
UNIT 16 EUROPEAN TRAVELOGUES*

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Afanasy Nikitin
 - 16.2.1 India and Its People
 - 16.2.2 Cities and Commercial Activities
- 16.3 Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz
 - 16.3.1 Domaingo Paes
 - 16.3.2 Fernao Nuniz
- 16.4 Sir Thomas Roe
- 16.5 Francisco Pelsaert
- 16.6 Jean Baptiste Tavernier
- 16.7 Francois Bernier
- 16.8 Nicolo Manucci
- 16.9 Summary
- 16.10 Keywords
- 16.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 16.12 Suggested Readings
- 16.13 Instructional Video Recommendations

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- understand the different European perspectives, as expressed in the writings of European travellers, about India,
- examine the biases and cultural complexities inherent in their narratives of India,
- analyse how their individual settings impacted their depictions of Indian culture, political systems, religious practices and society,
- assess their observation's importance in the construction of Indian past, and
- understand the evolution of their perspectives with the changing of times.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will discuss how different European travellers represented India in their writings, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Most of these Europeans were often self-made men, 'in their occupations, they ranged widely from Catholic priests and artillery experts to translators, jewellers, painters, builders, and merchants'. Their writings represent different aspects of the political, social, cultural and economic worlds of the Indian subcontinent. While some scholars have seen their representations of India, or the east, in the Saïdian sense of orientalism, in which the image of the east was created as the opposite of the

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west, means a sense of inferiority of the ‘other’ was always a part of these narratives. Subrahmanyam argues that in a ‘world where-when outright conquest and domination was not the rule (as happened in Mexico and Peru) cultures met frequently in a situation of **contained conflict**’ (Subrahmanyam 2008: 37). This means that, though there was an absence of bonhomie and mutual understanding between the two worlds, it did not suggest that Europeans were having any superior positionality.

It was also believed for a long time that European travellers were more correct and honest in describing medieval and early modern India than Indians themselves. According to this view, Indians were ‘a-historic’, ‘other-worldly’, Indifferent to mundane matters and therefore, unable to correctly record and analyse their own life (Vanina 2013: 269). Especially, the texts in the Indian vernaculars were not given any importance in historical researches for a long time, however, Persian chronicles were considered reliable.

European travelogues have been considered, along with the company records, as the most reliable source material on late medieval and early modern India. The socio-cultural and political background of the travellers’ home countries and the impact of their position in a specific Indian context on their perception was not considered. What is also not taken into account while using these European travelogues is the change that occurred in the perceptions of these narratives because of the changes happening in the settings in which they were travelling, with time. The travellers who visited India in the early sixteenth century found a politically fragmented space, where about half a dozen kingdoms were fighting among themselves to capture the space, among them the kingdom of Vijayanagara was the most powerful, about which the Portuguese travellers of that time wrote extensively, like Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz. In the second half of the sixteenth century Mughal power was emerging, and in the seventeenth century it acquired a hegemonic space in the Indian subcontinent, so the travellers from Europe were mainly preoccupied with the Mughal political space. As far as religion is concerned, European travellers were using two complementary modes, on the one hand, they tried to see parallels between their beliefs and the beliefs prevalent in India, on the other, they showed the contrast between them. This whole representation was aimed to show the truth of their religion and the futility of others’ beliefs.

In the first Section, we will discuss Russian merchant Afanasy Nikitin’s observations about India, his idea of India was limited to the Deccan, especially Bidar. Then, in the next Section, the two Portuguese travellers’ accounts of the Vijayanagara empire will be discussed. One of them is Domingo Paes, who visited Vijayanagara with a group of traders from the then colony of Goa. Another Portuguese traveller Fernao Nuniz was a horse trader. Both of these travellers visited the Vijayanagara empire in the first half of the sixteenth century. Sir Thomas Roe’s perception will be discussed in the next Section, who was at the court (1616-1618) of emperor Jahangir in the second decade of the seventeenth century, carrying a letter from James I of England seeking permissions for the company’s trade rights. The next Section is focussed on Francisco Pelsaert, who was a Dutch factor and had stayed at Agra for some time, his account is very rich in the details of trade networks, manufacturing centres and production centres situated in the northern and eastern part of India. Tavernier and Bernier, both were French, the first one was a trader and an expert in precious stones. The latter one was related to the

post-Galilean intellectual world and his writings played the most important part in the creation of the Mughal emperor's image as an Oriental Despot. The last Section deals with Nicolo Manucci (d.1720), an Italian traveller, whose accounts are the most interesting, detailed and captivating. He spent the longest time in India, among all the travellers, and died in Pondicherry (Puducherry), in the early eighteenth century.

16.2 AFANASY NIKITIN

Nikitin (d. 1472) was a Russian merchant who visited India in the latter half of the fifteenth century. This merchant had already tried his luck trading in Crimea, Georgia, Asia Minor and Walachia. He started his journey in 1466 from his home, in Tver, Russia, and reached Diu, India in 1469. His travelogue is now famous as *Voyage Beyond Three Seas*. He first visited Shirvan in present-day Azerbaijan and from there via Baku and Persia, he finally landed in India, a country he became fascinated with. Nikitin's travel into India was not a journey planned in advance, as was the case with the other Europeans' travels. 'It was just an accidental undertaking, and Nikitin made this clear in his travelogue' (Shlapentokh 2012: 170). The group with which he was travelling was robbed by Tartars and after getting no help from the ruler of Shirvan he decided to go to Persia and from there to Hormuz, where he heard of the importance of horse trade in India. So, he bought a horse so that he could sell it in India and gain some profit. In this way, it was the encounter with Muslim Tartars that formed his negative attitude towards Muslims, of which clear impressions can be seen in his travelogue. 'He saw India not only as an alien, exotic land but a place of clear immorality, or, at least, of bizarre habits' (Shlapentokh 2012:172). Here, we will discuss in brief some of his impressions of Indian people, culture, society and religion.

16.2.1 India and Its People

Nikitin discusses with great interest the appearance and the dresses worn by Indian people. On the one hand, he describes in detail the appearances of 'prince' and 'princesses' of Chaul, the place where he reached first, on the other hand, he also narrates the clothes worn by servants of these high-class persons. He does not notice much difference between the two, except for a cloth on the head of the prince and a cloth draped over their shoulders by princesses. However, the clothes used in the winter in the descriptions of Junnar the many details were given:

In winter the people go about with a cloth on their hips, another in their shoulders and a third on their heads. At that time the princes and the nobles put on trousers and a shirt and a coat, and they wear a cloth over their shoulders and grid themselves with another and they wrap the third cloth around their heads. **Beklov 1950 : 15**

He was conscious about his white colour while describing Indians as being dark skin.

Nikitin also observed the religious practices of the Hindu population. He says that when he told the people that he was not a Muslim but a Christian who believed in Jesus, they did not hide anything from him, about their prayers, foods, businesses or other affairs of life, and that of the Muslims as well. 'If he was getting mixed up, it was not because he was doing it because he was not a Muslim, but because of his belief in non-Muslims rather than Muslims. He calls their deity *But* and mentions their belief in Adam as well, possibly, either he was thinking of the soul

as Adam or he must have heard the story of Manu. There are in all eighty and four faiths in India and they all believe in *But*. Those of one faith will not drink, eat or marry those of another faith. Some eat mutton, fowl, fish and eggs but no faith eats beef” (Beklov 1950: 26).

