MERCHANTS, RENEGADES AND PADRES: PORTUGUESE PRESENCE IN BENGAL IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **MERCHANTS, RENEGADES AND PADRES: PORTUGUESE PRESENCE IN BENGAL IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES** submitted by RADHIKA KHANNA in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University, is an original work and has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1498 A.D., while purchasing goods at Calicut to make up the cargo for his trip back to Lisbon, Vasco da Gama observed the very high price of Bengali textiles in the market at Calicut and noted that a trip to Bengal itself would be a profitable venture.[1] In the first few years of the 16th century, Portuguese individuals had already found their way around to Bengal and were fairly familiar with its geography and products. It was with information furnished by such persons that Duarte Barbosa, the Portuguese escrivão (writer) at the factory at Cananor, without ever having visited the region himself, was able to include an account of Bengal in his book, completed in c.1517-18.[2]

Several of these first few itinerant merchants and sailors, who had waltzed along the waves into the region, settled down there. They were followed by others, many of whom had been blacklisted and turned out of the Goa-controlled settlements of the *Estado da India*, others who had fled Goa for fear of the long-reaching arm of the

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[1] M.R. Tarafdar, *Husain-Shahi Bengal, 1494-1538 A.D., A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca, 1965, p. 31.

[2] Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa, An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants, written by Duarte Barbosa and completed about the year 1518 A.D.*, translated by M.L. Dames, 2 Vols., London, 1918 & 1921.

Inquisition; most of whom were really criminals and blackguards as far as the *Estado* was concerned. In 1517, the first official Portuguese expeditions reached Bengal,[3] in 1536-37, the *Estado da India* acquired its first toe-holds in the region at Chittagong and Satgaon,[4] in the 1580s the first priests of the Bengal mission arrived in the field.[5]

This pot-pourri of elements that constituted the white-skinned 'Firingi' in Bengal was a new factor in the region in the 16th century. Being a peculiar mix of agents of the viceroy and private adventures, merchants, pirates and slave-traders, 'the Portuguese in Bengal' does not comprise a simple, homogenous category. Nevertheless, within a short span of time, they passed into contemporary perception as a significant presence in the area. They were viewed as an element that had come from outside the region, from the direction of the sea, and had soon established itself as an extra-local, sub-rgional entity in the area.

With excellent military skills and naval prowess, the Portuguese in Bengal came to represent a much-sought-ally and a formidable foe. Based in a series of settlements that were spread over the entire coastal and deltaic belt, they

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[3]J.J.A. Campos, *The History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1919, pp. 26-27.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 39.

[5]Fray Sebastien Manrique, *The Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique, 1629-1643*, translated by C. Eckford Luard and Fr. H. Hosten, S.J., 2 Vols., Oxford, 1926, Vol. I, pp. 38-40.

participated in Bengal's flourishing commercial economy. In league with the indigenous populace (the Maghs) of the Arakan region, they indulged in piracy, looting and slave-trave. Any contemporary account of Bengal in the 16th and 17th centuries is sensitive to the "Firingis" as an important element in the region. In 19th century popular Bengali literature, there are numerous references to the "*magh-i mullūck*", which refers, at one level, to the area of operation (*mulk*) of these elements, and also, more generally, to their activities. In popular perception, thus, the period of Portuguese activity in Bengal came to form a paradigmatic era of anarchy and chaos.[6]

By 1632, the Portuguese in Bengal were important enough to deserve eviction from their main centre at Hugli. That is to say, they were not an inconsequential little element perched at one edge of the mighty Mughal empire; they represented a presence that was important enough in the region to deserve to be the target of a military expedition, and an adversary that was powerful enough for the victory to be regarded as one of the significant triumphs of the career of Shah Jahan.[7]

Whether the Portuguese in Bengal formed a well-liked, or a feared and hated, category is incidental for the

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[6]I thank Mr. Kunal Chakravarti for this piece of information.

