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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/23668
DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/23668>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TRAVELOGUE OF FRANÇOIS BERNIER AND HIS DEPICTION OF THE SUBCONTINENT

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 12 April 2026
Final Accepted: 14 May 2026
Published: June 2026

Abstract

This paper examines the seventeenth-century travelogue of French physician and philosopher François Bernier, analyzing his complex and highly influential depiction of Mughal India. Situated at the intersection of European empiricism and subcontinental sociopolitical realities, Bernier's writings are evaluated not merely as observational records, it served the dual-purpose ethnographic and political critiques. The study investigates Bernier's conceptualization of "Oriental Despotism" which was rooted in his assertion regarding the absence of private land ownership and his documentation of the paradoxes of the empire's economy. Crucially, this analysis highlights how Bernier utilized his critique of the Mughal state, especially its agrarian decadence, heavy taxation, and religious extremes as an allegorical warning against the absolutist, wealth-draining policies of Louis XIV's France. The essay also addresses the epistemological limitations and elite biases of Bernier's work, contrasting his Eurocentric judgments of artisans and indigenous practices with his nuanced acknowledgement of female political agency within the zenana and his expressions of aesthetic cultural relativism relating to the subcontinent. Ultimately, this research posits that Bernier's travelogue operated as a sophisticated analytical bridge that deeply intertwined the Indian subcontinent with early modern European political imagination.

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Introduction:-

The seventeenth century evolved with heavy hints of political turmoil, social variations, an everchanging economy and a few travelers noting every change during their sojourn in the subcontinent. The history of medieval India is usually characterized through the dynasties which ruled them, yet the mark it left in the global sphere was not just through the intimate histories within. It was through the lens of the travelers who extensively moved across the subcontinent, playing a role of either a dynamic persona or silent spectators as they jotted down the instances that will later connect the medieval history of India to the evolving historical thoughts on global stage. The seventeenth century France saw the salon of Marguerite de La Sablière becoming a space that would help in the development of the knowledge about *les Indesorientales* texts related to India started originating there. This was because of an avid writer, François Bernier who took up residence in the salon after his decade long visit to India. In that salon of La Sablière and La Fontaine, Bernier spent another decade in composing, compiling and ultimately publishing his texts on Mughal India, which also earned him the title of "le Mogol" by his contemporaries in France and elsewhere.

In the 1640s, Bernier, nearly twenty years after his birth, left for Paris for his studies and came under the influence of the philosopher, Pierre Gassendi. Gassendi was often called a libertine and it was under him, that Bernier met other thinkers of his time and developed the empiricist and neo-Epicurean philosophy of his mentor.

It was in the company of Gassendi that Bernier developed a fascination for natural sciences which he cultivated during his time in India as well. Bernier received his doctorate in medicine degree at Montpellier which would later aid him during his travels to India. Gassendi had always been keen of the 'Orient', a factor which pushed Bernier along with his love for travel to roam the world after the death of his mentor. This led him to journey across the world to come to India which was a lesser-known place for his French contemporaries. In 1658-59, he finally reached Surat as an independent thinker, visiting and travelling out of curiosity and not as a merchant or missionary which was prevalent during that time. On India, he had published four volumes of work out of which the first one was *Histoire de la dernière révolution des états du Grand Mogol*, which along with his letters and other works acted as a watershed moment for the engagement of early modern Europe with the subcontinent.¹ His works marked the beginning of a long engagement of empiricism of Europe and the realities in the Mughal Empire. The India he landed at and subsequently wrote about was not barren, it was wealthy with an agrarian economy and a huge influential market of global trade. His arrival was however met with the moments of Mughal history when it was caught in between a brutal internal struggle for power. The strange beginnings of his travel impacted his political and cultural critique of the subcontinent, which Sanjay Subrahmanyam noted in his work as the "aliens" operating in zones of "contained conflict".² His writings showed a political, commercial and cultural ethnographic account of India along with a mirror that would also relate to the political situation in an absolutist France during the time of Louis XIV.

