



French Encounters Of François De La Boullaye- Le Gouz In India: Hindu Mythological Illustrations and Narratives

RESEARCH PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Seventeenth-century French travellers' records ignited the curiosity of the Occidental world, especially the French imagination, because of their commercial and religious understanding of the Orient, mainly India. Among their authors, the most unresearched traveller is François de la Boullaye-le Gouz, who wrote a fabulous account about his voyage to India. His understanding of the Hindu religion ideologies and pictorial representations require analysis based on this hitherto unused manuscript. This article examines the distorted and under-researched facts about his biography, followed by scrutinizing Gouz's perceptions of Hindu gods and goddesses and their significance in Hindu mythology. These observations, interpretations and misrepresentations of Hindu religious illustrations through Gouz's perception are analyzed by examining printed French untranslated memoirs (printed in 1653) in comparison with Gouz's abridged manuscript (codex). Varied approaches of scholars such as Subrahmanyam, Sapa, Beasley, Marsh, Dew and Teltscher have criticized Said's Orientalism. Our research contributes fresh insight by undertaking an in-depth comparative study of this Oriental knowledge (Gouz' Hindu mythology observations) with Oriental records, his narratives and codex. This ascertains the credibility of knowledge that formulated French's Oriental image of India in early-modern Europe.

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During the seventeenth century, numerous French travellers made voyages to India and wrote fascinating travelogues and memoirs about the Oriental world. This led to the construction of an image of India as an 'Others' (Beasley, 2018; Marsh, 2015; Sapra, 2011; Subrahmanyam, 2017; Subrahmanyam, 2021a; Subrahmanyam, 2021b; Teltscher, 1995) (the uncivilized counterpart of Europe) based on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism that has been challenged by critics later for oversimplification and being partisan (Halliday, 1993; Roddan, 2016; Said, 1978). For example, Faith E. Beasley's recent analysis highlights the role of French 'salon culture' (worldly/learned gathering) in the evolution of western thought that dismantles the notion of European superiority where India did not serve as an inferior 'other'; and also challenged prevailing images derived from nineteenth-century 'orientalism' imbued with colonialism (Beasley, 2018, p. 22). Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues that no monolithic view can be imposed on the European travellers' perceptions of India, as that was the 'product of layered and intermittent conversations and distinct symmetries in perception' (Subrahmanyam, 2017, p. 323) which often transcended standard Orientalist procedures and reached genuine human engagement (Ibid., p. 323; LeHardy Sweet, 2010, pp. 197–213).

European travellers' desire to discover the 'other' and analyse the 'self' through this discovery led to the siring of many Indias. These encounters produced different resonances, antiphonic music, and paradigms of alterity (Goswami, 2020). Many pioneering French travellers visited Mughal India during this century (François Martin de Vitré, Sir John Chardin, François Bernier, Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Abbé Barthélemy Carré, Jean de Thévenot, François Pyrard de Laval) and wrote voluminous writings that became a popular genres in Western Europe, but one traveller whose account had remained untranslated, under-researched and, hence, obscure is François de la Boullaye-le Gouz. His manuscript, titled *Les Voyages et Observations du Sieur de la Boullaye le Gouz*, was published in 1653 and reprinted in 1657 (revised and enlarged), and a Dutch translation in 1660. This article analyzes his unexplored biography, and examines his textual and visual depictions of Hindu mythology. His narratives about Indian mythology seem complicated when compared to contemporary popular Hindu texts; moreover, the pictorial representations are incredible concerning time and space, but each of these needs a further investigation in terms of its assertions, objectivity and accuracy. His observations are compared and correlated with his codex (abridged manuscript different from a printed version of 1653) to analyze his religious understanding of the Orient and that of his contemporary French travellers.

Our approach in terms of Gouz's imagination purports to explore the curiosity to satisfy the French exoticism (fascination for foreign religion) similar to Marsh's approach (Marsh, 2015, pp. 21–40) by highlighting mysterious tales of Hindu mythology. It discusses the visual and pictorial representations of Hindu paganism through French engagement with the Hindu visual sources in early modern cross-cultural exchanges. The observations are testified and carefully compared with the most popular Hindu mythological sacred texts and literature (Oriental records). To establish the context, multiple versions of the Hindu sacred text of the Ramayana (Ramanujan, 1991, p. 48) existed, but the research mostly correlates to the popular versions of *Ram Katha* (the story of Ram) vis-à-vis the Sanskrit Ramayana, written by Adi Kavi Valmiki, and the Hindi version by Goswami Tulsidas, titled *Ramcharitmanas* (Thapar, 2000, p. 1055). The literature on Hindu mythology is also used to testify and examine Gouz's narratives, both visual and pictorial, conducted concurrently to identify the ambiguities and ironies.

Like many prominent French voyagers' accounts during the seventeenth century, Gouz's text emphasizes common miraculous and irrational themes which he sees as distinct from those in European religion (displaying their religious superiority against the Orient). This 'notable trend' was also witnessed in Gouz's contemporaries and successors that corroborated identical Oriental religious themes: Brahmin supremacy in the caste system, the criticism of idolatry, amusing tales of the cow, the river Ganga and the sanctity of the Hindu *ghats*, fakirs and their unbelievable practices, astrologers and astrology, the sati system, yogis/monks and their miracles (Kundra, 2017). The explanation to this movement can be assigned to the royal patronage provided led by Jean-Baptiste Colbert (Louis XIV's Minister of Finance from 1661 to 1683) to French scholars (part of European 'Republic of Letters') for acquisition, cataloguing and translation of 'oriental' texts in order to construct the glorious image of the sovereign (Dew, 2009; Baghdiantz-MacCabe, 2008). Albeit, Nicholas Dew admitted this Oriental learning had a marginal position in 'early Enlightenment' (c.1650–1715) of the late seventeenth century (Dew,

2009) whereas like Joan Pau Rubiés (2002), Donald Lach (1994) and Peter Burke (1999) believe these account helped in the development of European intellectual history during European enlightenment.

