



International Journal of Advanced Research

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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: **IJAR-58173**

Title: An Analysis of the Travelogue of François Bernier and His Depiction of the Subcontinent.

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision.....

Rating	Excel .	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity		✓		
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer Report

Overall Assessment

The manuscript entitled “**An Analysis of the Travelogue of François Bernier and His Depiction of the Subcontinent**” presents a thoughtful examination of François Bernier's writings on seventeenth-century Mughal India and attempts to situate his observations within the broader intellectual, political, and cultural contexts of early modern Europe. Rather than treating Bernier merely as a traveller documenting an unfamiliar land, the paper argues that his writings served multiple purposes: recording Mughal society, critiquing the absolutist tendencies of contemporary France, and contributing to the evolution of European intellectual engagement with India. The manuscript successfully demonstrates that Bernier's travel accounts should be interpreted not simply as descriptive narratives but as historically significant texts that influenced subsequent European understandings of the Indian subcontinent. This perspective provides the article with a clear scholarly contribution and distinguishes it from studies that rely solely on descriptive summaries of travel literature.

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The manuscript is well organized and progresses logically from Bernier's intellectual background and arrival in India to thematic discussions on the Mughal court, Oriental despotism, economy, religion, education, gender, and cultural relativism before arriving at a balanced conclusion. The author has engaged with a number of important secondary sources, including the works of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Joan-Pau Rubiés, Faith Evelyn Beasley, Sakul Kundra, Michael Fisher, and Edward Oaten, alongside Bernier's own travel accounts. This demonstrates a reasonable familiarity with the existing historiography and enables the author to place Bernier within contemporary scholarly debates regarding European travel writing and knowledge production. The discussion on Bernier's dual role as both an observer of Mughal India and an indirect critic of Louis XIV's France is particularly noteworthy and adds analytical depth to the article. Similarly, the sections dealing with Bernier's observations on female agency and his appreciation of Mughal architecture provide a balanced interpretation that moves beyond viewing him solely as an orientalist thinker.

Overall, the manuscript represents a valuable contribution to the study of medieval Indian historiography and European travel narratives. The paper combines historical description with interpretative analysis and succeeds in highlighting both the contributions and limitations of Bernier's writings. While certain aspects require refinement to enhance analytical depth, historiographical engagement, and overall presentation, these issues are relatively minor and do not detract from the significance of the study. The manuscript possesses sufficient originality, coherence, and academic merit to be considered for publication after minor revisions.

Strengths of the Paper

One of the greatest strengths of the manuscript lies in its balanced interpretation of François Bernier. Instead of portraying him exclusively as either a reliable observer or an orientalist critic, the paper recognizes the complexity of his writings and demonstrates that his travelogue functioned simultaneously as an account of Mughal India, a commentary on European political developments, and an important source for understanding early modern intellectual exchanges between Europe and South Asia. This nuanced approach reflects careful engagement with both primary and secondary literature and allows the discussion to move beyond simplistic characterizations of Bernier's work.

The manuscript also benefits from a coherent thematic organization. Each section addresses a distinct aspect of Bernier's observations, including court politics, economic thought, Oriental despotism, religious practices, education, scientific reasoning, gender relations, and cultural relativism. This organization

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enables the reader to appreciate the multidimensional nature of Bernier's travel writings while maintaining a clear narrative throughout the article. The transitions between sections are generally logical, and the conclusion effectively reiterates the principal argument that Bernier's writings should be interpreted within their broader historical and intellectual context rather than through an exclusively colonial lens.

Another notable strength is the author's engagement with historiographical debates. The discussion incorporates important scholarly interpretations regarding Bernier's empiricism, his association with Pierre Gassendi, his critique by Nicolò Manucci, and his influence on subsequent European political thought. The manuscript also demonstrates awareness of the limitations of Bernier's observations by acknowledging his elite bias, linguistic constraints, and tendency to interpret Mughal society through European intellectual frameworks. This balanced treatment enhances the credibility of the analysis and prevents the paper from becoming either wholly celebratory or overly critical of Bernier's work. Furthermore, the article successfully demonstrates that Bernier's travelogue cannot simply be understood as a travel narrative but should also be viewed as an important intellectual document that influenced European perceptions of India. The discussion of concepts such as Oriental despotism, economic decline, state formation, religious practices, and female agency illustrates the wider historical significance of Bernier's writings. The manuscript therefore contributes meaningfully to the literature on travel writing, Mughal historiography, and cross-cultural intellectual history while remaining accessible to readers interested in early modern South Asian history.