While proceeding to view his writings, it becomes necessary to situate him within the Indian society and among his contemporary, "alien" Europeans. He was an observer of the period; however, his position is critiqued by his contemporaries like Nicolò Manucci, a Venetian traveler who had spent a long period of time in the subcontinent. He detested Bernier's sudden fame due to his literary publications. In Manucci's work, the *Storia del Mogol* he questions the methodology of Bernier and stated that the latter knew the Mughal empire only in a fugitive manner and on a superficial level. Every information provided by Bernier was supposedly acquired in the marketplaces of India, not believed in the courts of the kings and the princes or nobles. Further he accuses Bernier of knowing most of the things stated by him and not properly annotating Manucci for it; in the process he also describes the "slaving away" situation the Bernier was in during his stay at the library of his patron Danishmand Khan. Bernier was kept busy in several works of Danishmand that barely gave him enough time to have lived experiences of the empire.³ The European knowledge production in India was not a monolithic orientalist structure; there existed several internal dynamics and clashes as the period was that of "contained conflicts" and not colonial domination as a whole.⁴

The Mughal Court:-

Before being involved in the library of Danishmand Khan, Bernier on his entry to the subcontinent was exposed to the succession struggle that occurred on account of Shah Jahan being sick. During the fratricidal war, he met Dara Shikoh near Ahmedabad, who was on the run. Dara had suffered a huge defeat in 1659 and did not have any royal titles while retreating towards Sind. As he met Bernier, he convinced the latter to join his entourage to provide medical assistance. The association with Dara was brief, but it provided Bernier with deep insight in the working of the Empire during the seventeenth century. In his works, he mentioned the tragic finale of the prince as he was defeated by his brother Aurangzeb who stripped Dara of all glory during his final parade in the streets of Delhi. With the death of Dara, Bernier had to strive hard to create a position within the empire. Using his medical expertise and philosophical intellect, he secured his position by joining under Danishmand Khan, who was the Secretary of State for foreign affairs and later the treasurer of the Empire. Bernier was paid in his employment in return of translating intellectual pieces of work to Persian, along with educating the former on European works of astronomy, physics and anatomy.⁵ This situated him in the internal court affairs of the Empire, where at times he also served as provider of medical assistance to the emperor.

¹Faith Evelyn Beasley, *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal : François Bernier , Marguerite de La Sablière , and Enlightening Conversations in Seventeenth-Century France* (Toronto ; Buffalo ; London: University Of Toronto Press, 2018).

²Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien* (University Press of New England, 2011).

³Ibid, 146-146.

⁴Ibid, 138.

⁵Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 1916).

He noticed in great depth the intricate details of the court under Aurangzeb and pointed out the various emissaries who visited. He mentioned the Uzbek Tartars being received with lavish gifts and materials embroidered with gold and silver, as they brought gifts from Central Asia. Bernier highlighted this diplomatic mission in his work and the necessity of maintaining etiquette which also remained a central factor in the court of Louis XIV in France. His mentioning was read in reference to the Ottoman Empire sending an ambassador to the French court to improve their strained relationships; however, the French could not determine the rank of the ambassador and hence could not decide on how to receive him. As negotiations happened through interpreters, it resulted in a ruckus and embarrassment. The French court did not follow the traditional Tartar etiquettes that needed to be followed. He utilized the context to critique the happenings of his own countrymen. In 1665, the representatives of the French Compagnie des Indes and Louis XIV, La Boulaye and Beber visited the subcontinent but considered themselves to be superior to the local customs. Hence, they refused to do the traditional salaam and wanted to give the gift directly to the emperor, sidestepping court norms. Bernier mentions that Persian ambassadors at times flouted the customs based on the Safavid superiority but the Europeans as merchants could not afford to do that. Bernier and Tavernier stated that it was a diplomatic failure and might have affected relations.⁶ He was also instrumental in noting the political and philosophical ideology of the period and especially the way Aurangzeb ran the Empire. The strict stance of Aurangzeb in rebuking his former tutor for not teaching him practical lessons and instead, focusing heavily on language and literary based modules showed that there was need for pragmatic learning as Bernier explained the instance.⁷