[7]Cf. the description of the 'Capture of the Port of Hugli' in 'Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Badshah-nama*, extracts translated in H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as told by its Own Historians*, Vol. VII, London, 1877, pp. 31-35.

moment. Our basic contention is that they formed an important enough presence in the region for a certain period of time to deserve to be the subject of a whole story. The Portuguese towns were the first proto-colonial enclaves in our region (as they were in Asia, as a whole). Numerically they were not very large, it is true. Sandwip island, one of their more famous settlements in Bengal, had one thousand Portuguese and two thousand well-armed mesticos in 1607.[8] Hugli, their premier settlement in the region had a population (that included Portuguese, mesticos, indigenous resident merchants, and slaves) of five thousand, in 1603.[9] Notwithstanding, the Portuguese were able to build up a quasi-political presence in Bengal. They were perceived as a naval-militaristic power in the region. Their fleet was well-respected and acknowledged to be superior to any other in the area.[10] By virtue of this, and in the context of the political confusion that Bengal was experiencing at this time, they were able to wield a certain amount of political clout. They also enjoyed a remarkable degree of independence in their settlements in Bengal. In more ways than one they laid the foundations for the Dutch and the English to build on in the years to come.

The North Europeans frequently followed the Portuguese

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[8]Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

[9]M.N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India*, (The New Cambridge History of India, 1.1), Bombay, 1987, p. 84.

[10]Cf. Shitab Khan (Mirza Nathan), *Baharistan-i Ghaybi*, translated by M.I. Borah, 2 Vols., Gauhati, 1936, Vol. I, p. 334.

in terms of institutional arrangements. Hugli had already acquired the independent status that became the basis of the extra-territorial privileges that were enjoyed by Chandernagore and Calcutta, also built in Hugli's immediate vicinity.[11] The first outposts built by the Dutch and the English in Asia were in the Portuguese style of forts and *feitoras* (factories). Often they even found themselves falling into patterns of behaviour already created by the Iberians. It is a little-known fact that when Clive was addressing his troops at the field of Plassey in 1757, he spoke to them in Portuguese.[12]

All this considered, the historiography of the Portuguese in Bengal is really rather scanty. Beginning with J.J.A. Campos" book published in 1919,[13] interest in the theme gets lost in historical circles till Sanjay Subrahmanyam"s 1990 publiction.[14] Campos" perspective is entirely Portuguese-centric and betrays a somewhat exaggerated sense of their importance. He sees them as traders who gained effective control over the whole sea-board from Orissa to Chittagong. Their strength lay in their military and naval superiority, so that "the greater part of the Bengal trade and shipping passed into their

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[11]For a description of the independent status of Hugli see Fr. John Cabral, S.J., letter dated Ceylon, November 12, 1633, in Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, Appendix, 'The Fall of Hugli', p. 393.

[12]~~NESTFORM~~ Pearson, *op.cit.*

[13]Campos, *op.cit.*

[14]Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1700*, New Delhi, 1990.

hands."[15] In addition, Campos" understanding, which perhaps stems from his being among the early writers on the Portuguese in Asia, is rather simplistic in its categorization. Thus, he sees the acquisition of a foothold at Chittagong, in 1536-37, as the takeover of the entire trade of Bengal by the Portuguese, and the arrival of the Dutch as the elimination of Portuguese influence in the area.

Subrahmanyam"s outlook, on the other hand, is much more nuanced. To his mind, "if the Portuguese did really meet with such success in Bengal, despite the fact that their presence there was very largely comprising private individuals, we may consider it remarkable .... The Portuguese presence in its various layers was undoubtedly an important one, but it was not achieved by wholly excluding other traders...."[16]

It is to this importance of the Portuguese in Bengal, which did not necessarily stem from their commercial dominance, that we need to address ourselves. In the first place, an understanding of their presence in the region is necessary to make complete the history of Bengal in this period. An eminent historian expressed the opinion many years ago that the history of medieval Bengal could not be

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[15]Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

[16]Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade", in Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire, op.cit.*, p. 97.

written without a knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, Bengali *and Portuguese*.

Secondly, a study of the Portuguese in Bengal is also useful in furthering our understanding of the Portuguese presence in Asia as a whole. Most writings on the Portuguese activity in Asia concentrate on a particular region. Discernible in them, however, are perceptions of the issues examined in a general 'Portuguese" and 'Asian" context, that impinge upon, and are in turn conditioned by, regional findings. A survey of these writings reveals immediately that first, research in Portuguese activity in the Indian Ocean is weighted heavily in favour of the western sector and second, and more important, the notions of the enterprise differ depending on their western or eastern basis. This could result in viewing the Portuguese presence in Asia as different in different sectors or in requalifying older, western sector-related conclusions in the light of newer research with regard to the east, both of which are visible in the recent writings.

