CONCLUSION

The travelogues are useful source of information for the period under study. This genre of unofficial historical writing has its own importance even surrounded by much criticism; it is profusely used by the modern historians in corroborating the facts. It sheds light on social customs and institutions, religious practices and beliefs, trade industry and commerce and the economic condition of the people.

Travellers like Duarte Barbosa, Varthema, Nuniz and Paes has given a very interesting description of southern India especially of Vijayanagara Empire covering a wide range from king to common masses during the early 16th century. Northern India was also visited by a horde of travellers such as Sir Thomas Roe, William Hawkins, Edward Terry, Bernier and Manucci; who were in close touch with the Mughal Court and they furnish us with detailed information about the court life, festivals and ceremonial functions. Others travellers like Ovington, Thevenot, Careri wrote much on common masses. These travellers recorded the minutest details of Indian social-cultural and economic life.

Analysing the vast mass of material provided by the travellers leads to the conclusion that a common civilization sprang up in the greater part of the country during the 16th and 17th centuries. The establishment of a strong central government under the Mughals gave peace to the country. This peaceful atmosphere enabled the people to evolve a common outlook upon life which brought about homogeneity in social and spiritual ideals and in art and literature.

The Hindus and Muslims lived together with perfect peace and harmony. There was no serious religious strife or communal disturbances in India except that of some trivial bitterness between the Shias and Sunnis. The Hindus and Muslims both adopted the customs and manners of each other. They celebrated their fairs and festivals in the same manner. In the courts of the monarchs some of the Hindu festivals such as Diwali and Rakshabandhan were celebrated with the same enthusiasm as the two Ids and Shab-i-Barat. This gave a very healthy influence on the population.

Most of the ceremonies performed by the Hindus and Muslims were same such as at the child-birth and beginning education were identical. The pastimes and
amusements were similar for the whole period. In their household affairs, dresses, ornaments, arms, and in other details of their living, it was difficult to distinguish the one from the other. Even they observed common superstitions and beliefs except that of the religious ones.

The educational-system remained organized on the traditional lines. The Muslims and Hindus had a common system of education. They studied side by side in the same maktabs and madarsas under a common teacher. The primary education was given in these madarsas, attached with the mosques. Persian being the official language was learnt by most of the Hindus to get employed in mughal administration. J. N. Sarkar writes, "All the twenty Indian Subahs of the Mughal Empire were governed by exactly the same administrative machinery, with exactly the same procedure, and official titles. Persian was the one language in all official records etc… officials and soldiers were frequently transferred from one province to another. Thus, the native of one province felt himself almost at home in another province, traders and travellers passed most easily from city to city, subah to subah, and all realized the imperial oneness of this vast country". After learning Persian the higher education was imparted in colleges.

The Muslims learnt Hindi and some of them studied Sanskrit also. The Vedas, Upanishads and several other Hindu religious and philosophical works were translated into Persian. Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum studied such works with great curiosity and interest. The Muslims also contributed in the enrichment of the Hindi, Bengali and Punjabi languages and literatures.

During the sixteenth and the seventeenth century the condition of women was not much different as it prevailed in early medieval period but with a minor alteration only. Many social reforms were undertaken such as the abolition of child-marriage and sati for raising the status of women in society.

The royal ladies enjoyed special privileges and were held in high esteem. They were also given proper honour and respect. Some of them kept themselves involved in mercantile activities, court politics and even in state welfare works. The royal ladies held this place because of their personal achievements and ability sometimes. The position of the women of the nobility was just the copy of the royalty.
In spite of the many privileges enjoyed by the ladies of the aristocratic and nobility class their life was also not free from some of the evil practices in the society like polygamy and _purdah_.

_Purdah_ or veiling of women was a common practice among the Muslims, and it was also adopted by Hindu women after the advent of the Muslims. This system was particularly prevalent among affluent families of both communities, as it came to be associated as an elitist practice. In fact _purdah_ was the most strictly observed by the royal ladies and higher class women. Polygamy was common among the Muslims while Hindus mostly practiced monogamy; but Hindu rulers were an exception to this rule.

