337 CE - 422 CE]

Fa-hien was a Chinese pilgrim who visited India during the reign of Chandragupta II on a religious mission. He travelled by foot from China to India and returned by sea route.

#### Fa-Hien / Faxian Visit to India - UPSC Prelims Facts

1. **Fa-hien also known as Faxian** was born in AD 337 to Tsang Hi in Pingyang Wuyang, modern Linfen City, Shanxi. Faxian was orphaned at an early age and spent most of his adult life in Buddhist monasteries.
2. **Faxian was a chinese monk** who left Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) in 399 CE to set forth on an expedition through Central Asia to India, and ultimately Sri Lanka at the age of 62.
3. During a visit to Chang'an, he was taken aback by the torn and weathered state of the **Books of Discipline (Vinaya Pitakas)** which contain the monastic code for Buddhist monks and nuns.
4. In 399 CE, Faxian was accompanied by 4 others on a mission to visit the land of the Buddha and search for Buddhist texts.
5. He reached Purushapura (Peshawar) and recollected how Buddha had predicted the birth of a king named 'Kanishka', who would build a magnificent stupa at this place.
6. Fa-Hien made his way towards Northern India and took note of a very different vegetation from his own land of Han (China). **The only familiar plants he noted were the bamboo, pomegranate and sugarcane.**
7. He **visited India in the early fifth century during the reign of Chandragupta II ([Gupta Empire](#))** and entered here from the northwest and reached Pataliputra. Here in a Mahayana monastery, he found a copy of the Vinaya Pitaka, containing the Mahasanghika rules written in Sanskrit. Hence, **he lived in patliputra for nearly three years**, learned Sanskrit and wrote out the Vinaya rules.
8. He **travelled to many cities** associated with the life of the Buddha – Sravasti, Sarnath, Bodh Gaya, Vaishali, Rajgir, etc and wrote about Taxila, Pataliputra, Mathura, and Kannauj in Middle India.
9. An **important city that Fa-Hien visited was Mathura**. He indicates that the city was prosperous, peaceful and that most people seemed to be teetotalers and vegetarians.
10. Fa-hien is renowned for his pilgrimage to Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha.
11. He followed the course of the Ganga eastwards, reached Champa and then Tamralipti (was an ancient city in West Bengal)
12. He travelled across Pakistan, Nepal, Northern India and eventually to Sri Lanka, and claimed that demons and dragons were the original inhabitants of Ceylon.
13. Faxian **spent two years in Sri Lanka and decided to return, along a precarious sea route, to China**. Today, there is a cave in the district of Kalutara in Sri Lanka named after Fa-Hien. It is believed that he resided there.
14. After he returned home at the age of 77, the next decade until his death, he **translated the Buddhist Sutra** along with the Indian Sramana Buddha-bhadra and compiled a travelogue filled with invaluable accounts of what life was like, the places he saw and the nature of Buddhism at the turn of the 5th century.

15. He recorded **his observations in a travelogue titled Foguoji** (A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms; also known as Faxian's Account).
16. Faxian died in Jingzhou in China, at the age of eighty-eight.

## Recordings of Faxian

### Political and Administration conditions

1. Fa-hien did not record anything specifically about the political condition of India. He did not even mention the name of Chandragupta II during whose reign he visited the country.
2. He simply inferred that the administration of the Guptas was liberal, the people enjoyed economic prosperity and the burden of taxes on them was not heavy. Mostly, fines were exacted from the offenders and corporal punishment was avoided and and, probably, death penalty was absent.
3. The primary source of income of the state during that time was land-revenue and people could move freely from one land to another.
4. Monasteries, Sanghas, temples and their property and other religious endowments were free from government taxes.
5. The kings and the rich people had built rest-houses where every convenience was provided to the travellers. Also, hospitals were built to provide free medicines to the poor.
6. The Fa-Hien account suggests that the administration of the Guptas was benevolent and successful; there was peace and security within the empire.

### The Religious Condition

1. Based on Fa-hien's recordings, people observed tolerance in religious matters because Buddhism and Hinduism both flourished side by side during that time.
2. Buddhism was more popular in Punjab, Bengal and the region around Mathura.
3. The Hindu religion was more popular in the 'middle kingdom' (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and a part of Bengal) which formed the heart of Chandra Gupta II's dominions.

### The Social Condition

1. People during the 5th century i.e. during Fa-hien's visit to India were prosperous, happy, liberal and simple in morals.
2. Mostly, they were vegetarians and avoided meat and onions and they avoided alcohol and other intoxicants.
3. There were houses built for dispensing charity and medicine and gave large donations to temples, monasteries, Sanghas etc.
4. The rich people vied with each other in practice of benevolence and righteousness.
5. Public morality was high and people were content with their lives.

### Other Prominent Records by Faxian in Relation to India

1. In context of his visit to Patliputra, Fa-hien inferred that there were separate Sanghas both of the Hinayana and Mahayana sects, which provided education to students gathered from all parts of India.
2. He was much impressed by chariot-processing that was arranged by people on the eighth day of the second month of every year. The procession carried images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas.

3. The Palace of Emperor Ashoka also existed at that time, about which Fa-hien remarked that “it might have been built not by men but by gods’. Check out a few links giving relevant information about Ashoka
  - [Ashoka’s Inscriptions](#)
  - [About Emperor Ashoka](#)
  - [Sanchi Stupa and Lion Capital](#)
4. Fa-hien also visited Malwa and praised its climate.
5. He described that both internal and external trade of India was in a progressive stage and Sea Voyages were also carried out by Indians.
6. On the western sea-coast as described by Faxian, India had ports like Cambay, Sopara and Baroach whereas on the eastern coast Tamralipti was a famous port. It was this port from where Fa-hien went to Sri Lanka on an Indian ship.

**Revision Points:**

1. He travelled all over India for more than 13 years.
2. Fa-Hien’s visit to India is one of the literary sources to reconstruct the age of Gupta’s.
3. Fa-Hien wrote about India in his book Fo-kwo-ki (Travels of Fa-hien).
4. He mentioned about two monasteries in Pataliputra - Mahayana and Hinayana. Other things he noted about Pataliputra was prosperity, excellent hospital, existence of rest-houses in large cities and highways, prevalence of honesty and law, obsolete capital punishment, etc.
5. Fa-hien’s observation about Gupta Empire:
  - a. Vegetarianism
  - b. Non-Violence
  - c. Prevalence of caste-system
  - d. Presence of untouchability - Chandalas at the lowest rank
  - e. Existence of slavery
  - f. Remarriage of widows was unfavourable
  - g. Prevalence of Devadasi system
6. Fa-hien mentioned the existence of multiple religions - Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, Buddhism, Jainism etc.