To cite a simple example, traditionally the Portuguese Asian enterprise was studied and understood in terms of the empire of the Portuguese Crown - the *Estado da India* - which comprised of more than fifty fortified settlements stretching across the Indian Ocean littoral, from Sofala in Mozambique to Macao in China, with its headquarters at Goa. Any Portuguese presence found in the long stretches of

coastline between *Estado* settlements were seen to lie in Goa"s shadow - they comprised the shadow-empire that was of peripheral importance and thus, of marginal interest.[17] Thus, 'Golden Goa", and the pepper trade from bases in Malabar, and the stranglehold on the traffic in Gujarati textiles conducted from Diu, formed the focus of study and the working, sucesses and failures of the *Estado da India* came to epitomise the essence of the Portuguese enterprise in Asia.

Research in the twilight zone between official *Estado* settlements, on the other hand, revealed that the shadow did not always follow its master. It was not the officials of the *Estado* who called all the shots in Portuguese Asia; the private elements had a logic and functioning that was quite independent and could even influence the functioning of the *Estado*. The "principal persons" (*pessoas principais*) of the private settlements in the east proved strong enough to remove a governor of Goa on one occasion. Thus, not only did the "shadow" comprise a living part of the Portuguese Asian enterprise, but private ambitions, hopes and aspirations could be located within the *Estado*, too, as powerful enough to shape its destiny. In fact, the 'official" aspects of the Portuguese Asian enterprise came to be recognised as giving in more and more to its private

[17]Cf. George Winius, 'The "shadow-empire" of Goa in the Bay of Bengal", *Itinerario*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1983.

components after 1540.[18]

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Bengal formed one of the hyperactive commercial zones of the Indian sub-continent. Contemporaries were struck by the great fertility of its soil and the profusion of commodities it produced. It was a well-populated region which afforded cheap labour and a low level of subsistence. "Many strange nations" flocked to it "on account of its vast trade and commerce in a great variety of commodities which are produced in the rich and fertile lands of this region."[19] "The Plenty and Cheapness of Provisions are incredible, and the Country is full of Inhabitants...."[20] "As to the Commodities of great value, and which draw the Commerce of Strangers thither, I know not whether there be a Country in the World that affords more and greater variety .... In a word, Bengale is a country abounding in all things...."[21]

It was to this region of plenty and opportunity that the Portuguese were attracted on their arrival in Asia. In

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[18]Cf. Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Luis Filipe Thomaz, 'Evolution of Empire: The Portuguese in the Indian Ocean during the sixteenth century", in James D. Tracy (ed.), *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 298-331.

[19]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, pp. 44-45.

[20]Alexander Hamilton, quoted in Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of the Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679*, edited by R.C. Temple, Cambridge, 1903.

[21]Tavernier, quoted in *ibid.*

addition, with a three hundred mile-long seaboard and an extensively navigable riverine network, Bengal offered ideal topographical conditions for the Portuguese, with their pronounced maritime orientation, to operate in.

The Portuguese in Asia itself were divided, broadly, into those who resided under the official umbrella of the *Estado da India*, and the deserters, who were referred to derogatorily as *arrenegados* or *chatins*.[22] Correspondingly, in the first three decades of the 16th century, when the Portuguese were spreading out all over the Indian Ocean littoral, Asia came to be divided, broadly, into three sectors. In the western Indian Ocean, a network of coastal fortresses, that were in a regular state of war, were set up. This was the stronghold of the *Estado da India*. East of Malacca, the network established was of peaceful, commercial, coastal settlements. This was a twilight zone, which included *Estado* bases like Malacca, as well as essentially private settlements with some kind of official linkage, such as Macao, Tidor, Timor etc. The Bay of Bengal formed a third region, which was recognized as largely the domain of the Portuguese renegade and private trader.

The Portuguese presence in Bengal was composed largely of the *arrenegados*. Bengal was not one of the trading emporia of the intra-Asian trading system that predated the

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[22]Cf. Subrahmanyam and Thomaz 'Evolution of Empire", *op.cit.*, p. 321.

Portuguese arrival in Asia. With their aim of capturing the entire trade of the Indian Ocean, Bengal did not come first on their agenda in the way Diu, Hormuz and Malacca did. For the renegade, who either deserted the *Estado* or was expelled from it, this was an ideal area to flee to. The official representatives of the Crown found their way round to Bengal by 1517. Thereafter, an annual Crown voyage (the *carreira de Bengala*) came to Bengal from Goa, and sometimes from Malacca, to trade with the region.