During the mid-seventeenth century, the process expanded of communicating Indian visual material to understand Hindu mythology and to present a coherent picture to a Western audience (Mitter, 1992, p. 50). Awareness of non-European parts of the world had penetrated the European consciousness, giving rise to a literary hunger for travel literature (Ames and Love, 2003, p. 136; Anjum, 2018). The content and visual documentation of Hindu mythology are complex, as it constitutes a plethora of themes. There were anecdotes, corroborated, transcribed and even plagiarized among contemporary French travellers. This corpus of texts claimed to transmit testimony on India's history that "are then processed and received into the economy of narrative circulating, transformed or manipulated according to an individual or collective needs in early modern France" (Harrigan, 2014, pp. 1–22).

Several scholars from varied perspectives have studied the literature of European travellers in the context of Oriental perspectives. Two research works of Michael H. Fisher concentrate on Indians travelling to Britain between 1600 and 1857 (Fisher, 2006), which made an overview of some French travellers' observations (Fisher, 2007) that lack an in-depth analysis of the religious aspect. Researches of Meera Nanda, H. K. Kaul, Vincent Rose, Edward Farley Oaten, Jean Marie Lafont and Rehana Lafont have not thoroughly researched Gouz's perceptions on Hindu mythology (Oaten, 1991; Kaul, 1997; Lafont and Lafont, 2010; Nanda, 1994; Vincent, 1990). Kate Teltscher's primary focus is on late-1700s British texts, including some French narratives (Teltscher, 1995), whereas Yasuyuki gives a sketchy description of Gouz's political and commercial contributions (Yasuyuki, 1998, pp. 82–88).

French travellers came to India in varied capacities, stayed for different periods and had different motives and prejudices. They usually projected diverse images for the French understanding of India. They provided several reasons for visiting India, starting from the support given by the strong monarchs of Western Europe; the desire to make quick commercial fortunes; the insatiable curiosity to discover the East; a zeal for missionary work; the representation of French government or companies in India; and the desire to achieve glory, fame and fortune through publishing their literary works (Fisher, 2006, p.xxi).

Concerning the objective of Gouz's travel to India, Michael Harrigan (Harrigan, 2008, pp. 30, 107) and Chauviré Roger (Chauviré, 1995, pp. 66–74) highlight Gouz was motivated to travel because of 'unsatisfied curiosity' that included an opportunity for moral perfection, the study of political maxims, the need to gain wisdom or the betterment of the individual. Partha Mitter states that Gouz's objective was to present the truth about Indian religious practices (especially misconception about the monstrous nature of Indian religion), and not to please his readers with fiction (Mitter, 1992, p. 52). Cesbron (1995) stated Gouz shows a example of a man who writes about other and not about himself. Subrahmanyam believes that Gouz used illustrations/images to complement or reinforce the printed word that became popular for a brief period in the seventeenth century until superseded by François Bernier's writings, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's lavishly illustrated travelogue (Rowan, 1981, p. 271; Subrahmanyam, 2010) and superseded by the success of the more authoritative works of Jean Thevenot (Thomas and Chesworth, 2017, p. 479). Subrahmanyam posits that Boullaye presented a 'positive image of the Mughals, as well as of the social and religious practices of the Indous' (Subrahmanyam, 2021a, 204) and consider it essentially 'soft' and accommodative in character (Subrahmanyam, 2017). He presented himself as a pilgrim during his voyage (Subrahmanyam, 2011) and had a great sense of empirical observation (Cesbron, 1995). His narrations of Hindu mythology in the 1653 memoir created an immense curiosity amongst European audiences and learned readers (Harrigan, 2008, p. 13). His memoir described about religions, government and situation of the states and kingdoms of different places in Europe, Asia and Africa. He stayed in these nations to give a large amount of information, but the focus of research is on his writings on Great Mogol.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Gouz was appointed as the first ambassador of King Louis XIV to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1664 (Ray, 2004, p. 36). Born in 1610, (Godard-Faultrier, 1858) or as some records suggest

on 22 July 1623, (Maussion de Favières, 1994; Harrigan, 2017) near the small town of Baugé in the Anjou region of western France, Gouz belonged to a noble family who left Brittany for Anjou (Castonnet des Fossés, 1887, p. 146). He claimed that his ancestors belonged to Great Britain, while others believe they belonged to France (Gouz, 1653, p. 457). He studied at the College of Flèche (Gouz, 1653, p. 448) and was probably influenced by the work of René Descartes and his philosophical writings (Godard-Faultrier, 1858, p. 30). After studying several languages, geography and mathematics, Gouz undertook a project to devote his life to distance voyages. Gouz left toward Orient against the will of his parents in 1647, at the age of twenty-four years (Atlas, 2018). Thus he visited India two times, first in the late 1640s as a tourist and second time in the mid-1660s as a diplomat on behalf of Louis XIV. The first visit seems to be closer to be a part of cultural encounters (that is studied in this paper) that established some stereotypes and comparative analysis of West-East, while the second is motivated by the European imperial notion of power.

In 1643, he left France with the desire to meet learned individuals, as his objective to travel was to explore. After having visited Holland and the Coast of Baltic, he returned to Venice and journeyed to Constantinople (Castonnet des Fossés, 1882). He spent 63 days in Ireland (from 15 May to 17 July 1644), where he wrote extensively (de La Boullaye, 1937). During the period 1644 to 1650, Gouz made his first visit to the Orient. He spent some time in the Ottoman and Safavid empire, where he changed his name to Ibrahim Beg, dressed according to the Oriental customs, and pretended to have a modest existence to avoid being identified as a 'Frank' (meaning European) and hence evade higher levies (Gouz, 1653, p. 71).

Gouz visited India for about three years from early 1646 to 1649. This was the reign of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. Gouz gave an elaborate description of the country's religions, customs and government. During his stay, he observed that Surat had a large port that generated income from customs duties charged on vessels arriving from various parts of the country according to the tides, seasons and winds (Gouz, 1653, p. 135). After a few months, he embarked on an Indian boat to reach Daman and Goa. In a detailed account, he mentioned the dominance of the Portuguese in Goa (Gouz, 1653, p. 197). He spent less than a year in India and departed from Surat for Bandar Kung, that is in Persian Gulf, and finally, returned to Europe in 1650. Chauviré highlights Gouz's finances for the trip, the language used, the difficulties faced by the traveller and the objectivity of his narration (Chauviré, 1995, p. 71), but his research does not discuss Gouz's voyage in India concerning its religious implications (Ibid., p. 71).