From Bidar he also went to visit the pilgrimage site at Sri-Shailam, which he called *Parvat* and described it as ‘Jerusalem of Kaffirs’. Nikitin admired the great temple built here of stone, it was richly decorated, all the sculptures are discussed by him in great detail. Nikitin described the deity as the *But*, not the stone image of it, but he had an understanding that the idols represent different forms of the deity, so a vague idea of the different *avatars* of the deity (*But*). Vanina argues that most of the European travellers were unable to understand the concepts of the Hindu religion because of their ignorance of the Indic languages (Beklov 1950: 277)

16.2.2 Cities and Commercial Activities

He, specifically, discusses the cities of Chaul, Junnar, Bidar, Gulbarga, etc. He has provided detailed information regarding the grandeur, structure and security of their forts, has given details of distances between different cities or of the time taken to cover these distances. He describes the sultan’s palace in Bidar in this way:

Seven gates lead into the Sultan’s palace and at each gate, there are a hundred guards and a hundred kaffir scribes, but they don’t allow foreigners into the citadel. Some record the names of all who enter and others record the names of all who leave...(T)he city of bidar is guarded at night by a thousand garrison troops and they ride about on horseback and in armour, and each one carries a torch.

Beklov 1950: 24

Along with these cities, special mention has been made of the products of the cities which he crossed in his journey. Calicut is described as the main port, although the danger of pirates present there is also mentioned. The production of ginger, black pepper, dyes, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and many other spices in Calicut is described, as well as of the cheap slave market functioning there. Before coming to Chaul, when he was in Khambhat, he described the production of indigo and lac being done there. Bidar is said to be famous for horses, brocade, and silk. During the winter months, he spent in Junnar, sowing wheat, gram and other cereals are mentioned, as well as making a special type of liquor from the bark of palm trees. However, he says the commodities in the Indian region are of no value in Russia, and even if some of them have, there is no profit in trading in them because Muslim rulers charge higher duties from foreigners.

He refers to the Bahmani sultan while referring to Muslim India, he says that there is a great influence of the Khorasanis on all administrative posts, and among them, Malik-tujjar (Mahmud Gawan) has a special place. This Khorasani Amir had two lakh soldiers, and in the same way, he also describes the power of Malik Khan (Nizam-ul Mulk) and Farat Khan. He describes the grand procession of the Bahmani Sultan held at Bidar, with elephants, horses, dancers, drums and army contingents moving along.

The sultan rides out for pleasure with his mother and his wife, and accompanying them are ten thousand mounted men and fifty thousand on foot, and they lead two hundred elephants clad in gilded armour. In front of them there are one hundred trumpeters and one hundred dancers and three hundred spare horses in golden harness, and behind him follow one hundred monkeys and one hundred concubines, (all young maidens).

Beklov 1950: 23

Shlapentokh argues that Nikitin was different from other travellers who came after him, in the sense that he mingled with masses easily. While he had a sense of hatred towards Muslims, he was also a part of the larger Perso-Islamic cultural habits and idioms. This can be understood by his use of the terms like 'kaffirs', *But*, *Butakhana* and by his invocations to God in Arabic.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) What was Nikitin's idea of Indian religious practices?

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- 2) Examine Nikitin's description of Indian commercial activities.

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16.3 DOMINGO PAES AND FERNAO NUNIZ

In this Section, we will see how the two travellers of Portuguese origin, in the sixteenth century, came to Vijayanagara and provided a vivid description of the kingdom, its people, culture, trade and political developments. These descriptions are of great importance to reconstruct the history of the Vijayanagara empire. A British civil servant Robert Sewell had composed *A Forgotten Empire Vijayanagara: A Contribution to the History of India* (1900), in which two long and historically configuring translations of these accounts were included.

16.3.1 Domingo Paes

Domingo Paes visited Vijayanagara in about 1520-1522 when Krishnadevaraya was the king. Paes calls Vijayanagara, the Kingdom of Narsymga. The visitor gives critical information on the fortifications, gates, streets and markets of different commodities in the city, as well as the major temples of the city, including the Virupaksha and Vitthalswami at Hampi, together with its colonnaded bazaar. Paes describes the Mahanavami festival at some length, held at the House of Victory. The climax was the review of the troops that was held at some distance outside the city. Paes's account concludes with the description of the king's palace, Krishnadevaraya's new residence, in Nagalpur (Hospet). Now, we will discuss some of these in some detail.

Vijayanagara: The Capital of the Empire

Paes compared the city of Vijayanagara with Rome in its size, having a very large population with one lakh houses built within the city. Paes's description of the city is very accurate and confirms the excavations done at Hampi:

The king has made within it a very strong city, fortified with walls and towers, and the gates at the entrance are very strong...these walls are not made like those of other cities, but are made of very strong masonry...and inside very beautiful rows of buildings...with flat roofs. There live in this many merchants, and it is filled with large population because king induces many honourable merchants to go there from his cities...

Sewell 1991: 244

Paes describes the markets of the city and the commodities which were available there to be sold. Paes found the city is cosmopolitan in its nature where people of every nation were residing for the purpose of trade, especially of precious stones, diamonds. There was a specific quarter of the 'Moorish people' (Muslims) at the very end of the city, and these Muslims were employed by the king in his service. Describing a street nearby a temple, he gives details of the rows of fine houses belonging to the rich strata of the society, the merchants selling rubies, pearls, seed pearls, clothes and 'every other sort of thing on earth' and that one may wish to buy. Every evening a fair was held there, in which the merchants 'sell many common horses and nags, and also many Citrons and limes, and oranges, and grapes, and every other kind of garden stuff, and wood; you have all in this street' (Sewell 1991: 255)

Paes gives a detailed description of three beautiful temples, outside the city wall, on the north, one of which is Vitthaleshwar, the other is Virupaksha temple and the third is not specified. The Virupaksha temple was considered the main temple and he has given a very long description of this temple, its architecture, rituals and deity. He mentions every structural aspect of the pagoda (temple) like a very beautiful street to the opposite to its principal gate, houses with balconies and arcades to shelter pilgrims, lodgings of the upper classes, the king's palace to reside when he visits the temple, pyramidal tower engraved with sculptures of men, women and mythical scenes which opens into a large courtyard. Paes gives the information regarding the maintenance of the lamps to lightning the temple building, also about 'the principal idol', a round stone.

Paes also provided information regarding the tanks built by the king to irrigate their garden and rice fields. One of them was constructed between two hills so that all the water that comes from either side collects there. And besides this, the water was brought from a lake through the pipes. 'To make this tank, the said king broke down a hill and in it, I saw about 15,000 men at work, looking like ants so that you could not see the ground on which they walked. The king portioned out the tank among his captains, each of whom had the duty of seeing that the people placed under him did their work and that the tank was finished and brought to completion' (Sewell 1991: 245).