From the very beginning, therefore, the Portuguese presence in Bengal was a very mixed one. Rivalry was rampant between the private settlers and the *Estado da India*, in the race to establish themselves in the region. Till the late 1530s, Bengal was beyond the pale of the *Estado*; it was only in 1536-37 that it secured the right to build trading posts at Chittagong and Satgaon.

In the meantime, imperial ideology was changing in the metropolis by the 1540s, which affected the way empire was conceived. By this time, 'monarchic capitalism"[23], was on the wane. Both in the trade with Europe, as well as in trade within Asia, the Crown and the *Estado* began to withdraw from direct participation. The Cape route had been the fiercely-guarded monopoly of the Crown. Within Asia, between 1511 and 1520, a whole series of Crown voyages (or *carreiras*) had been created. By the 1540s, however,

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[23]I have borrowed the term from *ibid.*, p. 301.

commerce came to be regarded as beneath the dignity of the Crown. Within Asia, therefore, the *carreiras* first began to be conducted in ships freighted by the Crown, and then gave way to the concession voyages that were awarded to deserving *fidalgos*.

It was when the Portuguese Asian enterprise was in this phase that the first inroads were made into Bengal. By the 1540s, the Portuguese Crown and *Estado* were backing out of areas that were already their established domain of operation; in regions such as Bengal, where their own position was not yet quite clear and they were still fighting it out with the private elements, they, quite naturally, began to give in to them.

The private settlers in Bengal usually dissassociated themselves from the *Estado* and were careful to maintain their independence. Bengal, therefore, was never quite part of the *Estado*; nevertheless, official interest in the area never did wane. The 'private" and 'official" aspects of the Portuguese presence in Bengal continued to coexist through the evolution of a working relationship between them.

It was the Christian missionary who usually maintained the most tangible link between the 'private" and 'official" in Portuguese Bengal. By virtue of a series of rights granted to the Portuguese Crown by the Papacy between 1452 and 1514 A.D., the Crown had acquired

extensive authority over the overseas missions. In a region such as Bengal, the Church was used as a frontier institution of the Crown. The missionary in the field did not go out only to seek converts for Christianity; he also went to mobilise loyalty for the Portuguese Crown, and was usually a diplomatic envoy carrying a message from Goa to a local ruler.

The private settlers in Bengal, themselves, acknowledged the Cross and the Flag. While disassociating themselves from the *Estado da India*, it was through such linkages that the settlers in the region tried to establish an identity that was proudly 'Portuguese" in this far-flung, foreign land. It is such aspects of the Portuguese, visible in the region of Bengal, that shed light on their larger presence in Asia itself. With the *arrenegados* acknowledging the authority of Lisbon, but rejecting that of Goa, there are hints at a power-struggle within Portuguese Asia over the categories of 'official" and 'unofficial" themselves.

This dissertation is an effort to understand the Portuguese presence in the region of Bengal, trying not to include too much of *the Portuguese*, leaving out, in the process, the dimension of *the region* itself. It is not exclusively the history of the Portuguese, nor that of Bengal, but an effort to understand each in the context of the other. Our study also suggests that further research

into such hitherto neglected aras of Portuguese Asia help not only in understanding their presence in these regions themselves, but requalify our notions of the Portuguese enterprise in Asia as a whole.

CHAPTER I

THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND THE POLITICAL CANVAS: THE REGION OF BENGAL IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

It is the aim of this chapter to paint the background against which the Portuguese operated in Bengal in the 16th and 17th centuries. We may begin by defining the limits of our region itself. We will establish that in contemporary perception, geographically Bengal was a separate region. We are not, however, attempting a history of Bengal, but of the Portuguese in Bengal. Our area of interest, thus, gets determined by the zone of Portuguese operations.

It is a view commonly held in the historiography that the nature of the Portuguese presence east of Cape Comorin, in the Bay of Bengal, was different from that in the west, along the shores of the Arabian Sea.[1] It is, thus, justified in one way to study the role of the Portuguese along the entire Bay.[2] If one wishes to make a more detailed study of

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[1]This notion is visible, among others, in C.R. Boxer, *Fidalgoes in the Far East 1550-1770*, The Hague, 1948; B.W. Diffie & G.D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, Oxford, 1977; M.N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India*, New Delhi, 1987; and most clearly in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire, Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal*, 1500-1700, New Delhi, 1990.