The “Oriental Despotism” and Bernier’s Analysis:-

The way Bernier viewed the subcontinent can be assessed through varied lens. There are instances of his amazement but the one constant remained, was his surprise at the way the subcontinent functioned. The way he viewed the subcontinent was through the Oriental gaze where he drew comparisons of the happenings with the conditions in Europe. It was an ‘exotic’ view of the customs, rituals, practices, economy and politics as the traveler roamed the “unfamiliar” political, economic and cultural landscape of the subcontinent. One of his most influential writing and critic were his writings and correspondence with the Finance Minister of Louis XIV, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. It was in his “Letter to Monseigneur Colbert concerning Hindoustan”, where he spoke of an economic and political theory regarding the subcontinent which would influence European political thoughts and philosophy.⁸ He recognized a paradox in the economic functioning of the subcontinent; it was an “abyss” which consumed a huge portion of the global gold and silver bullion and precious metals due to its enormous trade in the massive export of manufactured goods like silks, cotton and spices. But its imports from Europe remained relatively low. Bernier saw that despite the intense influx of bullion into the subcontinent, the general populace remained poor and there was the lack of the prosperous middle class along with the booming urban centers which were popular sights in the western world.⁹ Bernier attempted to find the root cause of the problem stating that it was the complete absence of private property in ownership of land as throughout the empire it was considered to be the land of the sovereign.¹⁰

Through his ideas of the economic declined society and political structure, he defined what would later be termed as ‘Oriental Despotism’. Even though in his letter he never used the word “despotism”, he termed it as “*la décadence des Étatsd’Asie*” where he wrote about the “oriental” monarch seen not just in Mughal India but also in Ottoman Empire. His understanding of Mughals was not detailed and he followed a top-down approach ignoring the sections of people in the middle and lower strata, including zamindars who were a defining aspect of the economy.¹¹ In the Mughal land grant system, he noted that land was given to the provincial governors on a non-hereditary and ad-hoc

⁶Faith Evelyn Beasley, *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal: François Bernier, Marguerite de La Sablière, and Enlightening Conversations in Seventeenth-Century France* (Toronto ; Buffalo ; London: University Of Toronto Press, 2018), 59-64.

⁷Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 1916).

⁸Ibid, 200-239.

⁹SakulKundra, “An Assessment of FrancoisBernier’sTravelAccount: A French Commercial Informer or a Critic of the French State?,” *Journal of History and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (June 30, 2010), 26-27, <https://doi.org/10.46422/jhss.v1i1.3>.

¹⁰Edward Farley Oaten, *Travel and Travellers in India, A.D. 1400-1700* (Kegan Paul Trench Trubner and Co. Ltd, 1971), 204.

¹¹Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Race, Climate and Civilization in the Works of François Bernier,” ed. Marie Fourcade and Ines G. Županov, OpenEdition Books (Paris: Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, September 16, 2020), 61, <https://books.openedition.org/editionsehess/22612>.

basis due to which they had to ulterior incentive to invest in welfare of peasants or agriculture. They functioned as tyrants to extract the maximum wealth through revenue which Bernier argues led to the impoverishment of peasantry, agricultural decadence, fertile lands changing into arid landscapes and desertion of several villages.¹² In an attempt to locate the cause of money vanishing from circulation, he realized that merchants and artisans followed a certain superstition of burying their golds and silver as they believed that buried treasure with stay with them in their afterlives. Tavernier agreed to the existence of this custom as he notes that wealthy people in Assam would bury their fortune in the hopes of using it if they reincarnated. The people would be truly poor only if they did not have a secret stash of treasure buried in the ground. These customs of burying treasure in the ground led to the cash or bullion getting out of circulation in the economy which led to a crisis of liquid money and evident impoverished livelihood. Bernier was not just focusing on a travelogue but it was a way to warn the French. It reflected the emerging problem in France during that time when the French economy was crashing due to vanity and war led by Louis XIV and his absolutist regime. Instead of reinvesting the profits into trade or ships, the wealthy French bourgeoisie spent their money on buying social status. Louis XIV needed huge amount of cash to wage his wars due to which he made efforts to raise money by selling off official government posts, titles and estates or fiefs. The elevation of status would aid them in several ways like increase in their social standing, exemption from the enormous land tax or *taille* and extravagant lifestyles. Trade was considered to be of lower strata than true nobility and hence, merchants tried to buy their way to the top; securing which they would abandon mercantile practices. France was facing a crisis as the wealth and energy started getting soaked up. When Bernier narrated the foolishness of Indian merchants and their economic enterprises, he was also issuing a warning to France that money would be pulled out of the economy and hinder progress of nation. He also warned the ruler and Colbert that heavy taxation, absolutist policies and lack of private property would cause economic fragility as he pointed out in India.¹³