The French voyager posed intriguing questions and transmitted valuable information to his sovereign about the Mughal empire (Godard-Faultrier, 1858, p. 40). He narrated the Mughal's rule as 'soft' or 'mild' in character contrary to others French travellers that gave references of India's reflecting religious diversity to indirectly challenging Louis XIV's policies (Beasley, 2018, pp. 170–194). This argument implies as counter-narrative of ethnocentrism and prejudices explained by Said (Burke, 1999). He noted that the emperor of Hindustan allowed religious freedom and did not force anyone to obey the State religion as its population consisted of people from various faiths (Godard-Faultrier, 1858, p. 40). He stated Mogol are from a Sunni sect of Muslim but their vessels consist of different religions like Christians, Jews, Muslims, Paris and Indous (Hindus), and these men are allowed to live and die with religious liberty and given equal opportunity to attain the high offices of the State (Gouz, 1653, pp. 129–132). He was one of the first French traveller who describes gentiles of India as 'les Indou' meaning 'India in the Indian language is called Indoustan, the habitation of the Indous who are the ancient inhabitants of the Indies' (Subrahmanyam, 2017).

The 1653 manuscript of Gouz gave an account of different religions, governments and conditions of the states and kingdoms that presented a novelty to the Western audience. His style of writing is easy and pleasant to read, thoroughly exploratory and extremely informative, albeit coloured by his preconceptions and prejudices (Castonnet des Fossés, 1887, p. 146). Some claim he was a 'worldly, cautious sort of traveller' (Atkinson, 1920, p. 9), while others term him as an intelligent observer blessed with impartiality and faithfulness. Some others characterize him with three words: 'conciseness, simplicity and clarity' (Moreau, 1956). This traveller voyaged not only to enrich himself but to have knowledge of the world and receive permanent bliss (Gouz, 1653). He believed not to repeat the already known information that is already known, as he consider this as a waste of time (Witek, 2018). Henri Castonnet Des

Fosses praises Gouz by stating that ‘his originality, curiosity, facility to yield the customs of the countries that he travelled makes him the first tourist of modern times’ (Castonnet des Fossés, 1882). Researchers acknowledge him as a curiously intelligent, unpretentious, objective and pious Christian with an independent character — a Frenchman with modesty and with a mission to provide service of communication about distance lands to his homeland (Moreau, 1956, p. 35). Back in Paris, his observations had the merit of accuracy, and this helped him gain popularity which led to his appointment as Louis XIV’s ambassador to the Mughal emperor.

In July 1665, five deputies, namely Lalain, Boullaye-le Gouz, Beber, Mariage and Dupont, went to Ispahan as an embassy (Castonnet des Fossés, 1882, p. 170). Gouz obtained a *firman* from the Persian king which granted the French merchants freedom from customs duties (Castonnet des Fossés, 1887, p. 50). Gouz reached Surat in March 1666 as per his political mission. He wrote a letter to Colbert on 1 April 1666, where he requested the king of France to dispatch a powerful fleet to India with artillery that would successfully intimidate their competitors, especially the Dutch (Castonnet des Fossés, 1882). His suggestions must have influenced Colbert, and he insisted that the French East India Company being once established, should also look into the possibility of the king of France to being the eventual ruler of India (Yasuyuki, 1998, pp. 82–89).

Later, probably in the same year, Gouz and Beber moved to Agra at the Mughal court without ostentation with only two oxen coaches escorted by 25 soldiers (Castonnet des Fossés, 1882). After having failed at the Mughal court, Gouz wanted to execute a project to go to China by crossing Bengal. This journey, however, proved to be fatal for Gouz. He travelled in the direction of Patna to reach the Deccan in the company of some Persian soldiers. However, he was assassinated by these soldiers while he was sleeping, who robbed him of his money, (Castonnet des Fossés, 1882) while other accounts claim that he succumbed to a high fever back in Persia and was given a royal funeral by the Shah (Moreau, 1956). Thus, came the abrupt and unfortunate end of this Frenchman, who, despite some limitations, was one of the most intriguing characters of the seventeenth century. The succeeding French travellers’ narratives have numerous similarities regarding themes mentioned by Gouz.

On reviewing the illustrations of Hindu mythology in Gouz’s account, Michele Bernardini, a renowned historian, put forwards a manuscript (codex) that was an abridged version of Gouz’s manuscript that has several chapters (those of marriage and an ecclesiastic or legal career) omitted in comparison to the printed version of 1653 (Bernardini 2004). This codex was a copy or a revised version of the first draft of Gouz’s travel record that was dedicated in 1649 to Cardinal Luigi Capponi, the librarian of the Vatican Library (Becherini, 2017, p. 350). Marta Becherini believed that the original version (probably misplaced now) was taken away by Gouz to France and reworked into the final printed edition (Becherini, 2017). He published his account at the request of King Louis XIV in 1653, which earned a reputation and enabled him to be chosen as the agent of the French East India Company (Saumon, 2011). This codex was produced in Rome after the first encounter with Capponi in 1650 (Becherini, 2017). Astrid Elisabeth McKenny-Engström states that this codex presented to ‘Capponi was produced following Gouz’s arrival to Rome and that its watercolours were created by a European artist by copying the original paintings that Gouz had brought back from India’, an argument which has been supported by Becherini (Becherini, 2017).

Bernardini stated that 49 illustrations in this codex were reduced to 34 in the printed text, among which many were based on Indian subjects (Becherini, 2017). Becherini purports that of these 49, 29 uncoloured ink sketches are drawn in European style by a skilled draughtsman, while some lack execution that has been attributed to Gouz himself (Becherini, 2017). Becherini also highlights the second group of 20 pictures executed in watercolours and blank ink for the outlines in an entirely different style (Hindu mythological figures) that can be linked to a pictorial tradition that spread across the Indian regions of Gujarat and south-west Rajasthan (Becherini, 2017). We believe that Becherini’s hypothesis — of Gouz’s work based on local Indian tradition — is speculation as if the work would have been so influenced by local tradition, it would not have committed numerous errors in the sketching and narration of Indian mythological characters. Further stating, it was made by a painter accustomed to work for local patrons, based on this acquaintance with Hindu iconography (Becherini, 2017).