[2]This is what Subrahmanyam has done in *Improvising Empire, op.cit.*

their presence in a smaller region, on the other hand, it becomes difficult to know where to draw the line.

There are two factors that make it difficult to reconcile the geographical boundaries of Bengal with our usage of the word 'Bengal'. First, in our time-period the political boundaries of Bengal frequently did not correspond with its geographical limits. The 16th and early 17th centuries were characterized by political turmoil in the region. The participants in the fray included Bengal based powers such as the Husain Shahs, the Karranis, Sher Shah and his Afghans, and the local chieftains known as the Barah Bhuyas, as well as rulers of territories perceived to be outside the region, such as the Arakan raja and the rulers of Orissa and Tippara. With these 'neighbours' frequently wresting control of parts of 'geographical' Bengal in this period, the whole notion of perceiving the region in geographical terms as a distinct territorial unit begins to become questionable.

In addition, the spread of the Portuguese settlements and their operations in this region were not confined to any particular political area, nor to its conventionally understood geographical boundaries. The Portuguese settlements were located along the coast and the extensive riverine tracts and did not extend very far inland. Their operations were, by and large, confined to the coastal belt and its immediate hinterland. It, thus, becomes necessary

to clarify our usage of the word 'Bengal'; in our study the term 'Bengal' corresponds really to the Portuguese zone of operations in the region. The Portuguese presence extended beyond 'geographical' Bengal into upper Orissa and, more particularly, in the Arakan, along the coastline. On the other hand, while Portuguese activity did focus towards inland Bengal it did not really extend north beyond Dacca. Hence, in this study 'Bengal' denotes the macro-region where the Portuguese extended their commercial-colonial activities.

Before venturing into a study of the nature of the Portuguese presence in the region that we have demarcated, it is necessary to place them within the setting in which they were acting. It is our contention that it was within a particular geographical setting, on a certain political canvas, that the Portuguese were able to implant their presence and carve out a quasi-political role and position of influence for themselves in the region. In the first section of this chapter, therefore, we will try to recreate the physical environment in which the Portuguese were able to make their presence felt in medieval Bengal.

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I. The Geographical Setting

There is a very clear perception running like a thread

through all our sources from the beginning of the 16th century to the latter part of the 17th century that Bengal was geographically a separate region, flanked on the west by the region of Orissa and on the east by the Kingdom of Arakan. Our sources are also fairly consistent in drawing the eastern and western boundaries (they do not refer to political boundaries, but to the geographical limits of the area) of the region of Bengal. Most of them draw the borders along two rivers which they call the two arms of the River Ganges. The 16th century Portuguese historian, João de Barros' perception of the location of Bengal is very clear -

> The Kingdom of Bengal ... is situated in that region where the River Ganges discharges its waters by two principal branches into the Eastern Ocean, and where the land drawing further back from its waters forms the great Gulf which geographers term Gangetic and which we now name from Bengal. Into the mouths of these two branches two notable rivers discharge themselves, one from the east, the other from the west, both being boundaries of the kingdom. One of these our people call the River of Chatigam, as it enters the eastern mouth of the Ganges at a city of this name .... The other river enters the western arm of the Ganges below another city called Satigam .... And as this river is a great one and flows through many lands, the natives, in imitation of the Ganges into which it discharges its waters, give it also the name of Ganga .... In this manner lies the Kingdom of Bengala on its sea-coast which faces southwards between these two rivers, this of Satigam to the west

> and that of Chatigam to the east, and the two branches of the Ganges into which they flow form the figure of the Greek letter Delta, as do all great rivers which enter the sea by several mouths.[3]

As far as the western boundary is concerned, we have the same curious fact of the river Ganges forming the demarcating line between Orissa and Bengal recurring in other travellers' accounts as well. Thus, describing the region of Bengal from information received from merchants and other frequenters of that area, Duarte Barbosa, the Portuguese writer at the factory at Cananor, wrote in circa 1516-17 -

> This kingdom [of Otisa] .... extends along the coast northwards where there is a river called Ganges (but they call it Guorigna), and on the further bank of this river begins the kingdom of Bengal....[4]

The Dutchman, John Huyghen van Linschoten, had a similar perception in 1580s -

> At the end of the Kingdom of Orixa and the coast of Choramandel beginneth the River Ganges in the Kingdom

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[3]João de Barros, *Decadas da Asia*, extracts translated and reproduced by M.L. Dames in *The Book of Duarte Barbosa, An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants,written by Duarte Barbosa and completed about the year 1518 A.D.*translated by M.L. Dames, 2 Vols, London, 1918 & 1921, Vol. II, Appendix I, pp. 244-245.