He proceeded to define the manufacturing units of the subcontinent and highly acknowledge the superior level of craftsmanship of the Indian artisans. He noted their ability to produce gold ornaments, textiles brocaded with silver or gold threads, miniature paintings and the luxurious fabrics that were produced even without the availability of formal training or western machinery. Bernier did not forget to bring to light the conditions in which they worked and severely critiqued the dismal state of affairs in the imperial workshops or the *karkhanas* and in the markets. He stated that they were treated brutally, not remunerated adequately and had to go through extreme physical hardship with long working conditions in order to stay employed. He also showed surprise over the complex caste system prevalent in India which divided on the basis of traditional occupation and birth while explaining the intricacies of this system of society.¹⁴ The complexity of this oppression however led Bernier to translate it in a different way which was a socio-cultural judgement. He stated that they were “naturally indolent” even if they produced great handcrafted goods. Since these artisans lack the means and could not have upward social mobility, he labelled them in a Eurocentric manner. It remained a paradox in itself that he continued to praise the production of luxurious fabrics and brocades done by these craftsmen while labeling them as “lazy” as they did not work within the capitalist framework of Europe.

He wanted to put forth the notion of the European being hardworking, industrious people due to their correct belonging to a “correct” religion and western civilization. Indians on the other hand may produce great items of export and have great rulers but intrinsically would be termed as “vile” or “indolent” based on the nature of their worship and lifestyle. This created the seeds of an Oriental view of the subcontinent which later crystallized during the colonial rule in India.¹⁵ He is also judgmental regarding the administration of justice in the Mughal empire which he found to be dependent on the ruling elites. There was no recorded law or independent judiciary due to which even provincial governors could exercise their powers in cases of life and death rendering the accused to be entirely defenseless. He however agreed that even though the system was despotic and there was a scarcity of lawyers too, yet it prevented lawsuits from happening which was quite prevalent in France and finally stated that speedy injustice

¹²Edward Farley Oaten, *Travel and Travellers in India, A.D. 1400-1700* (Kegan Paul Trench Trubner and Co. Ltd, 1971), 205.

¹³SakulKundra, “An Assessment of FrancoisBernier’sTravelAccount: A French Commercial Informer or a Critic of the French State?,” *Journal of History and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (June 30, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.46422/jhss.v1i1.3>.

¹⁴Ibid, 37-39.

¹⁵EugenaVanina, “Roads of (Mis)Understanding: EuropeanTravellers in India (Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century),” *IndianHistoricalReview* 40, no. 2 (November26, 2013): 279, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0376983613499678>.

was better than tardy justice.¹⁶ He assessed the spiritual landscape of India through the lens of European scientific rationalism where he critiqued both the Hindu and Islamic religious practices. In his letter to Monsieur Jean Chapelain, he described the ‘Superstitions, strange customs, and Doctrines of the Indous or Gentiles of Hindoustan’ which were used as evidence to state that there was no doctrine too strange or too improbable for the soul of man to conceive.¹⁷ He did not believe in the Hindu faith in astrology and the supernatural to describe natural phenomenon. In this regard he talks of the solar eclipse in Delhi in 1666, which resulted in chaotic reaction among the populace in contrast to the scientific predictability that he had seen in Europe. He criticized the Hindu belief of the evil deuta or deity infecting the sun and other rituals followed like bathing in river or giving alms to priestly classes which he believed would just enrich them. He considered the bazaar astrologers to be imposters and cheaters who would prey on the gullibility of women and to his dismay, stated that even Mughal elites consulted them.¹⁸