During the seventeenth century, factors contributing for the Europeans to study of Hindu doctrine and beliefs (although anecdote in sixteenth-century European travellers’ accounts),

was primarily due to Jesuits missionaries endeavour to make comparative religious analysis, where the practice of knowledge gathering was done direct interaction with Indian religious specialists based on the search of authentic text to claim credibility; and additional factor was the revival of interest in extra-European cult and mythologies in contemporary Europe under Counter-Reformation discourses about idolatry (Becherini, 2017). Under this context, Gouz questions the absurd, aberrant and bizarre practices of India (Ibid, 2017). He appeared to be convinced of the superiority of his nation and Christian religion; hence, he attempted to analyze Hindu religious customs through the French rational and scientific perspective. He claimed that the French were excellent Christians compared to other nationals (de La Boullaye, 1837) and believe other religions as a threat to Christianity, and even showed his concern about lack of freedom among Christians to speak about their religion (Witek, 2018). It is believed that Gouz 'discusses India from a strict Catholic believer's point of view... [but] project[s] a neutral image of a foreign land ...' (Rowan, 1981). Although he believed that 'natives of India [Hindus] as superior being ... not only are they kind and gentle ... Le Gouz avoids comparing them with his own rough compatriots' (Rowan, 1981). Therefore, this French traveller's encounter with Indian paganism (narratives and illustrations) became a piece of paramount information that requires further critical analysis.

FRENCH IMAGINATION OF HINDU MYTHOLOGY

This section evaluates the information and numerous illustrations (Oriental knowledge) provided by Gouz about Hinduism and Hindu mythology, concerning its interpretations or misinterpretations. His account can be termed as early repository account of cross-cultural religious knowledge. In this context, Mitter raises a question: 'Was Boullaye-le-Gouz attempting to correct here the misconception of early travellers who identified Indian gods as horned monsters? ... [these] old preconceptions had no hold over him, he stated without any further speculation that gods were depicted with four arms and hands' (Mitter, 1992). Therefore, he wanted to caution his readers that Hindu mythology has both gods and anti-gods (*asuras* or demons). As Gouz stated, Ram was wearing a crown in the illustrations rather than horns (Gouz, 1653, p. 161). His reasons for exploring Hindu mythology can also be due to his urge to satisfy personal curiosity to learn about the religion of a distance society, support missionary efforts to spread the Christian faith and narrate the numerous mythological and miraculously mysterious anecdotes to attract European readers. Overall, Gouz's illustrations are a spectacular example of the emergence of cross-dressing as a visual strategy in the realm of portraiture used to gain authority on travel writings and promoting its reception among contemporary readers (Becherini, 2017). Chauviré proposes that Gouz 'surely saw these monstrous Gods, he describes, Vishnu with multiple arms, Ganesh with elephant head' that seem to be exaggerations (Chauviré, 1955). He was also known as *voyageur Catholique* (Subrahmanyam, 2018). He recognizes that being a 'Christianity is the most glorious quality' that reflects his state of mind while observing other religions and their customs (Gouz, 1653). He even presented himself as a pious Christian in distance land during his voyage (Witek, 2018). Bernardini mentions that the illustrations of India and Indian mythology were careful copies of miniatures collected by Gouz during his travels in India, and it is probable that they were drawn by an Indian artist, whereas some illustrations were made by Gouz, who, however, was not a professional artist (Bernardini 2004). Subrahmanyam, moreover, states that the painting of Shraavan Kumar was made by artists based in southern Gujarat where Gouz often visited, and these artists were aware of the tradition of the Bhagavata Purana and other Indian figures of Vaishnava, Shaiva and Jain tradition.

Further, Subrahmanyam claims that European professionals have contributed to these drawing the one where Gouz is shown to dedicate the work to Cardinal Capponi, whereas other drawings are the contribution of one or more Indian artists (Bernardini 2004). Highly curious about Hindu mythology, Gouz possibly gathered information regarding the Hindu pantheon — such as Ram, Lakshman, Sita, Krishna, Durga, Hanuman, Mahadeva, Parvati, Ganesh, Glacmi/Gliacmi (Goddess of earth or Lakshmi) and others (Gouz, 1653, p. 142) — from his interaction with the audience during his visit, which, however, lacked authenticity and were sometimes miscoded. Subrahmanyam believes that due to considerable deterioration of the figures in their passage from Indian artist/s to the eventual engravings that led to the distortion of many details and, hence, many attributes are mistakenly presented (Subrahmanyam, 2010). Concerning his

paintings he said “the painting being to discourse what the original is to the painting. I believe I would satisfy the reader more with some figures of Mogol costume than by a descriptions I could make of them” (Gouz, 1653). Gouz had accepted some information on a superficial level, without any analysis, and probably wanted to get a wider European audience and recognition in the academic circle.

Gouz started with the description of Ram, who, according to him, was the first and supreme among all but lived the life of a normal human being. He gifted the Hindus the sacred law which was carried down the generations from father to son for 120,000 years (Gouz, 1653). The year of Ram’s appearance, as Gouz claimed, seems to be a grave error or may be based on fables. He further criticized the principle of idol worship and remarked that many idolaters were unaware of the existence of the Supreme God (Becherini, 2017) and legislator (Gouz, 1653). He believed Hindus were known as Ramji — followers of Ram — who would chant ‘Ram Ram Ram meaning God God God’ (Gouz, 1653) when praying to their deities in their temples (Gouz, 1653). He depicted Ram as an avatar (incarnation) of Shiv, but in Valmiki’s version of the Ramayana, as also Kampan’s, he is represented as the avatar of Vishnu. However, the Thai version of the Ramayana, *Ramakriti*, shows him as a subordinate to Shiv (Ramanujan, 1991). Further, he stated that Hindus derived their rights, beliefs and customs from Ram.