[4]Barbosa, *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 133-134.

> of Bengalen: This is one of the most famous rivers in all the world....[5]

Lavanha's map of Bengal, given in Vol.IV of the *Decadas* of João de Barros, shows this River Ganga as the boundary between the *Reino de Bengalla* and the *Reino de Orixa*.[6] However, as is clear from the map itself as well as from Barros' unambiguous description, it was not the main River Ganges, but a smaller river lying to its south-west, probably the nameless one marked just below the River Rupnarayan on Irfan Habib's map of Bengal.[7]

Separately, Barros also gives as the western boundary of Bengal a particular point on the coast that he calls the Cape Segogora or the Point Palmeiras.

> And from this cape (Segogora), which our folk call Palmeiras, ... we come to the end of the kingdom of Orixa (at one and twenty degrees)...."[8]

Thomas Bowrey, a century later, has the same thing to say -

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[5]J.H. van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, translated by A.C. Burnell and P.A. Tiele, 2 Vols, New Delhi, 1988, (reprint), Vol. I, p. 92.

[6]The map is reproduced in Barbosa, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, facing p. 135.

[7]I estimate that it was this river and not any other lying further to the south-west as Hijli is clearly located in Orissa in our sources and there is no other river marked north of Hijli and south of the Ganges. Barbosa's translator, M.L. Dames speculates that it was the Baitarani river.

[8]Barros, *op.cit.*, pp. 241-242.

> ...the Sea or Gulph of Bengala ... [stretches] between Point Palmeris and the Arackan shore...."[9]

This point is very considerably to the south of the aforesaid River Ganga marked in Lavanha's map. It is unlikely that this was the actual boundary between Orissa and Bengal, since this does not tally with other bits of information culled from the same sources. Thus, Hijli is always clearly depicted in the region of Orissa,[10] as is Balasore,[11] both of which are north of the Point Palmeris. Going by this, Point Palmeris itself should have been in Orissa proper, and not between Orissa and Bengal.

As far as the eastern boundary of Bengal is concerned, most of our sources merely state that the Kingdom of Bengal stretches till the Kingdom of Arakan in the east. Barbosa is more specific, drawing the boundary between Bengal and Arakan at a particular river -

> Having passed the River Ganges, along the coast ... until reaching the River Paralem, is the Kingdom of

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[9]Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679*, edited by R.C. Temple, Cambridge, 1903, p. 131.

[10]Fray Sebastian Manrique, *The Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique, 1629-1643*, translated by C. Eckford Luard and Father H. Hosten, S.J., 2 Vols, Oxford, 1926, Vol. I, pp. 13-15; J. Hosten Ryley, *Ralph Fitch, England's Pioneer to India and Burma*, London, 1899, p. 113.

[11]Bowrey, *op.cit.*; cf., Linschoten, *op.cit.*

Bengala.[12]

It is difficult to identify this river. However, the historian Barros too places the eastern boundary of Bengal at a river, which he calls the "River of Chatigam."[13] Since Barros is very clear that the river has this name as the city of Chatigam is located on it, this river should be the Karnaphuli. Abul Fazl, too, locates the city of Chittagong as the eastern boundary of the Subah of Bengal, the possession of which city he, however, gives to the neighbouring kingdom of Arakan.[14]

Most of our sources tend to view Bengal from the coast towards the interior, and their perception of its borders and boundaries shares a similar perspective. Thus, a boundary is marked by the *mouth* of a river, or a particular port-city, or a particular point on the coast. While most of the European travellers were, thus, very familiar with the eastern and western borders of the region of Bengal, along the coast, few of them seemed to have had any idea of its northern limits or inland borders. Ralph Fitch was among the exceptional few who referred to "the country of

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[12]Barbosa, extracts translated and reproduced in J.N. Dasgupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century A.D.*, New Delhi, 1989, reprint (1914), p. 114.

[13]Barros, *op.cit.*, p. 224.