The Festival at The House of Victory

Paes provided a very detailed description of the festival held during 'the month of September' for nine days. It begins in the morning with the marching of the horses and elephants, then king adorns the idol of the deity kept in a room made of cloth, and after this, follow dance performances, wrestling matches, fireworks, and the march of triumphal cars of the captains of the king. In this festival, all the horses were brought before the king and they were worshipped ritually by the chief brahmin. The royal horse was leading this ritual with two royal parasols attached to its back. The queen's maiden with their all precious jewellery and best dresses, carrying gold vessels in their hand, used to walk in the corridor. After the festival, the king used to supervise his military. Paes has given information regarding the structure and strength of his army, including cavalry, infantry and archers.

The King and His Appearance

Raja Krishnadevaraya has been described as being 'of medium height, of fair complexion and good figure, rather fat than thin, he has on his face signs of

smallpox'. His title is given as 'Crisnarão Macação', king of kings. Krishnadevaraya had three principal queens, having equal rights, and a total of twelve thousand wives. Krishnadevaraya's attack on Orya (Odisha) is also discussed, how he defeated the Gajapati king and made captive his son, and later on married the daughter of the 'Orya' king, so that the peace can be reached between the two kingdoms. Paes also discussed revenues of the kingdom, king's captains (*nayakas*), their place at the court and their power vis-a-vis the king.

16.3.2 Fernao Nuniz

Fernao Nuniz, a Portuguese horse-trader, composed his account around 1536-37. He was in the capital during the reign of Achyutaraya and may have been present at earlier battles fought by Krishnadevaraya. This visitor was particularly interested in the history of Vijayanagara, especially the foundation of the city, the subsequent careers of three dynasties of rulers, and the battles that they fought with the Deccan sultans and Odishan Rayas. Nunez, too, gives details of the Mahanavami festival, noting admiringly the extravagant jewels worn by the courtly women, as well as the thousands of women in the king's service.

Historical Account of the Vijayanagara Empire

Nuniz begins his account with the description of the attack of the sultan of Delhi (Delly), Muhammad bin Tughlaq on the kingdom of Bisnaga (derived from Vijaynagara; here it means the city of Anegundi, and also, before the establishment of the capital city at Vijayanagara, it was the capital of Sangam Dynasty of Vijaynagara empire). However, Nuniz claims that his chronicle is related to the kings of Bisnaga, who reigned from the era one thousand two hundred and thirty, which means 1230 CE, he is wrong about the date as it was 1336 when the Vijaynagara kingdom came into existence. Nuniz's narrative of the founding of the empire is not correct and can not be corroborated with the other sources, as he claims that the Sultan of Delhi attacked the city of Anegundi of which there are no other historical records. It's well known that the two brothers from the Kampili kingdom, who were captured by Tughlaq and later on appointed as commanders of the Sultan's campaigns against southern kingdoms, established the kingdom of Vijayanagara, and they had no connection with Anigundi before that.

There are other discrepancies in his historical account of the Vijayanagara, like the story of six captives at the Sultan's disposal, one of whom was made the king and people accepted him as the person of their faith, so this whole account seems to be imaginary and very less to believe in at as the truth, in this narrative it was the sultan who created the kingdom. Then he also mentioned the popular story of founding of the city of Bisnaga (Vijayanagara): once the king was on hunting and saw a hare 'which instead of fleeing from the dogs, ran towards them and bit them all...and seeing this the king astonished at so feeble thing biting dogs which had already caught for him a tiger and a lion, judged it to be not aware but some prodigy;...and arriving at the river, he met a hermit who was walking along the bank...whom he told what had happened...and being there hermit said that the king ought in that place to erect houses in which he could dwell and build a city..and so the king did.'

This city was named after the hermit, Vyadiajuna (Vidyaranya, Famous Madhwacharya, known as spiritual guide of Harihar and Bukka). He also mentions that the great temple of Virupaksha was built by Harihar I to show his respect for this Hermit. Then the

account continues with the details of kings who followed the founders on the throne, details of how the throne was usurped by Narsingh of Saluva dynasty, by whose name Portuguese recognise the kingdom of Vijayanagara as the kingdom of Narsymga, in the following part the information about the establishment of Tuluva dynasty is given. However, historians have questioned his details about the brothers of Krishnadevaraya, usurpation of the throne by Narsa Nayak.

After the accession of Krishnadevaraya on the throne, his campaigns in Odigair (Udaygiri), Raichur and Mudgal are described in great detail, especially the campaign against Rachol, a city of Ydalcão (Raichur which was under the occupation of Ismail Adil Shah of Bijapur). Nuniz discussed in detail what role the Portuguese played in this war. Having captured the fortress of Raichur the king also attacked 'Calbergara' (Gulbarga) and announced one of the captive sons of Bahmani king as 'King of the kingdom of Dequem (Deccan)'. However, he states that the sons of the Bahamani sultan were prisoned by Ismail Adil Shah but they were actually imprisoned by Amir Barid.

Nuniz has provided a detailed description of how Devaraya I built a dam to facilitate irrigation in the city of Vijayanagara. However, he confuses him with some Ajarao, but the description is very vivid and illustrative:

...the king desiring, desiring to increase that city and make it best in the kingdom, determined to bring to it a very large river which was at a distance of five leagues¹ away, believing that it would cause much profit if brought inside the city. And so he did, damming the river itself with great boulders;...and the water so brought he carried through such parts of the city as he pleased...by means of this water they made round about the city a quantity of gardens and orchards and great grooves of trees and vineyards, of which this country has many, and many plantations of lemons and oranges and roses, and other trees which in this country bear very good fruit.

Sewell 1991: 301

He also provided the information regarding the tank built by Krishnadevaraya, the account of Paes in this regard we have quoted above. However, Nuniz also mentions the Portuguese masons were invited by the king and the governor of Goa sent him Joao Della Ponte, a great worker in stone.

During Achyutaraya's reign, when Nuniz was in Vijayanagara, he gives details of the king's palace, his five hundred wives, five or six hundred women and eunuchs appointed as servants in the palace, the daily routine of the king and his large army and how it was maintained by his nobles. He also discusses the nine-day feast. However, his description is not that long and it provides some details which are not mentioned in Paes's account like the role played by different nobels and captains in it, he also mentions the reason behind it being celebrated:

...they do this in honour of the nine months during which our lady bore her son in the womb; others say that it is only done because at this time the captains come to pay their rents to the king.

Sewell 1991:376

Politico-administrative culture is discussed in detail in this account in comparison to the account of Paes (Sewell 1991: 384-90). In addition to this, while discussing the beliefs of 'heathens', he has also provided details of 'the custom of women burning themselves when their husband dies,' and how it was considered an honour. How the system of punishment and justice was at that time is also mentioned, like the crime of theft was punished by cutting off a foot and a hand, or outraging a

¹ A unit of measuring distance; 1 league = 3 miles.

respectable woman was punished by hanging, the treason by nobles was punished by 'impaling them alive on a wooden stake through the belly' (Sewell 1991: 383). While discussing the religious beliefs of the heathens (Hindus), he mentions the respect they give to Brahmins and cows, their belief in 'Three persons and only one god, most Holy Trinity, it is clear he was confused in this regard'.