This French traveller was amused by the incredulous practices of the devotees of Ram. For instance, Hindus abstained from eating the flesh of the cow, buffalo and other animals cherished by Ram (whom he claimed as the legislator of Hindus), and it was believed that the ‘spirit of happiness lives in the bodies of these animals’ (Gouz, 1653). Moreover, the cow was a revered animal due to its utility in carrying things as often it was not possible to use horses effectively (Gouz, 1653). The voyager narrated the practice of women washing their faces with the urine of cows, which even the Muslims considered as a superstition. However, Hindus believed that this ancient practice was medically beneficial for the eyesight as well as considered this religiously sacred (Gouz, 1653). Gouz pronounced various reasons which lured Hindus into converting to other religions. He further elaborated on the weird practices that had to be followed if the converted person would repent and want to come back to their original faith. He stated:

[T]he Hindus are converted into Masulmans [Muslims] on the territory of the prince who professes the law of Mahomet, for several considerations ... to have moral parental as per ordinance made by Muslim princes ... [and] to escape punishment for adultery and murder, as Manulmans forgive all such kinds of crime to those who embrace their religion: if the a Hindu repents being converted ... [to other religions] ... he comes to the Brahman cries for mercy for the apostasy, they receive him, and order him sometimes besides other penitence to give a certain quantity of barley to a cow after making it fast for three or four days. After the cow digests it, to hang its excreta and to eat it, as if the barley which passed through the entrails of the cow has the quality to purify his body and heart (Gouz, 1653).

Gouz mentioned that Ram was depicted in various postures in the pagodas (temples), often seen dressed as an archer with a bow and arrows along with his wife Sita, who was presenting him a flower (Figure 1). He described Sita as a *Mogoglie*, probably confusing the identity of Sita as *Mogoglie* who belonged to the Tartarie region (Central Asia). According to Valmiki’s version, Sita is the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi and the daughter of King Janaka, who named her so as he found her while ploughing the earth. He nurtured this earth-born as his own (Shastri, 1953). In the same picture, Hanuman is seen to be fanning Ram and Sita with a piece of cloth. Ram has a crown on his head. Gouz went on to describe Hanuman as a monkey wearing a *langouti* (a cloth to wrap around the male lower body parts), who is honoured by the Hindus. According to him, there were many Hanuman temples in India where his relics were preserved. He referred to one such temple — famed for various miracles — three miles from Surat in the kingdom of Gujarat. It attracted numerous pilgrims who would go there to seek Hanuman’s forgiveness for their ill deeds, sometimes making offerings to him. The image of the divine Hindu couple with a monkey accompanying them fascinated this traveller who tried to know more about the religion as well as the Hindu gods. These stories of Hindu gods — which a Brahmin narrated to Gouz — were included in his memoir (Gouz, 1653). Gouz’s narration was possibly inclined towards Valmiki’s description of Hanuman as a sacred devotee of Ram, but his



Figure 1 Top: Hanuman, Sita and Ram (Left) and Mahadev (Right); Bottom: Ram and Laxman (Left) and Ganesh (Right).

Source: François de la Boullaye-le Gouz, *Les Voyages* (Retrieved from BNF Gallica digital edition), p. 162; Appendix ii.

representation is depicted differently in other versions of the Ramayana (Ramanujan, 1991). This printed version has differences with the coloured codex in regards to the position of the ornaments held by Ram and worn by Sita, and the sketching of facial expressions in the printed version also lacks clarity in comparison to the codex.

Furthermore, Gouz wrote, 'Ram had a war with his rebellious subjects' (Gouz, 1653). This was probably a reference to his 'cousin brothers, which forced him to leave his kingdom with his wife Sita' (Gouz, 1653). Then, he narrated the incident of how in exile, the unfortunate Sita was captured by the cunning servant of the king of Zeilan (Sri Lanka) in disguise when she indiscreetly crossed the prescribed line demarcated by Ram to give alms to the wicket man (Gouz, 1653). Gouz's narration was misleading because he claimed that Ram gave the instructions to Sita to not to cross the door in his absence whereas mostly the accepted Ramayana version is that 'Lakshmana drew a line across the doorway and instructed Sita not to cross the line [later termed as *Lakshman rekha*]' (Badlani, 2008). Gouz's narration was inaccurate as it did not mention Lakshman, who instructed Sita to not cross the *Lakshman rekha*. Also, Gouz mentioned that Hanuman built a bridge to cross the sea to search for Sita (Gouz, 1653). This is inaccurate as Hanuman had flown over the sea to reach Lanka (Keshavadas, 1988).

Strangely, Gouz never mentioned Ravan by name but referred to him by his kingdom — Zeilan. Gouz further said that Ram was helped by his follower — the monkey Hanuman — to find Sita whom he gave his ring as a symbol of virtue. Hanuman went to the island of Zeilan where he met Sita and gave solace to her regarding her husband, country and her freedom. Further, he narrated the story of the blazing of this island when the king of Zeilan tried to put fire by tying *goudrins* (cloth) to Hanuman's tail as an act of punishment for an illegal infiltration into his empire (Gouz, 1653). Gouz's version of the Ramayana is different from the Valmiki Ramayana when he wrote that Hanuman 'generously raised Sita whom he put in between the hands of Ram' (Gouz, 1653). This version, heard from a Brahmin, misinterpreted the incidents as the huge war between Ram and the king of Zeilan, the latter's defeat and the recovery of Sita by her victorious husband are omitted. Gouz's version gave all the credit to Hanuman in bringing back Sita from the island of Zeilan, which is a gross exaggeration. This led Gouz to believe that Hindus consider animals as sensible as a mere monkey-like Hanuman could bring Sita back to her husband. This traveller mentioned Hindu fables where animals represented as rational beings, such as serpent and donkey, playing essential roles as they did in the Adam and Eve and Balaam stories, respectively. He compared men with animals.