[14]Abu 'l Fazl Allami, *The Ain-i Akbari*, translated by H.S. Jarrett, 3 Vols, 3rd edition, New Delhi, 1978, (reprint), Vol. II, pp. 129-130, 132.

Couche" (Cooch Behar) lying on Bengal's northern border.[15] While this is probably because most of our travellers approached Bengal from the sea and visited its prominent ports and were thus familiar with the coastal tract, it does reflect their perception of the region in terms of their own interest in it. Geographically, the region of Bengal extended inland till "the northern range of mountains." We have a complete visualization of all its geographical frontiers in the *Ain-i Akbari*.

> Its length from Chittagong to *Garhi* is four hundred *kos*. Its breadth from the northern range of mountains to the southern frontier of the *Sarkar* of *Mandaran* is two hundred *kos* .... It is bounded on the east by the sea, on the north and south (sic) by mountains and on the west by the *Subah* of Behar.[16]

The Portuguese perception of the region was different and their zone of interest was much more restricted. This perception is clearly articulated in Barbosa, who divides the region into the 'coastal' and the 'interior' areas.

> ... the Kingdom of Bengala, in which there are many towns, both in the interior and on the sea-coast. Those of the interior are inhabited by the Gentiles, subject to the King of Bengal, who is a Moor; and the

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[15]Ryley, Ralph Fitch, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

[16]*Ain-Akbari*, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 129-130.

> sea-ports are inhabited by Moors and Gentiles, amongst whom there is much trade in goods and much shipping to many parts...[17]

When the Portuguese referred to Bengal they meant a long stretch of coastline, stretching inward to cover an area serviced by the navigable tract of the river systems of the area. While this division reveals the Portuguese understanding of the region according to their own interest in it, it is not quite so arbitrary a visualization either. We do have a glimmering of a similar notion in the indigenous perception of the region too, in days long before the Portuguese ventured into the area. Thus, the coastal areas of the Gangetic delta are supposed to have formed a separate district distinct from the other four districts into which pre-Muslim Bengal is said to have been divided.[18]

The Coast

The region of Portuguese Bengal was, thus, really the coastal and riverine tract. Geographically it was an area distinct from the landlocked region to its north, with a

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[17]Barbosa, in Dasgupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century*, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

[18]H. Blochmann, "Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan period)" in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (henceforth *J.A.S.B.*), Vol. 42, Part I, No.III, 1873, pp. 209-310.

logic and functioning of its own.[19] The Portuguese came to Bengal as traders, seeking trade concessions and permission to found settlements in the region. Their early missions to Bengal - that of João de Silveira in 1517[20] and the two rival missions headed by Cristóvão Jusarte and Diogo Pereira in 1521[21] - were obviously of this nature. That their interest was first and foremost in the coastal areas, thus, becomes easy to understand.We have, accordingly, detailed and graphic descriptions of the coast. One of the earliest descriptions of the coastline of Bengal comes from Barbosa. He situates Bengal north of Orissa, *following the coastline*. After the river Ganges, along the coast,

> twenty leagues to north-east by east and twelve leagues to south-west and then twelve leagues to the east until reaching the river Paralem, is the Kingdom of Bengala ....[22]

Barros tells us that the entire coastline of the region of Bengal measured about a hundred leagues (one league equals approximately three miles), which corresponds remarkably

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[19]Cf. M.N. Pearson's comment in M.N. Pearson & A. Dasgupta (ed.), *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, Delhi, 1984, Introduction.

[20]J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese*, Calcutta, 1919, p. 27. Silveira's mission to Bengal is also described by Barros, a summary of which is reproduced in Barbosa, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 247.

[21]Genevieve Bouchon and Luis Filipe Thomaz, *Voyage dans les Deltas du Gange et de l'Irraouaddy, Relation Portugais Anonyme (1521)*, Paris, 1988.

[22]Barbosa, in Dasgupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century, op.cit.*, p. 114.

with Thomas Bowrey's description of the coastline more than a century later.

> ... the Sea or Gulph of Bengala ... [stretches] between Point Palmeris and the Arackan Shore, the whole extent of the bay beinge about 300 English miles....[23]

Several pieces of land along the coast were cut off from the mainland by the several channels of the delta intersecting the Sunderbans. This is described well by Barros

> This whole distance from Cape Segogora to Chatigao can be better depicted than described in writing by reason that all that land is cut into islands and shallows, which form at the mouths of the Ganges through the abundance of its water. We name not the cities and towns on these islands, yet those curious as to their position may see it in the plates in our Geography.[24]

Barros does, however, name these islands - Tranquetia, Sundiva, Ingudia, Mularangane, Guacalà, Tipurià, Bulnei, Sonargam, Angarà, Merculij, Noldij, Cupitavaz, Pacuculij, Agrapara[25] -- most of which can be located on Lavanha's map.

