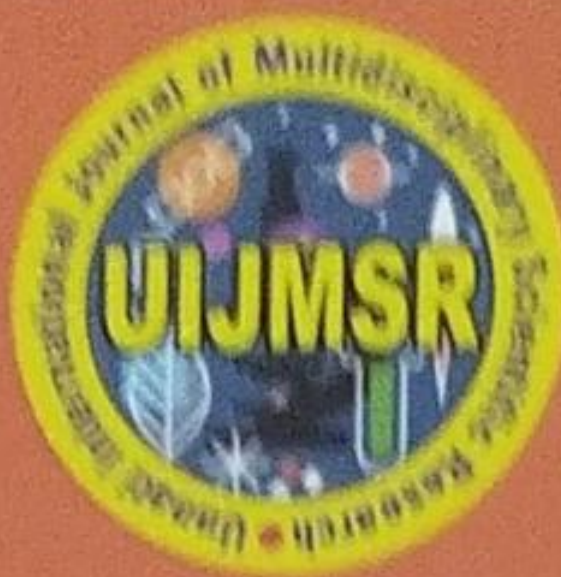
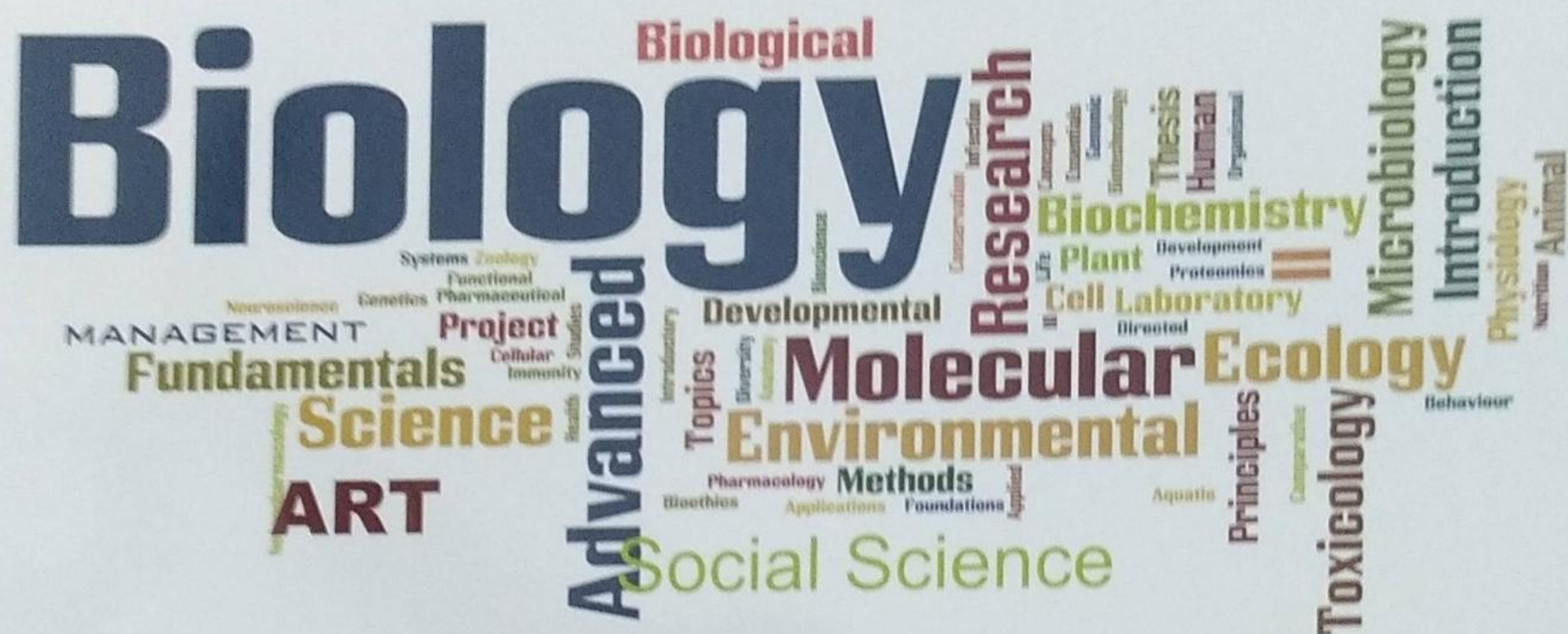


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An Insight into the History of Travels in Ancient India

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Travel has always had a fascination for mankind from the earliest times. It may rightly be called as an ancient phenomenon. The man wandered from one place to another place in search of food and shelter in ancient period of history. All travels are not tourism but all tours are travels. Historical records have amply reflected that people travelled for motives other than trade, commerce and religious rites in the ancient world.¹ The man had the desire to explore the unknown land and seek new experiences. Further knowledge, health, curiosity and health were other motivators for undertaking travels. In the case of India, travels were undertaken for religious and business purpose during the earliest periods of her History.

Travel was considered as a tool of cultural enrichment. Scholars in search of knowledge, missionaries in their zeal for propagation of their philosophy and pilgrims in the cause of their faith continued to travel from and to India facing all the dangers and difficulties in a spirit of adventure and joy.² The Atharva Veda sings praises of the mother country as the land of brave and the pious, of commerce and trade, of science and art, of sacrificial rites and sacred pleasures, and of virtue and greatness.³ India has always carried a distinguishing feature of pilgrimage to sacred places scattered in different region of the country. This is known as the institution of 'Tirthatan'. Rivers, mountains, cities and places associated with saints, sages, founders of religions and cults assumed sanctity. Further these places had the features of scenic beauty and known for its art and architecture. Varanasi and the snow-clad Himalayas in the north and Kanchipuram in the distant south, Jagannath Puri on the east coast and Dwarka in the west, with innumerable places interspersed

throughout the country, came to be loved and visited because of their scenic charms, temple cities rich in art, architecture and association of pious men and scholars.

The Vanparva of Mahabharat gives the exhaustive list of places which continue to attract people from all parts of the land throughout the course of many centuries. The number of such places of Hindu pilgrimage, according to tantra Chudamani is fifty two while another work Devi Bhagavata enumerates one hundred and eight.⁴ Further India has been a cradle of heterodox sects as well. This has led to the centers of pilgrimage associated with Buddhism, Jainism and other sects developed all over the country. Hence in India Tirthatan visit to a holy place for religious purpose constitutes the major segment of domestic tourism in India even today. We know that Adiguru Shankaracharya had set up four Mathas in four directions of the country in 7th century. Since then it has become an established practice to visit these Mathas in a life span of a man following Hindu faith.

The visits to these centers of pilgrimages as a part of religious duty made wide travelling a national habit and promoted inter-communication between different parts of the country.⁵ The common ways of thought and life, resulting in common ideals and institutions produced that cultural unity which knit the whole country into a single organism and deep knowledge of the land.⁶ Apart from the travelling to such pilgrimage centers, Indians have a deep faith to visit the congregational fairs. One such fair is that of Kumbha Mela. This is easily the largest religious congregation in the world which attracted thousands of persons in the period from all walks of life. Rooted in the hoary past, the Kumbha Mela was conceived and