Check Your Progress -2

- 1) Discuss the account of Vijaynagara city provided by Domingo Paes.
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- 2) What is the importance of the details of the historical account provided by Nuniz?
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- 3) What can we know about the royal authority from the accounts of Nuniz and Paes?
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- 4) Write a short note on the economic conditions of Vijaynagara as reflected in the accounts of Portuguese travellers.
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16.4 SIR THOMAS ROE

Roe was the most well known Englishman at Jahangir's court who arrived at the port of Surat in September 1615 CE carrying a letter from King James I to the Mughal Emperor, Jahangir, seeking a trade agreement, as he was also working for East India Company. Roe was at the royal court in Ajmer in January 1616 and remained at the court until August 1618, and in February 1619 he started his journey back to England.

The ambassador spent four years of negotiations at the Mughal court. During this time he not only kept a detailed journal but also penned letters to his business and personal contacts and to James I. The details of his presence in India and his relations with the *Padshah* have been published by the Hakluyt Society.

Thomas Roe had two sets of readers to address in his correspondence back home, one set belonged to East India Company officials, and the other, a select aristocratic and royal audience. His comprehensive description of the seventeenth-century Mughal court, and its customs, laws, and political culture was addressed to the aristocratic and royal audience. Banerjee (2017: 161) argues that 'Roe seeks to define Mughal India by a set of attributes which are diametrically opposed to

those of Jacobean England and, by extension, Europe'. His refusal to admit the points of connection suggests a desire to deflect onto the oriental 'other' what he didn't want to own in the 'self'. Chida-Razvi (2014: 266, 268) pointed out that the contradiction inherent in this dual role of Roe, had pushed him to convey the image of having a powerful authority in the Mughal court. England's stature as a country of little importance to Mughal trade and diplomacy became apparent to Roe on his very arrival, this also impacted his descriptions of the 'self' and the Mughals.

In his report of the first royal audience, he provides a brief account of courtly practices, etiquettes, the order of hierarchy, and emperors' daily routine. In this account, it can be seen that how he presents a theatrical picture of the emperor and his courtiers. This image of Jahangir's *darbar* or the public audience, not just informs us about the way the *darbar* was held, but gives a sense, as Roe wanted to represent it, that the power and pomp reflected in it is not real:

There is noe business done with him Concerning the state, government, disposition of warr or peace, but at one of these two last places, wher it is publicly propounded, and resolved, and soe registred, which if it were woorth the Curiosity might bee scene for two shillings, but the Common base people knew as much as the councill, and the Newes every day is the kings new resolutions tossed and censured by every rascall. This course is unchangeable, except sicknes or drinck prevent yt; which must be known, for as all his Subjects are slaves, so is he in a kynd of reciprocall bondage, for he is tyed to observe these howres and customes so precisely that if hee were unseene one day and noe sufficient reason rendred the people would mutinie; two dayes noe reason can excuse, but that he must consent to open his doores and bee scene by some to satisfye others.

Roe 1899: 106

Thomas Roe has discussed, in detail, the Mughal court and the interests of Jahangir. A four-inch gold thread attached with a miniature of Jahangir was gifted to the important nobles. The rich class used to hang that thread in their turban. Roe was also bestowed with this miniature of the emperor. He has also written about him and his religious beliefs, etc. The mention of Sir Thomas Roe's account is also important because it throws light on the secular outlook of the *padshah*. According to this, the *padshah* was satisfied with all religions but he did not like religious conversion (Roe 1899: 314). He also writes about the conversion of Daniyal's sons into Christianity but the reason he gave it for is the desire of Jahangir to have a Portuguese wife. Sir Thomas Roe has written that once Jahangir met a monk at a place called Toda near Jaipur, Jahangir spoke to that monk with such affinity, kindness and humility which is not easily seen in any king...he hugged him in his arms while no clean person would even dare to touch him, thrice placed his hand on his chest and called him father (Roe 1899: 366). In this description, we see not just acceptance but the reverence of Jahangir for non-Islamic faiths which was quite strange for Roe.

To share proceeds of hunting games, on behalf of the *Padshah*, was considered a sign of his grace. The *Padshah* had shown such grace many times. He has given a very interesting description of *Jharokha Darshan*. It is known from his description that the royal women also used to accompany the *padshah* at the time of *darshan*. They used to sit behind 'lattice windows' (Roe 1899: 320). Roe had twice accompanied the *Padshah* in the celebrations of births, celebrated in Agra and Mandu, and twelve elephants, decorated with gold-encrusted seats and waving flags having diamonds and gold embroidery, passed in front of the *Padshah*. The elephants saluted the *Padshah* by 'bowing down gracefully'. *Tula* donation

ceremony also took place. The *Padshah* was weighed with gold and silver, diamonds and jewels, silk and *zari* clothes, spices, etc.

Row says that ‘though the drunkenness be a common and a glorious vice, and an exercise of the kings, yet it is so strictly forbidden that no men can enter the Guzelchan (*Gusalkhana*) where the king sits’. If a person dared to do so, he would have to face whipping. The whip was ‘a formidable weapon, having four-pointed knots on both sides of its handle, and each blow inflicted four wounds.’ In this description, Roe shows the anomalies inherent in Jahangir’s personality.

Roe has written, in detail, about the ceremony organised at the occasion when the emperor wears his armour before going on any military campaign and about the arrival of the *Padshah* in the camp. Describing the army camp (*leskar*) area, he writes that there were all kinds of shops. Shops were arranged in such a way that one could ‘separately identify’ what to buy where and what, this camp might ‘equal almost any town in Europe for greatness’ (Roe 1899: 363).

He has also described the episode of Khusrau, his popularity, his father’s love for him. He writes that Khurram, Nur Jahan, Asaf Khan and Itmad-ud-Daulah used to do whatever they wanted. He was the master of everything. Together they hatched a conspiracy against Khusrau. He writes: ‘The poor prince got caught in the lion’s claws. He gave up eating and drinking and wanted his father to kill him so that he would not become a cause of triumph and delight for his enemies. The whole court whispered, rumours started spreading, the whole situation became very dire’ (Roe 1899: 294). He had a complete idea of the power of Nur Jahan’s ‘group’ in the court. He criticised the influence of Nur Mahal on Jahangir,

a woman is not only always an ingredient, but commonly principal drug and of most virtue; and she shows that they are not capable of conducting business, nor herself void of witt and subtlety. **Roe 1899: 364**

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) What are the characteristics of Roe’s description of Jahangir’s court?

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- 2) How did Roe view Jahangir’s religious behaviour?

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16.5 FRANCISCO PELSEAERT

Pelsaert was a Dutch factor (*Gumashta*) who lived in Agra during Jahangir’s time. He has given a very interesting description of the social and economic conditions of many places in the subcontinent of India. His description is a kind of report, which is based on his experiences and explorations done by him. He sent it to the directors of the Dutch company so that it could help them to know the possibility of benefitting the Dutch in trade in South Asia and Europe. His report has details about the city of Agra, the trading activities in Agra and eastern part of the country, the Dutch trade in northern India, Burhanpur and Gujarat’s commercial profile,

Mughal administration, living conditions of lower sections of the society as well as of elites, and religious practises of the Hindus.