Bernier directed his most severe critique against the then popular practice of “widow burning” or sati prevalent under Brahmanical traditions. Europeans even in earlier visits mentioned the practice but Bernier provided eyewitness accounts in his letter to Chapelain, which removed any aspect of devotion or romanticism that could have been attached to it.¹⁹ He structured it as cruel manipulation as part of the patriarchal narrative and Brahmanical order. He condemned the notion that widows died out of devotion to their husbands and wanted to join them after death. He believed that it was due to the societal conditioning which was deeply entrenched and utilized by men to keep wives in subjection and prevent situations where the wife might poison the husband. He furthered his condemnation to the Brahmin priests who forced the act of self-immolation on the women even when they were unwilling participants to cement their material and physical authority.²⁰ There are however several layers in analyzing his criticism where different aspects of his thoughts are highlighted. He made clear documentation of his intervention in preventing the self-immolatory practice by threatening to revoke the children’s pension if the wife died.²¹ Through his, he brought forth the oriental view of the western world where he wanted to show that pragmatic intellect and European reasoning was necessary in order to counter the indigenous dogma which existed. This version of his understanding reverts one back to his concept of “Oriental despotism” where the subcontinent was viewed to be ruthless, mindless and in need of European pragmatism. Another aspect that can be highlighted was the link of the critique of indigenous religious extremities to a covert critique of the western religious extremes especially in Europe. He developed parallel understanding of the Hindu worship of idols to the Catholic practices of venerating the images and made suggestions that the manipulative structure of priesthood in the subcontinent was similar to the functioning of the Catholic church in Europe.

He spoke against Indian “gentilism” and propagated a view based on empiricism that would advocate for a world view that was beyond the fanaticism found in both Eastern and Western worlds.²² One of his deep analyses was based on the intellectual format of the subcontinent. He observed that the Hindu education system was unlike the formal colleges and universities as seen in Europe. His main critique was the huge amount of time spent learning a language like Sanskrit which was applicable only in elite circles and did not help in professional progress.²³ On a similar note, as stated in the works of Oaten, he even spoke of the time the tutor of Aurangzeb was chastised by the Emperor for wasting years on teaching language and Arabic when as a ruler he could have profited from practical arts of strategy, military, history, statecrafts and geography that would aid him during his rule. Through the example

¹⁶Edward Farley Oaten, *Travel and Travellers in India, A.D. 1400-1700* (Kegan Paul Trench Trubner and Co. Ltd, 1971), 207.

¹⁷Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 1916), 300-350.

¹⁸SakulKundra, “The Charisma of Royal Authority and Popular Culture in the Mughal Period: Representations of Francois Bernier,” *The IUP Journal of History and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2010): 49-50.

¹⁹Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 1916), 300-350.

²⁰SakulKundra, “The Charisma of Royal Authority and Popular Culture in the Mughal Period: Representations of Francois Bernier,” *The IUP Journal of History and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2010): 53.

²¹Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 1916).

²²Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Race, Climate and Civilization in the Works of François Bernier,” ed. Marie Fourcade and Ines G. Županov, OpenEdition Books (Paris: Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, September 16, 2020), <https://books.openedition.org/editionsehess/22612>.

²³SakulKundra, “The Charisma of Royal Authority and Popular Culture in the Mughal Period: Representations of Francois Bernier,” *The IUP Journal of History and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2010): 55.

of Aurangzeb, Bernier wanted to point at the disconnected nature of education that was being taught to the princes which left them ignorant of the political and economic realities of their empire.