On the other hand, the foreign travellers observed the social custom and practices that had a direct bearing on the place of middle-class and common women that relegated them (women) to the background. The social malpractices like the child marriage, infanticide, _sati_, _jauhar_, dowry, divorce, remarriage, female slavery that included concubinage and dancing girls are fearlessly revealed in the travelogues. Their professional life played an important role in the non-prevalence of _purdah_ system among the lower class.

In south India women enjoyed a better position as compared to their northern counterparts. They participated keenly in social, political and literary activities of the time. There were also women wrestlers, astrologers and clerks who were well-educated and experienced in state business.

Yet, the Vijayanagar society was not free from the social evils of child-marriage, the dowry system and the frequent practice of _sati_. Polygamy was not uncommon and even visits to brothels were considered to be fairly normal, unattached with any social stigma. Sometimes women of pleasure accompanied the army and accomplished courtesans often enjoyed special favours from the kings.

In the economic sphere the account left by the travellers is of prime importance. They give ample and reliable information about agricultural crops, minerals, industries, trade and commerce. People lived mostly in self-sufficient villages forming a unit. They produced all the necessities of life such as food and clothes for their own use. The cultivators grew different kinds of crops and the craftsmen manufactured all kinds of goods.
At the height of empire in the seventeenth century, the use of money, the cultivation of commercial crops and the production of manufactured goods had all become more widespread. The intensification of monetization and commercialization meant that even peasants were now enmeshed in economic relationships that extended considerably beyond their villages.

Commercial activity was not only intruding deeper and deeper into local agrarian economies, it was also operating in more expansive networks across the subcontinent as the Mughal Empire grew in size. Cash and credit, a wide range of goods and even people circulated on a much larger scale during the seventeenth century than in earlier times. As a consequence, all kinds of merchants, the small village moneylender, the urban shopkeeper, the long-distance trader, and the merchant-banker flourished.

Growing monetization and the expansion of economic networks were partly an outcome of the needs of the Mughal state. Revenues extracted from the hinterland typically in the form of cash, had to be dispatched to the capital, while funds for military campaigns or specialized goods had to be sent out to the provinces. This process could cumbersome, as in the early seventeenth century when Bengal’s revenues were physically transported to the Imperial heartland in a convoy of bullock-carts. A better means of remitting money from one place to another was soon developed, the *hundi* or bill of exchange.

The relative ease of travel and exchange over long distances also stimulated the expansion of economic networks in the seventeenth century. Even bulky raw materials and foodstuffs were circulated from one end of the empire to another. Rice, sugar and oil from Bengal for instance were sent inlands along the Ganges River to Agra and also down the eastern coast to the Coromandel. In its return, Bengal imported large quantities of salt from Rajasthan. Artisans in certain areas came to depend largely on supplies from distant regions. Bengal was the source of most of the raw silk used by Gujarat’s important silk textile industry, while Coromandel weavers relied heavily on raw cotton from the western Deccan. High and luxury items like precious stones and finely worked metal ware were widely coveted and distributed.
People too had to travel to far-off places to procure goods for business deals and needed safe accommodations while away from their homes. A large city like Agra had as many as sixty rest-houses or serais for travellers according to Jean Thevenot.

It is significant to note that industries were in a highly flourishing state in those days. The manufacture of textiles was the biggest industry in the country. Besides textiles, metallurgy, diamond cutting and the saltpeter, ceramics reached the highest stage of artistic development. Indian manufactured goods were exported to Western Asia and to the countries of Europe, and it was the prospect of a lucrative trade in these goods that attracted the European merchants to India during this period. Imports were almost negligible as India was self-sufficient.

During early sixteenth-century the economy the Vijayanagara also flourished due to the resultant agrarian surplus along with the development of industry. Travellers describe the capital of Vijayanagara as the ‘best provided city in the world’. The Vijayanagara rulers prompted mining of metals and diamonds, built craft-guilds and encouraged their subjects to produce the best of fabrics and perfumes. They patronized Hindu religion and made extensive developments in the field of architecture through the construction of impressive temples and monuments. With the battle of Talikota in 1564 A.D., the glory of Vijayanagara finally came to an end.

So it is safe to conclude that while the affluent sections of society were rich and prosperous from their income from agriculture, trade and manufacture. The standard of living of common masses was low but they were contented as foodstuffs and other basic needs were available in abundance; also at very cheap prices. The conditions of common masses were not so bad except during dislocation either caused by war or by some natural calamity.