Pelsaert entered India from Masulipatnam and visited most of the important places related to production and trade in the northern and western parts of the entire subcontinent. Writing about Gujarat, he has written about the many centres of production, the many varieties of cloth produced there, the import of raw materials from remote places such as Patna and Bengal or from Malabar, and towns located in the south-west of Gujarat.

Some other important centres are also mentioned by Pelsaert like, Lahore was mentioned as being a major trading centre in the past for the central Asian trade and the wider region beyond. Multan and Thatta, which were famous for the textile industry, sugar, sulphur and indigo. He also travelled to Kashmir and described the people there, important products from there and the miserable condition of the houses and people there. He has also written about saffron and many types of fruits grown there.

Pelsaert has given a very interesting description of Agra. He has written about the structure of the city, the houses of the rich and the poor, their food habits, the markets of different goods and the variety of goods available there. He mentions all the routes that connected Agra with important centres of production. He has also records the famous building structures there, like *Madari darwaza*, *Chaharsu darwaza*, *Nim darwaza*, *Nuri darwaza* (according to him all these gates were built by Akbar), *Shahburj* (royal bastion, 'in appearance as well as in cost it surpasses many of the most famous structures in the world'), *Ghusalkhana*, the palace of Nurjahan Begum, two gardens named, Char Bagh and Moti Mahal and so on. 'There is little or no room within the fort, it is occupied by various prickly edifices and residences, as well as mahals, or places for ladies. Among these is the palace of *Maryam Makani*, wife of Akbar and mother of Jahangir, as well as three mahals...' (Pelsaert 1925: 3). The eastern (*Pourop*) trade centres mentioned in his description, are: Jaunpur (produces and exports large quantities of cotton goods), Banaras (also produces girdles, turbans, clothes for Hindu women, also copper pots, dishes, basins, and other articles for use in Hindu houses), Awadh (produces coarse clothe), Lakhawar (superior white cloth), Patna (silk, muslin), Chabaspur and Sonargaon (in Bengal, produces high quality muslin) (Pelsaert 1925: 7-8).

From what Pelsaert has written about the spice trade in Agra, it is known how sharp his vision was and how clear was his understanding. The various methods used by Indian merchants while competing with the Dutch in the spice trade have been described. He has informed us which spices were brought into the market of Agra. He then advised the directors of the Dutch company how to organise their spice trade in India so that they could get maximum profit and to channelise this profit into the business of Indian textiles and indigo.

Pelsaert has no match for what he has written about the production of Indigo, and especially the production of indigo in Bayana. The available information about indigo production methods used in Bayana can be used to compare medieval Indian and British techniques. He describes that usually the crop is sown in June, before the rainy season sets in, and is cultivated before the winter season so that it doesn't lose its colour. He writes:

The yield of one bigha is usually put into each *put*, and allowed to steep for 16 or 17 hours, that *put* being about 38 ft. in the perimeter, and its depth the height of an ordinary man; the water is then run off into a round *put*, constructed at somewhat lower level, 32 ft. in circumference and 6 ft. deep. two or three men standing in the *put* work the indigo back and forward with their arms, and owing to the continuous motion the water absorbs the dark-blue colour. It is then allowed to stand again for 16 hours, during which then the matter, or substance, settles in a bowl shaped receptacle at the bottom of the round *put*. The water is then run off through outlet...the indigo which has sunk down...laid on cotton cloths until it becomes as firm as soap, when it is made into balls.

Pelsaert 1925:11

While discussing social conditions, he focusses on the poor conditions of the lower strata of society. According to him the conditions of three classes of the workmen (artisans), servants and shopkeepers are not very different from the conditions of voluntary slavery. Workmen have two problems, one, the lower wages, and the other is the oppression by 'the governor, the nobles, the kotwal, the bakhshi and other royal officers'. For these elites, they have to work either without any remuneration and or for very meagre payment. In the same manner, servants, 'exceedingly numerous in this country', their duties well defined both within a household and outside, are also not well paid, and 'their wages often left in arrears in several months, and then paid in worn-out clothes or other things'. However, 'shopkeepers are held in greater respect than the workman and some of them are even well-to-do'. But, they are also victims of the noble class's whims and arbitrary behaviours (Pelsaert 1925: 64).

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) How Pelsaert has described the city of Agra?

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- 2) What can we know from the account of Pelsaert about the social conditions of that time?

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16.6 JEAN BAPTISTE TAVERNIER

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier was the most famous French traveller of the seventeenth century. He was a jeweller by profession and came to India during the reign of Shah Jahan. He was an experienced and adventurous traveller and was not afraid of the dangers of travel. He had made seven trips to the east, out of which he came to India six times. These journeys took place during 1641-1642; 1645-1647; 1651-1654; 1657-1661; and 1665-1667. During his first two visits, Tavernier had scoured almost the whole of India. During his first visit, he travelled to Surat, Burhanpur, Agra, Dhaka, Goa and Golconda. In Golconda, he inquired about the diamond mines and possibly even saw the mines.

During his second journey, he reached Golconda by the Daulatabad-Nander route and in addition to the diamond mines there, he had also visited the mines of Dakhlakonda (modern Ramalakota) and Gani or Kollur. During his third journey,

he visited places like Masulipatnam, Madras, Gandikote, etc. on the east coast, and from there he proceeded towards Golconda to sell his jewels. The deal could not go through due to high prices and he soon left for Surat from here. In Surat, he received an invitation from Shaista Khan, the *subadar* of Gujarat, to come to Ahmadabad. From here he again went to Surat via the Aurangabad route with the purpose of doing business in the diamond mines of Golconda and nearby places and had returned to Surat in the same year.

In 1657, he again visited India, and the purpose of this trip was to supply the goods ordered by Shaista Khan. He had some rare items which he sold to Shaista Khan. Shaista Khan was besieging the Deccan at the time. After completing his work, Tavernier again turned to Golconda, and from here went to Surat again in 1660 or early 1661. By this time Tavernier had achieved substantial prosperity. On his return home, he was awarded the title of nobility by Louis XIV for his services. He bought the barony of Aubonne near Geneva and started living there with comfort and opulence. It was here that he thought of publishing his account. In 1675 his account was published under the title *Nouvelle Relation du Searcilda Grand Signior*. And, *The Six Voyages* was published the following year. These books were soon published in English, German and Italian languages, and became popular soon.

On his last voyage, he had many valuables to trade with. Via Burhanpur, Sironj, Gwalior, Agra, he reached Jehanabad and met Aurangzeb and his important nobles. He succeeded in selling his most precious jewels to the *Padshah*. After staying in Jehanabad for two months, he again proceeded to Agra and from here returned to Surat. This was his last journey. The fact that Tavernier had lived in India for a very long time is also attested by the descriptions he provided of the major trade centres of India. Therefore, his visit is of great importance to the Mughal history of the seventeenth century. But we must also remember that his aim was not to observe and study the people and regions of India. Whatever he thought important from the point of view of a businessman, he has focussed only on those things. His focus is more on mentioning the successes of his trade bargainings, but due to this tendency, he provides important information about the tricks and methods used in commercial activities by merchants, moneylenders, and *sarrafs* in India. He comments on the close-fisted nature of the *sarrafs* in the following manner:

...of all the gold which remains on the touchstone after an assay has been made, and of which were here make no account, far from so small a thing to be lost, they collect it with the aid of a ball, made half of the black pitch, and half of wax, with which they rub the stone which carries the gold, and at the end of some years, they burn the ball and so obtain the gold which it had accumulated. The ball is about the size of our tennis-court balls, and the stone is like those which our goldsmiths commonly use.