Gouz spoke of the fictitious associations between gods or perhaps he misunderstood Hindu mythology when he stated that Ganesh (son of Mahadev and Parvati), with the head of an elephant, was the 'gatekeeper of Ram' who is depicted in every Hindu temple (Gouz, 1653). He also accounted for why Ganesh had an elephant's head.

According to the brahmanic stories, Ganesh offended his mother, who cursed him and desired a head of an elephant for him since he was an unpleasant child, Ganesh repented his act and requested to his mother to forgive him and remove her curse. She did not comply but replied to him, I wish you had a head of an elephant which will remain with you, but Ganesh will be able to talk freely (Gouz, 1653).

However, as per popular myth, Parvati did not curse Ganesh, and it was Shiv who chopped off his head when he stopped him from meeting his wife Parvati (Kakar, 2005).

Gouz's mentioned that Ganesh was honoured by the Hindus, as he was considered compassionate, which was depicted in his illustration (Figure 1), which shows a woman is offering fruits to Ganesh and fanning him (Gouz, 1653). Some errors are noticed in the pictorial depicts as Ganesh is displayed with the head of an elephant having four hands, but is incorrectly painted as if Ganesh is offering fruits to the lady rather than receiving it. The codex and the printed version differ on the facial sketching of Ganesh, the way he holds his beads, the sketch of the axe, the positioning of the fan held by the woman and the ornament positioning [appendix ii].

Moreover, Gouz erroneously termed Ganesh as a servant of Ram and compared him with the gatekeeper of the king, who needs to be bribed for anyone to meet his master (Gouz, 1653). As per the rationality of French, they had questioned the supernatural powers of a living man such as Ganesh (Gouz, 1653).

Gouz's printed version (Figure 1) depicts Ram and his half-brother Lakshman, facing each other and holding bows. This image fails to properly draw Ram's right leg and probably forgets to place the arrows with Ram as has been done for Lakshman. This was corrected in the codex's coloured illustration. Other differences between these versions are the crown sketching, body representations, the ornaments worn and facial expressions (appendix ii). Gouz stated that Lakshman was the king of Amazones, a statement that is inaccurate when compared to Valmiki's version. Although Gouz mentioned the Amazones to be a region in northern India, his memoir fails to associate it with Ayodhya, the kingdom of Dasharatha, and the father of the four brothers Ram, Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughan. Gouz claim of Quran [Holy Book of Muslims] having a chapter on Lakshman seems fictitious.

With another illustration (Figure 2), Gouz also described Mahadev, like a dervish or fakir, 'is seated on God (Nandi or the bull), leading an isolated life in the forest, devoted to the contemplation of God, oneself and nature. He is leaning towards the right with a trident and has in his left hand an *eventail* (probably a pellet drum). He has matted hair like that of Hindu saints. Mahadev has been extremely honoured in Bengal, and the kingdom of Gujarat' (Gouz, 1653). Another illustration depicting Mahadev with Nandi in the codex and the printed version differ on the facial expression of Mahadev, the bull's body parts and the facial expression of Parvati in the second illustration [Appendix i].

Further, Gouz had a chapter on Mahadev, Parvati, Bagoti (Bhagavati) and Gliacmi. He mentioned that Parvati was attracted towards Mahadev and begged him to marry her, which he declined for a long time. The illustration (Figure 2) depicts Mahadev dressed as an ascetic, seated on his couch with a trident in his hand. Parvati is near him who has come with her appeal (Gouz, 1653). In both the illustrations (black and white illustrations of the 1653 printed edition in comparison with the codex's coloured illustrations), there are differences in the sketching of Mahadev's crown, his body parts, clothing, arm-bands, the trident design and overall outlooks. The following illustration displays Mahadev agreeing to marry her, where Parvati is depicted offering a flower — a mark of her virginity (the codex and printed version differed in facial expressions, body parts and attire, appendix i). In this picture, Mahadev's name is captioned as Issourarche (the text also stated that Mahadev had changed his name), and from their marriage was born Ganesh, who Gouz mentioned was the gatekeeper of Ram (Gouz, 1653).



Figure 2 Top: Bhagwati or Durga (Left) and Parvati and Mahadev (Right); Bottom: Parvati and Mahadev (Left) and Parvati (Right).

Source: François de la Boullaye-le Gouz, *Les Voyages* (Retrieved from BNF Gallica digital edition), p. 170; Appendix i and iv.

In another illustration of Bagoti (Bhagavati or Durga, the wife of Shiv, see Figure 2). Gouz described her as a woman who had the power to fight and defeat demons, who were considered immortals. Here, she is shown with eight arms and is seated on a lion which testifies her holiness and virtue. Gouz, as a French, compared her with the Maid of Orleans, a heroine of French history, who successfully fought for the spirit of her religion and the liberty of her fatherland (Gouz, 1653). He, however, misrepresented the weapons of Durga. Of her eight hands, two are empty, the rest six have a chakra, sword, lotus flower, serpent, umbrella and trident, whereas according to popular Hindu mythology, Durga carries different weapons (appendix iv) (Kinsley,1989). The codex and the printed version also have major differences regarding the weapons held by the goddess. The codex shows weapons in all hands, whereas the printed version shows two empty hands, extra weapons of beads in place of the snake, and concha is missing in the printed version. Another confusion arises as the figure shows Durga sitting on a lion whose tale is spotted like a tiger.¹ Gouz could not visualize the image of Gliacmi or another Hindu goddess; hence, he abstained from illustrating further (Gouz, 1653). He left it to his reader's imagination as to why Gliacmi is offered cows and ants by the devotees.

The next illustration (Figure 3) is of Servan (Bernardini 2004) (Shravan Kumar) who died in the kingdom of Gujarat, was honoured in Daman, and had been given the status of a saint. The story goes that as his parents were very old and unable to walk, Servan used to carry them on a beam of balance everywhere and took care of them as an obedient and grateful son (Gouz, 1653). Gouz praised the dedication and responsibility that Servan had shown towards his parents but made some mistakes of not showing his poor, blind and crippled parents (Jaffrey and Foreman, 2017). On the contrary, Gouz's illustrations show his parents wearing ornaments. They do not appear poor and do not look visually impaired. Servan is also shown as wearing a crown and ornaments. The codex and printed versions have many differences when concerning the positioning of the parents [refer to colour illustration in appendix i].