Areas to be Improved

While the manuscript demonstrates considerable scholarly merit, several aspects could be strengthened to further enhance its academic quality. The introduction provides a detailed historical background on Bernier's life and intellectual development; however, it would benefit from a more explicit statement of the research objectives and central argument. At present, the reader must infer the primary purpose of the paper from the subsequent discussion. A concise paragraph outlining the principal research question, the methodological approach, and the structure of the article would improve clarity and provide stronger direction from the outset.

The manuscript successfully draws upon several important scholarly works, yet the historiographical discussion could be expanded further. Much of the existing literature cited consists of established studies that have become foundational in the field. Incorporating a few recent publications on European travel

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REVIEWER'S REPORT

writing, Mughal historiography, Orientalism, and cross-cultural knowledge production would strengthen the contemporary relevance of the paper and demonstrate engagement with ongoing academic debates. Such additions would not require substantial restructuring but would further reinforce the scholarly foundation of the article.

Although the paper contains thoughtful analytical observations, certain sections remain primarily descriptive. In several instances, lengthy summaries of Bernier's observations are presented before analytical interpretation is introduced. Greater emphasis on explaining why these observations were historically significant, how they shaped subsequent European understandings of India, and how modern historians have reassessed Bernier's interpretations would deepen the analytical contribution of the manuscript. The discussion would become even stronger if descriptive passages were more consistently followed by historiographical interpretation and critical evaluation.

The section dealing with the concept of **Oriental Despotism** represents one of the strongest parts of the paper and demonstrates careful engagement with Bernier's political thought. Nevertheless, this discussion could be developed further by acknowledging the subsequent evolution of the concept within European political philosophy and colonial discourse. While the manuscript correctly recognizes that Bernier's ideas later influenced colonial understandings of India, a brief discussion of how later scholars have reassessed or challenged these interpretations would provide additional historiographical depth and strengthen the overall argument.

Similarly, the manuscript effectively highlights Bernier's observations regarding religion, education, caste, and scientific reasoning. However, in some places the discussion occasionally adopts Bernier's narrative before returning to critical analysis. A more consistent distinction between Bernier's perspective and the author's own interpretation would improve analytical clarity. This is particularly relevant in discussions concerning Hindu religious practices, caste, and educational systems, where brief explanatory transitions could further emphasize that these observations reflect Bernier's own intellectual framework rather than objective historical realities.

The section on female agency is one of the more original aspects of the manuscript because it moves beyond conventional discussions of Orientalism by emphasizing Bernier's appreciation of the political and economic roles of women such as Nur Jahan, Jahanara Begum, and Roshanara Begum. This section could be strengthened further by briefly relating these observations to broader historiographical debates concerning gender and power in the Mughal Empire. Such an addition would reinforce the originality of

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REVIEWER'S REPORT

this part of the paper while connecting it more explicitly with existing scholarship on Mughal women and court politics.

The conclusion summarizes the principal findings effectively and appropriately recognizes both the value and limitations of Bernier's writings. Nevertheless, it could conclude more strongly by explicitly restating the broader academic contribution of the study. Rather than ending primarily with a summary of Bernier's significance, the author may wish to emphasize how this analysis contributes to current understandings of travel literature, historical methodology, and the relationship between European intellectual traditions and South Asian history. Such a concluding statement would leave readers with a clearer appreciation of the wider scholarly implications of the article.

Finally, the manuscript would benefit from careful proofreading prior to publication. Minor grammatical inconsistencies, punctuation issues, spacing irregularities, and occasional typographical errors are present throughout the text. Ensuring consistency in citation style, improving sentence structure in a few lengthy paragraphs, and standardizing formatting would enhance readability and improve the overall presentation of an otherwise well-written manuscript. These are editorial refinements and do not require any substantive revision of the article.

Recommendation

The manuscript presents a well-researched and analytically balanced examination of François Bernier's depiction of Mughal India and makes a worthwhile contribution to the scholarship on travel literature, early modern European intellectual history, and medieval Indian historiography. The paper demonstrates originality in its attempt to move beyond conventional readings of Bernier by recognizing both the limitations of his observations and the broader historical significance of his writings. The suggested revisions primarily concern strengthening the articulation of the research objectives, enhancing historiographical engagement, expanding analytical interpretation in selected sections, and refining the overall presentation through careful language editing. These revisions are intended to improve the scholarly quality of the manuscript without altering its central argument or overall structure. Accordingly, I recommend that the manuscript be **accepted with minor revisions**.