Tavernier Vol. II: 29, 30

Commenting on the importance of the *sarrafs*, Tavernier writes; ‘All the Jews who occupy themselves with money and exchange in the empire of the Grand Seigneur pass for being very sharp, but in India, they would scarcely be apprentices to these changers...’ (Tavernier Vol. II: 24). He also describes the methods used in the production and sale of certain trade commodities like spices, musk, indigo, ivory, etc. which are very important from the point of view of knowledge of the history of Indian commercial practices. Being written by an experienced and expert trader, the importance of this description becomes more clear. His description of gems and pearls is very precise and clear.

Tavernier constantly told people that he was travelling under the patronage of the emperors of France and Persia. Due to this, he used to get opportunities to sit and make contact with the nobles and high officials of the royal court. He was called to appraise the jewels, etc. of the royal treasury. The interesting and vivid description of Kohinoor became available because of the reason that he had got full opportunity to see and examine Kohinoor. He has given details of the prominent nobles of the Mughal Empire, such as Shaista Khan, and also of how he negotiated the sales of precious stones, which is very interesting. He has also mentioned Mir Jumala's administrative skills and exemplary methods of conducting business. He has given interesting details about Jafar Khan, the *wazir*, and his wise wife.

From the description of Tavernier, important information is obtained regarding the Mughal court and military system. Its details are also very important about the office of *qazi* and the administration of justice, octroi house and officials, etc. Tavernier also provides various references of foreign powers and their representative employees who competed with each other in Eastern trade.

In his description, we get interesting details of the temples of Keshavdev in Mathura, Vishwanath in Benaras, Jagannath in Puri, and also of Tirupati temple. Not only the architectural style of these temples at that time can be known from the description but the rituals performed there, the incomes of these temples are also mentioned in it. But, he pays attention only to the external side of the religious customs, and could not transgress his preconceived notions of 'idolatry', 'poor idolaters', 'the worship of devils', etc. (Tavernier Vol. II, 225-237). Similarly, the description of Hindu festivals and processions is also very interesting. He has also provided the details of the groups and communities of the mystics and their lives and other facts.

Like most of the Europeans, he has shown great interest, in detailing the methods of *sati*. He says that for performing of *sati* the governor's permission was required. There were three methods of performing *sati* which he encountered in India. In 'the kingdom of Gujarat, and as far as Agra and Delhi', in Bengal, and in the kingdom of Coromandel. Here is how he describes this custom:

it is also an ancient custom among the idolaters of India that on a man dying his widow can never remarry; as soon, therefore, as he is dead she withdraws to weep for her husband, and some days afterwards her hair is shaved off, and she despoils herself of all the ornaments with which her person was adorned, she removes from her arms and legs the bracelets which her husband had given her, when espousing her, as a sign that she was to be submissive and bound to him, and she remains for the rest of her life without being of any consideration, and worse than a slave, in the place where previously she was mistress. This miserable condition causes her to detest life, and prefer to ascend a funeral pile to be consumed alive with the body of her defunct husband, rather than be regarded for the remainder of her days with opprobrium and infamy by all the world.

Tavernier Vol. II: 209

There are some misconceptions in Tavernier's account. For example, he describes the disintegration of the Bahmani kingdom resulted in the emergence of the Vijayanagara kingdom. Apart from this, he claims to have seen many such incidents with his eyes which he had not actually seen. His description of Bijapur city is also doubtful. He had never been to Bijapur.

The period during which he was in India was the period of heightened trade of the Dutch in South-East Asia. In Tavernier's view (Vol. I: 188), the Dutch had realised the advantages of having the Asian army under efficient leadership. He clearly states in his description that the Dutch were emerging as a major power in South

India . Overall, the accounts of Tavernier are very important for the construction of the history of the Mughal Empire, especially for the knowledge of economic history.

Check Your Progress-5

- 1) Critically assess the importance of Tavernier's account to understand the economic conditions of medieval times.

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- 2) How did Tavernier view Indian religious practices?

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16.7 FRANCOIS BERNIER

Bernier's well-known assertions were that 'Asiatic states lacked private property in land, or a hereditary nobility and the personalistic monarchs ruled tyrannically and arbitrarily' (Tambiah 1998: 362). To understand his assertions we have to delve into the background from which Bernier came to India, and how it impacted his perceptions about India. Bernier was known by other Europeans to possess a superior formal education: born in Joué (in the region of Anjou), he had spent time in the 1640s in Paris, studying with the noted philosopher Pierre Gassendi, professor of mathematics for a time in the Collège Royal. After travels in Germany and Italy, Bernier had returned to France in the early 1650s to become the secretary of Gassendi, at the same time, he managed to obtain a medical degree from the Faculty of Montpellier. Bernier would have stayed on in France to help publish and further divulge the works of his master. Instead, he chose for reasons that are still not entirely clear beyond the stereotypical 'desire to see the world' – to leave France on a long voyage. A voyage via the ports of Jiddah and Mokha in the Red Sea in 1658 brought him, in early 1659, to Surat. He travelled far and wide in India, starting from Ahmadabad and then via Agra to Kashmir and Bengal. After staying at Kasim Bazar for some time, he left for Masulipatnam and Golconda and from here, went back to Surat.

Meanwhile, he managed to find a powerful patron in the form of the Iranian *amir* and intellectual Mulla Muhammad Shafi Yazdi, who held the title of Danishmand Khan; the noble who had by the later years of his career attained the post of *mir bakhshi*. Bernier was appreciated generally in the Mughal court for his medical skills, and by Danishmand Khan personally for his knowledge of the classical tradition in Greek and Latin, and of more concurrent European intellectual developments.

Bernier, 'on the one hand, had apparently brought the best of European knowledge in its post-Galilean moment to the Islamic world of the Mughals, he also eventually brought the reality of the Mughals to a European audience.' Four works published in 1670 and 1671 created his reputation as the principal interpreter of India in

Europe in his generation: first, the *Histoire de la dernière révolution des Etats du Grand Mogol*, and the *Evenemens particuliers*; and then the two letter-collections from 1671, both entitled *Suite des Mémoires du Sieur Bernier*. Many of these were translated by the mid-1670s into English, Italian, Dutch, and German, providing him with an even larger audience.

While Bernier presented himself in the 'cosmopolitan' guise in these published works, at the same time, he was expected 'as a patriotic Frenchman to place his considerable knowledge of the political, cultural, and commercial scene in India at the disposal of the newly-formed Compagnie royale des Indes Orientales' (Subrahmanyam 2017: 3).