The next colourful illustration of the codex is that of Kan Kochetna, where Lord Krishna is depicted being accompanied by three *gopis* (milkmaids or female friends), two peacocks,



Figure 3 Top: Krishna with gopis; Bottom: Krishna on top of a kasta tree with charmed gopis (Left) and Shravana Kumar taking his parents, Shantanu and Gyanvanti, on pilgrimage (Right).

Source: François de la Boullaye-le Gouz, *Les Voyages* (Retrieved from BNF Gallica digital edition), p. 173; Appendix i and iii.

two cows and a dog (Gouz, 1653). Gouz wrote that Krishna has the power to do miracles and is worshipped in Hindu temples (Gouz, 1653). This painting depicts Krishna lifting a mass of land or mountain with his index finger, whereas popular Hindu accounts state that he lifted the Govardhan mountain with his little finger to protect the villagers from a storm sent by Indra, the king of gods (Pal. Et.a., 2016). This was corrected in the collection of paintings by Sir Hans Sloane (British physician, 1660–1753) (Becherini, 2017) where Krishna is shown holding a mountain on his little finger. Moreover, there are many differences in the codex's coloured illustrations with Gouz's 1653 edition concerning black and white illustrations, sketchings, positioning of objects, facial drawings and body parts. After comparing the black-and-white version of the printed edition (1653) and the codex version with coloured pictures, the coloured one seems to be made by a professional.

Figure 3 shows Krishna playing the flute from a *kasta* (a type of a tree), and the *gopagna* (Radha) with three *gopis* begging for their dresses. Krishna, who had the power of invisibility, had stolen the clothes without being noticed (Gouz, 1653). He is presented here as mischievous and a master conspirator. In Gouz's 1653 edition, there are four *gopis* requesting their clothes from Krishna whereas the codex displays only two. The other differences in the printed version show the *gopis* are holding flowers and Krishna's face is tilted towards the right whereas, in the codex, the *gopis* do not have flowers in their hand, there are a lesser number of branches in the *kasta* tree and Krishna's face is towards the left while playing the flute (appendix iii).

The supplementary painting of Krishna shows how he enslaved the serpent named Caguenai. He described, Krishna, or Kaniya, sitting on a snake in front of another snake which has the head of a female, the latter offering flower to him (Figure 4, first one Krishna sitting on serpent while the other three figures represent Krishna and *gopagna* or Radha).



Figure 4 Top: Krishna on top of a serpent (Left) and Krishna and a gopi (Right); Bottom: Krishna and a gopi (Left) and a gopi and Krishna (Right).

Source: François de la Boullaye-le Gouz, *Les Voyages* (Retrieved from BNF Gallica digital edition), p. 176; Appendix iii.

‘There was a serpent with the name Gemena, another was called Caguenai who had 100 heads and was as powerful as a fortress. These are the terms given in Brahmanic stories. While playing a game, a flower fell from Kan’s hand by chance’ (Gouz, 1653).

As per Gouz’s memoir, Krishna went into the river to find the flower, where he saw the snake Kaliya, and in a fight with this snake, Krishna defeated and captured him. Nagin (Caguenai) begged Krishna for her husband Kaliya to be spared, but Krishna refused (Gouz, 1653). The codex’s illustration showed the lotus flower being held straight whereas, in the printed version, the flower is falling from the hand of Nagin. The posture of the snake, too is different in both the illustrations. Another discrepancy in the painting is that the serpent is depicted with a single head and not a hundred, as mentioned in the narrative.

In another illustration by Gouz (Figure 4), Krishna is shown playing the flute in the shade of the *kasta* tree along with his favourite *gopika* (*gopagna* or Radha), who is fanning him with a handkerchief, a custom very common in India. This image also has a difference between the codex and the printed version in terms of picture size, body parts and facial presentation, such as the moustache of Krishna. Gouz stated, ‘In the shores of Indou, Krishna is sometimes depicted with Gopagna in the garden of flowers, receiving with his hand’, whereas in the next illustration in the 1653 edition, Krishna and the *gopika* are shown reading the love stories in the Hindu verse (Gouz, 1653). These illustrations lack uniformity in sketching. In the four illustrations of Figure 4, Krishna is shown with two hands in two pictures and four hands in the other two illustrations [appendix iii]. Gouz also questioned the miracles attached to the *kasta* tree (venerated by the Hindus) which is supposed to possess supernatural powers, ignited by the playing of Krishna’s flute. He said, ‘In the kingdom of Gujarat, I saw one of these trees by the seaside, which provides shelter not only to the Fakirs and the poor but also attracts travellers of which Hindus do not dare to tear the leaf from it fearing death within a year’ (Gouz, 1653).

Gouz was critical about all forms of idolatry in Hinduism and their belief that their idols possessed miraculous powers. He stated, ‘The Hindus carefully preserve in their Pagodas [temples] the relics of Ram, Sita and other illustrated people of antiquity, honour them more than their

illustrations or statues, and attribute to them several miraculous powers' (Gouz, 1653). Further, Gouz tried to emphasize that all rational Europeans — such as the Portuguese or French — are against idolatry. He referred to a Portuguese tale (probably fictional). In the early period, when the Portuguese had conquered India, they had found a tooth of Hanuman. The Hindu king then had sent his ambassadors to regain the sacred tooth (Gouz, 1653). This king even offered the Portuguese to be the protector of the sacred relic, where they could place the tooth in a temple and allow Brahmins to serve it and make sacrifices there. The king even suggested that the pilgrims visiting the temple could be taxed a reasonable amount, and the Portuguese could keep their share. But Portuguese showed their rational bent of thought and disapproved of the idolatry of Hindus despite the political and monetary gains. Subsequently, they burnt the relic and spurned the Hindu king's offer (Gouz, 1653). The intolerance of Portuguese against other religion was noted by Gouz (Subrahmanyam, 2021b) by referring to a quote that 'all these persecutions that the Portuguese carry out on the Indou, Parsis and Muslims, may be thought to be the reason for which they abandon their lands, and prefer to reside in the lands of Schah Geann [Shahjahan], or the Adel Schah ['Adil Shah], where they can freely exercise their religion, temples, sacrifices, bathing [ceremonies] et cetera' (Gouz, 1653). But the overall implication seems to be the showing Gouz's rationality to prefer European religion over Indian.