In terms of philosophy and sciences too, Bernier spoke with Hindu pandits and Muslim Sufis whose metaphysical understanding of the concept of God or universe felt inadequate to him and completely devoid of empirical thoughts. He did not believe in the anatomy, astronomy and other sciences as propagated during that time, dismissed explanations of various cosmic or natural incidents and considered them to be “extravagant follies” which he mocked.²⁴ He believed that the subcontinent and Empire was intellectually stagnated due to the despotic system which governed it and provided no incentive for scientific inquiry and based itself on religious establishments.

Other Aspects of His Work: Female Agency and Cultural Relativism:-

His accounts were very different from those of his contemporaries including Tavernier because of his inclusion of the female agency in the court, in his writings. His writings were compiled in a Parisian salon run by a woman as aforementioned which allowed him to reside in an environment dominated by politically active women. His work did not focus on the passive stereotype of the “Oriental” women but highlighted the political and economic power of figures like Nur Jahan, Jahanara and Roshanara Begum. He noted the immense governance ability of Nur Jahan with intellect and judgement during a time when Jahangir was moving towards overindulgence and incapability of rule. He highlighted the huge wealth that Jahanara possessed along with her control over trade in Surat and periods where European merchants had to directly negotiate with her, along with the architectural patronages that she indulged in. He spoke of Roshanara and her role in orchestrating key ideas during the war of succession where she played an active role instead of just an observer. His descriptions of the zenana or the seraglio went against the European preconceptions of a site of sexual subjugation and lack of rights. Instead, it was portrayed as an artistic and economic hub partaking in trade and patronages. His description of the extravagant journey to Kashmir with the zenana showed that it was not restricted to hidden corners of the Empire.²⁵ This resonated with the intellectual sphere of France where women were participating slowly and showed that Indian women shared similar or even more agency than their counterparts.²⁶ He also expressed a cultural relativism relating to aesthetics, in his letter to François de La Mothe Le Vayer where he did not parallel Paris with Delhi or Agra, noting that architecture needed to match the climatic situation. The Parisian structures would be unfit in the subcontinental climate. On his visit to Taj Mahal, he stated that it did not conform to the Greco-Roman architecture revered in France but the strange layout was stunning and he was afraid his taste was getting “too Indian”. He considered it deserving to have place in European architectural texts and being “superior” than the pyramids of Egypt. He described the throne being embedded with diamonds, pearls and golds which transformed the emperor into a be-dazzled “small sun”. He paid similar attention to the superiorly painted cotton and silk fabrics used in imperial tents and by common people.²⁷

Conclusion:-

In his seventeenth century travel work, there were several methodological errors, which was aided by his linguistic limitations. He learned Persian but that was able to connect him with the elites, leaving him unaware of the lived realities of the common populace and peasants or workers. The elite bias that he inculcated led to the error of stating there was no private property as he did not take into account the complex levels of hereditary and private ownership of land by zamindars and other classes. This led to him falsely creating a generalized idea that would provide the basis of “Oriental Despotism” which was utilized by the British colonizers.²⁸ Manucci’s critique also revealed the fact that Bernier’s epistemological sense was contested among his contemporaries as well.

²⁴SakulKundra, “The Charisma of Royal Authority and Popular Culture in the MughalPeriod: Representations of Francois Bernier,” *The IUP Journal of History and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2010): 50.

²⁵Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 1916), 350.

²⁶Faith Evelyn Beasley, *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal : François Bernier , Marguerite de La Sablière , and Enlightening Conversations in Seventeenth-Century France* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Eugena Vanina, “Roads of (Mis)Understanding: European Travellers in India (Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century),” *Indian Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (November 26, 2013): 280-281,

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0376983613499678>.

Bernier, however should not be read only as a purveyor of colonialism and orientalism. His work extended beyond a simple travelogue, where the author just noted and observed. He engaged with his work on a critical and analytical basis, while also highlighting and showing appreciation to aspects of women agency, architecture and pluralistic composition of the subcontinent. His critical engagement exposed flaws in the Mughal state and acted as a covert warning to the French empire about its dangerous trajectories; incited discussions in intellectual circles regarding the subcontinent and intertwined the subcontinental civilization with the western historical imaginations and political thoughts.

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