The 'Despotic Mughals'

Bernier's arrival in India came at a time when the war of succession was going on between the sons of Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb's enthronement took place during his stay in India. In this way, Bernier got an opportunity to see and understand the events of the period of two influential Mughal rulers. Shah Jahan died while he was in Masulipatnam. He has described the civil war or 'revolution', the war of succession in which all the prominent nobles of the country took part. Along with this, he has described the events that happened between the end of the civil war and his departure from India.

Bernier has portrayed the important personalities of the time in detail. Of Dara, he says: 'Dara was not lacking in good qualities and was very generous, but he had a very high opinion of himself. He believed that he could do everything with the power of his mind. He was very rude to those who tried to give him advice or to make him aware of the situation. That is why even his best-loved friends did not alert him about the conspiracies and tricks of his brothers.' He describes Aurangzeb as a person lacking the decency and noble conduct similar to Dara, but he had amazing decision-making ability and his eyesight was very sharp in selecting his assistants and well-wishers. He was serious, intelligent and was very skilful at keeping his ideas and plans a secret. About Shahjahan's powerful daughter he writes, 'Jahanara Begum Sahib was a very dear child of her father.' Bernier was aware of Jahanara's unlimited influence over Shah Jahan and interference in important matters. So, in Bernier's views, all the politico-administrative power is dependent on the persons of the royal family, at the same time, he recognises the lawless-ness prevalent in this country which allows royal officials to exercise 'an authority almost absolute over the peasantry, and nearly as much over the artisans and merchants of the towns and villages...no great lords, parliaments, or judges of local courts, exist as in France, to restrain the wickedness of the merciless oppressors, and the kadis, or judges, are not invested with sufficient power to redress the wrongs...' (Bernier 1914: 224)

The Condition of Commerce in India

In a letter to Colbert, Bernier describes the articles of commerce, its manufactures and exports, its imports, and the flow of gold and silver into it. Bengal is known not only for the production of foodstuffs but also for articles of commerce such as silks, cotton and indigo which are produced here. Other parts of the country are also famous for manufacturing not only silk and cotton goods but also carpets, brocades, embroideries, gold and silver cloths. According to him, a variety of goods are brought into India from outside countries, but 'the import of these goods

does not require the export of gold or silver in exchange because it is relatively more profitable for the outside traders to take away the best products from here in exchange.’ (Bernier 1914: 204). Thus, even after the supply of foreign goods and products, a large part of the world’s gold and silver is ‘absorbed’ in India, whose means of arrival are many, while there are hardly any means to outflow (Bernier 1914: 204).

The Absence of Private Property

‘In Hindustan, the *Padshah* is the owner of the entire land’, this assessment by Bernier created an impression in the minds of European intellectuals that in India there are no private property rights. It is clear that the above statement of Bernier is far from the truth. Bernier got this wrong impression because he could not understand the *jagir*-system’s working in India. Habib (1963: Chapter 5) has shown that in Mughal India there was no single ‘private property’ right, whether it be claimed by ruler or independent gentry. There were various rights over the land, to its tenure and to varying shares in its produce, which were ‘individually salable’. Bernier has also mentioned the rule of escheat to show that the positions of nobles were very unstable vis-à-vis the *Padshah*. ‘The King being the proprietor of all the lands in the empire, there can exist neither Dukedoms nor Marquisates; nor can any family be found possessed of wealth arising from a domain, and living upon its own patrimony’ (Bernier 1914: 211). The Mughal emperor, being heir to ‘the possessions of his Amir lords, systematically dispossessed their sons and grandsons, and reduced the latter at any rate to beggary or the status of mere troopers’. In fact, this rule was enforced in cases where nobles owed arrears (*mutaliba*) to the state. Generally, after claiming the *mutaliba*, the rest of the property was returned to the family of the deceased by the state.

Bernier has provided important details about the cultivators and the land tenures, which gives a good idea of the condition of agriculture in that period. According to him a large part of good land remains uncultivated due to lack of labourers and tenants as most of them die as a result of the bad behaviour of *subadar*, etc. It happens that most of the cultivators, frustrated by the oppression, leave the place and go to the cities or cantonments to find some other accessible means of subsistence. Sometimes they take refuge in a Raja’s territory because they are less likely to be oppressed there and get some relief (Bernier 1914: 367). Using this information, while Irfan Habib shows the continuous resistance faced by the Mughal state from the peasantry, Tambiah argues that this itself contradicts the image of an all-powerful despotic Mughal state.

Check Your Progress-6

- 1) What does Bernier mean by ‘despotic’ Mughal power?

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- 2) Critically examine Bernier’s views on private property rights in India.

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16.8 NICOLO MANUCCI

Nicolo Manucci was born in Venice, Italy. At a very young age Manucci boarded a ship for the Mughal port of Surat via Bandar Abbas sometime between 1653 and 1655, and after about 1656, was employed, as an artilleryman, by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh. From the Jesuit fathers, he learned the Persian language and went on to dedicate himself to medicine. He provided his services as a physician in the court of ‘the Emperor of Mogol’, and observed ‘the rites, customs, government, their religion. and everything that takes place in the running of a great empire.’ After Dara’s imprisonment and execution, he departed for Patna and Bengal; and later on, returned to Agra and Delhi, and got employment with Mirza Raja Jai Singh. After this, he exited Mughal service and joined Portuguese, this on and off with Mughal service continued, and during his final years he was in Pondicherry, after living for some time in Madras and working for East India Company. He begins to write his memoirs and sends them in 1700 to Paris, where they end up in the hands of the Jesuits. A distorted version appears in 1705 from the pen of François Catrou as *Histoire générale de l’empire du Mogol depuis sa fondation, sur les mémoires portugais de M. Manouchi* (Paris 1705).

Historians engaged in the explorations of Mughal India have extensively used Manucci’s works in different ways. ‘In so doing, these refer not to the original text of his *Storia del Mogol* which... has an extremely complex publication history, but to the very serviceable four-volume English translation produced by William Irvine of the Indian Civil Service in 1907-8 under the hybrid title, half Italian and half Portuguese, of *Storia do Mogor*’ (Subrahmanyam 2008: 40).

We find, in his works, a vivid description of the political situations of the time. Manucci has described the circumstances of Dara’s betrayal and death, and the merited destiny of Aurangzeb, the campaign around Goa, and the Mogul attacks on and conquest of Golconda are discussed in detail. He has provided detailed accounts of Aurangzeb’s movements between 1700 and 1707, with references to the desolate state of the country, a long drought from 1702 to 1704, and the intrusions of the Marathas into Masulipatam and as far north as Gwalior. Manucci’s observations regarding seventeenth-century Mughal India’s customs and traditions are very significant. Manucci’s information on the musical traditions of Gwalior *Gharana*, the religious beliefs of the Parsi community, Surat as a flourishing commercial centre of Mughal India, the seventeenth-century perceptions about the liberal approach of Akbar, the Mina Bazaars, Mughal *Harem*, etc. appear to be factual and relevant. Some historians criticised Manucci for his gossipy style and reliance on the ‘*bazaar* gossips’. Subrahmanyam categorises him as ‘*passer cultural*’, which means a person ‘who mediated effortlessly between one cultural complex and another’ (Subrahmanyam 2008: 38).