This French traveller held the Brahmins were responsible for making (sacred) sacrifices, collect taxes from pilgrims and propagate religious superstitions among Hindu. He narrated the ways used by Brahmins to gather alms and respect by enforcing irrational practices in the daily lives of Hindu men and women. He observed that the Hindus washed themselves every morning at a nearby river and came with folded hands to offer their respects to the Brahmins. The Brahmins, who sat near the riverbank, would then draw a mark, considered sacred, with their thumb on the supplicant's forehead and smear some grains of rice on it. The supplicant would then offer the Brahmin some handful of rice; the wealthy would, however, offer a lot more as Brahmins would perform this custom at their home (Gouz, 1653).

Gouz, a rational man, was surprised to note the miraculous fables associated with the fakirs, or Hindu yogis, for their power of creating miracles. He narrated an anecdote of a fakir who made *kicheri* (*khichdi* or Indian-style porridge) in a small pot for 100,000 pilgrims which did not get empty (Gouz, 1653). He also discussed the caste system existing among the Hindus, mentioning they had 125 different tribes who were never united, each with a different language and separate temples. The Hindus did not receive any Jew, Pagan, Christians or Muslims into their religion, as consider them unworthy and give value to its own sect. Their caste hierarchy began with the Brahmins (priest), 'Bagnian (Katrīs, Rajputs, Scharaf), Dalis' and other craftsmen. All were bound to follow the caste norms and the caste profession for generations. He mentioned that there were no inter-caste or inter-tribe marriages, and Brahmins neither drank water nor ate with the other 124 tribes who were considered below them. This practice was followed by all tribes as per the hierarchy (Gouz, 1653).

The most common theme among European travellers in India is about the practice of sati. Gouz referred to this as well, mentioning that the practice originated from the Hindu belief that Lord Ram had ordained that women should take care of their husbands not only in this world but also in the other world. He stated that after the death of the wives of Brahmins,

'they [i.e., Brahmins] can tie a second knot with a virgin, otherwise, they would be squalid, because of the mixture of seeds, but if a Brahman or Banian suddenly dies, his wife cannot remarry ... in some places the living wives burn themselves to be in his company in the other world as has been ordered by Ram, since a wife is obliged to take care of the husband.' (Gouz, 1653)

Gouz mentioned that the permission to commit sati was sometimes obtained from the 'nababs' (nawabs) after offering gifts since this custom was universally condemned by them (Gouz, 1653). Gouz praised the Hindu custom of burning the corpses, which does not pollute the water, air and land, while criticizing the Christians and Muslims whose bodies are corrupted when eaten by the worms (Gouz, 1653).

While describing the temples and sacred landing stages (*ghats*), Gouz criticized the miraculous beliefs and customs propagated by sacred monks and Brahmins, whereas appraising the Portuguese for destroying ghats and washhouses where Hindus would bathe on certain festivals to absolve their sins. This traveller mentioned one *ghat* that was considered sacred by pilgrims as it was associated with Lord Ram's birthplace that witnessed the auto-filling of water every

five years (Gouz, 1653). Gouz was against the collection of tribute that the Brahmins collected from the pilgrims at temples (Gouz, 1653). He considered the Hindu belief of washing away sins by absolutions in the holy river irrational and was amused by it.

Gouz considered the Hindu religious faiths as illogical, where only Jesus Christ (the true messiah or saviour) and the missionaries could help to restore their faith (Gouz, 1653). His mission to spread Christianity is reflected through his praise of the Portuguese (who were Roman Catholics) who with their proselytizing zeal propagated their religion ardently and converted many Indians. However, Gouz was depressed as these converts continued to practise their old superstitions. He also remarked that the Hindus liked the Portuguese more than Muslims, (Gouz, 1653) in the context of stating the possibility of Hindus being converted by French missionaries in India.

CONCLUSION

The article goes beyond Said's approach by analyzing Gouz's biography and his Oriental imagination of India. Similar to Marsh's perspective, Gouz' records are analyzed to explore French exoticism in terms of Hindu mythology in cross-culture encounters. His narratives are cautious and succinct, represented with simplicity along with empirical observations; however, these are not free of his preconceptions and prejudices. His motives to explore distant land include personal curiosity, the study of political conditions and exploring commercial avenues in the Oriental world, added with the zeal of a missionary. He also sometimes praised the Orientals for their liberty of conscience over their French counterparts. He modestly admits to not being an eyewitness to many Hindu religious customs, but his textual and visual depictions made a remarkable contribution to quench the thirst of the Western audience when it came to tales of Hindu paganism in a distant land.

This article is based on the first-ever in-depth investigation of Hindu mythological pictorial depictions, it can be purported that he was sincere in his effort to observe Hindu mythology but eventually failed as his narratives lack authenticity, based as they are on unreliable sources. Additionally, his illustrations lack uniformity in comparison to popular Hindu literature, their narrations and pictorial documentation. The striking discrepancies are also highlighted between the illustrations of the codex and the printed version.

Gouz accounts is not be regarded the most popular French traveller visiting Mughal India during the seventeenth century, in comparison to contemporary Bernier, Tavernier or Charin. However, his narratives are considered invaluable (despite numerous mistakes in narrations and pictorials) to set a trend of highlighting inquisitive Hindu religious themes in subsequent French travellers' accounts (although 'monolithic view' cannot be applied to them). He authored miraculous-mysterious fables attracted the immediate attention of the Western audience that enhanced French understanding of the Orientalism that and contributed in intellectual early modern Enlightenment. This contributed to intellectual enhancement (especially France) that helped in developing the French image of the Orient in early-modern France.

ADDITIONAL FILE


The additional file for this article can be found as follows:


- **Appendix.** Coloured Illustrations presented in the Manuscript. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/aa.269.s1>


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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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