Manucci categorically defined his life in Mughal India, and also with the Gentiles in a negative framework, he finds it unaccommodating. He writes:

...(E)ven if with God’s favour I had the good luck to find some good fortune there, I never wanted to settle there, because in reality they do not have the things to delight or affect the mind of a person from Europe to want to stay on there, for they

are good neither for the body, and even less for the soul: for the body, since it is necessary to constantly live in vigil for there are never words that can be trusted and everything must be judged suspiciously and in the opposite sense to what has been said, for they are perfectly accustomed to act as the proverb goes in my land: good words and sad works mislead the wise and the foolish alike. So, when they claim to be your greatest friends, it is necessary to watch out doubly. It is not good for the soul, both because of the liberties that there are in them, and because of the lack of Catholic observances, and so when I could withdraw from there, I did so, and never returned there save when I was obliged to by necessity,...

Subrahmanyam 2008: 61

The third part in which most of the sections are described under the title ‘Brief Notice concerning what the Gentiles of this India believe and state regarding the essence of God’, and this part begins with a detailed discussion of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra (Shiva). However, the same section moves on narrating the customs and government of these people, this description brings out his biased, prejudiced and pre-determined perception regarding these peoples. Manucci’s observations are referring to the *Nayaka* kingdoms of southern India, in this case. He presents this section as the ‘manner of government that they have amongst themselves’ in the following way:

The government of the Gentiles is the most tyrannical and the most barbarous that one can imagine, because, besides the fact that all the kings are foreigners (étrangers), they treat their subjects worse than slaves; all lands belong to the Crown, and there is no subject who has his own lands, or heritage, or possession of any sort that he can leave to his children.

Subrahmanyam 2008: 63

Representation of the Women

Manucci has provided us with detailed accounts of the Mughal *harem*, and the influence of powerful women on the Mughal polity. He writes about princess Jahanara that she ‘had an annual income of three million rupees, in addition to the revenues of the port of Surat, assigned for her expenditure on betel. She had, in addition, many precious stones and jewels that had been given to her by her father’. Recently historians have explored the gendered tropes in which the women were being represented in the writings of the European travellers. Chatterjee argues that in the European travel narratives, the assumed binaries of Hindu women and Muslim women dissolves, most of the time.

Chatterjee, while commenting on Teltscher’s suggestion that in earlier European representations the classical literary framework is adopted to depict a determined and courageous *sati*, says, the travel/authors do not always relate the *sati* to the classical heroine; there are many more ways in which this phenomenon is described. While condemning the institution of *sati*, the travellers highlight a strong suspicion at the strange behaviour of the *sati*. As can be seen in Manucci’s description, Chatterjee argues, that the *sati*’s agency always remained in question, even if not undermined. ‘Within the narrative of a single travel/author (here, Manucci), we can see different tropes used to depict the act of *sati*’ (Chatterjee 2013: 72). Manucci begins his description of a *sati* by praising the courage of the widow, and then the description turns to one of horror.

In this way, we can say that Manucci’s voluminous writings are very significant to understand the European perspectives regarding the Mughals and Indian subcontinent’s socio-cultural milieu in the seventeenth century.

Check Your Progress-7

- 1) How Manucci was different from other European travellers?

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- 2) Discuss Manucci's description of *sati*.

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16.9 SUMMARY

In this Unit, we have discussed the writings of European travellers to India, beginning with Nikitin, who came to India from Russia at the end of the fifteenth century and ending with the Italian traveller Nicolo Manucci, whose writings appeared at the very beginning of the eighteenth century. Between these centuries, vast changes occurred in the Indian politico-cultural environment, while this period was the time when the commercial companies coming from Europe were emerging in the Indian scene. Some travellers were associated with these companies, like Paes, Nuniz, and Thomas Roe, some were independent merchants, such as Tavernier, while others were independent explorers and were connected with the new intellectual developments taking place in Europe, such as Bernier. There was also a different personality like Manucci, a 'footloose'. While their personal and political circumstances influenced their accounts, the atmosphere of this unknown country created astonishment in them, and at times even fear. Their own sense of religious superiority, as well as, ignorance, of most of them, of the Indian languages, at times, narrowed their perceptions of Indian culture and beliefs. Regarding the nature of political power and socio-cultural atmosphere in India, they created such images (Asiatic despotism, lack of private ownership in land, and morally corrupt religious-social traditions) which were extensively used in the creation of India-related knowledge in Europe, from Montesquieu to Marx used it in their theorisations. Although, in many cases, the descriptions of these European travellers record those dimensions of the Indian past that have either been overlooked as considered taken for granted by Indian observers themselves, or were impossible to be recorded in the court chronicles of Persian writers because of their fixed convention, for example, the lives of the lower strata of India, the Mughal *harem* life, the methods of economic production and their distribution, etc. What we have to keep in our mind while studying these European accounts, are the biases and prejudices with which they came, and also the influences the settings had on them in which they were functioning.

16.10 KEYWORDS

Gentile

This term was used by the Europeans to describe Indians, who were not Muslims

Contained conflict

Sanjay Subrahmanyam used this term to characterise the interaction between Europeans and Asians (and in

particular Indians) in the period from roughly 1500 to 1750. Which far from being a period in which Europeans carefully and inexorably moved to conquer and subjugate Asia and its inhabitants, was witness to important forms of cooperation between Europeans and Asians

**The Kingdom of
Narsymga/Bisnaga**

Portuguese travellers called Vijayanagara empire ‘the kingdom of Narsymga’ (which indicates to Saluva dynasty’s Narsingh, who usurped the power from Sangam Dynasty); the term Bisnaga was derived from Vijaynagara

**Asiatic (Oriental)
Despotism**

A particularly oppressive form of despotic government especially, identified with pre-modern Asian polities. Bernier’s account, specifically, created an image of the Mughal state which characterises oriental despotism. Later on, European intellectuals used these travel accounts to theorise pre-modern Indian polities

Sati

The act or custom of a Hindu widow burning herself to death on the funeral pyre of her husband. The description of *sati* was a regular feature in most of the European travel writings, not only it influenced the discourse on woman’s agency in this act but also created the impressions that the Hindu religious practices were harsh.

16.11 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sub-section 16.2.1, India and Its people
- 2) See Sub-section 16.2.2, Cities and Commercial activities

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 16.3.1
- 2) See Sub-section 16.3.2
- 3) See Sub-section 16.3.1 and 16.3.2
- 4) See Sub-section 16.3.1 and 16.3.2

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Section 16.4, the description of Jahangir’s *darbar*
- 2) See Section 16.4.

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) See Section 16.5
- 2) See Section 16.5, the last paragraph of that Section

Check Your Progress-5

- 1) See Section 16.6, discuss the routes he travelled and trade centres he described
- 2) See Section 16.6, discuss his views on temples and priests

Check Your Progress-6

- 1) See Section 16.7, The Despotic Mughals
- 2) See Section 16.7, The Absence of Private Property

Check Your Progress-7

- 1) See Section 16.8
- 2) See Section 16.8, Representation of the Women

16.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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16.13 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mughal Historiography and Sources - III

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQzm9h0gXAI>