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[23]Bowrey, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

[24]Barros, *op.cit.*, p. 242.

[25]*Ibid.*, p. 245.

Our anonymous travel account of 1521 tells us that these islands were once inhabited but storms and strong currents that engulfed them soon rendered them deserted.[26] The shifting of the coastline, the submerging of pieces of land in the Sunderbans and the surfacing of new islands must have been a regular feature in the coastal region. This would explain why most of Barros' islands do not find mention in later sources. Manrique, who journeyed along the coast from Orissa to Arakan more than once mentions only "the islands of Sundiva", "the island of Xavaspur" (Shahbazpur), and "the famous isle of Sogoldiva [Sagardwipa?], which was so highly estimated as to be known in Bengali as *the richest of all*." (emphasis in original).[27]

These islands along the coast constituted a very fertile tract. In c. 1565, Caesar Frederike described Sandwip as "to my judgement the fertilest Iland in all the world."

> And when the people of the Iland saw the ship, and that we were comming a land: presently they made a place of Bazar or Market, with shops right over against the ship with all manner of provision of victuals to eate, which they brought down in great abundance, and sold it so good cheape, that we were amazed at the cheapnesse thereof ... and the people told us that we were deceived the half of our money, because we bought things so deare .... This islands is called Sondiva

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[26]Bouchon & Thomaz, *Voyage dans....*, *op.cit.*, p. 310.

[27]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 394-395.

> belonging to the Kingdome of Bengala, distant one hundred and twentie miles from Chatigan....[28]

Given their very high productivity, easy availability of goods, and the low cost of living, and being situated right along the navigable tract, these islands were at the very heart of Portuguese Bengal. Our 1521 travel account says that they served as bases for pirate groups operating in the area.[29] Manrique too testifies that they were the scene of incessant war between the Mughals and the Magh and Portuguese pirates.[30]

The Riverine Tract

Going upwards from the coast we more into the riverine tract which, with its innumerable rivers and their tributaries formed a huge network of communication.

> This Kingdome of Bengala ... is replenished with many faire and pleasant Rivers, the most famous and most admired of which is the great River Ganges, one of the foure principall rivers in the world .... The other brave and Navigable Rivers are for the most part

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[28]Samuel Purchas, "Extracts of Master Caesar Frederike his eighteen years Indian Observations" in *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrims Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and others*, 20 Vols, Glasgow, 1905, Vol. X, pp. 136-137.

[29]Bouchon & Thomaz, *Voyage dans ..., op.cit.*, p. 311.

[30]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 395.

branches of this.[31]

The rivers were the life support system of the region. They brought down the huge quantities of silt that made the land "so wondrous fertile that one lives there for almost nothing,"[32] and the water that grew "the abundant crops of foodstuffs"[33] which gave Bengal the status of "a very nursing mother who supplies [several Asian lands] with their entire subsistence and food."[34] It was this plentiful availability of cheap food stuffs and natural products that made Bengal the hub of commercial activity that it was in the intra-Asian trading system. Again it was the riverine network that gave the region its major means of communication. These were the highways along which merchants and travellers traversed the region and this was the means by which ruling powers travelled across and patrolled their kingdoms. Indeed, political power was closely connected to naval power and agility in Bengal. It was well appreciated by the Mughals when they made their first serious attempt to gain de facto control over Bengal in the reign of Jahangir that "the foremost thing necessary for ... [any] expedition ... is the fleet."[35] And, indeed, any polity that had a claim to

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[31]Bowrey, *op.cit.*, p. 161.

[32]François Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of François Pyrard de Laval To the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, translated by A. Gray and H.C.P. Bell, 2 Vols, London, 1888, Vol.I, Ch. XXIV.

[33]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 54.

[34]Pyrard de Laval, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 54.

[35]Shitab Khan (Mirza Nathan), *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, translated by M.I. Borah, 2 Vols, Gauhati, 1936, Vol.I, p. 330.

importance in this region was recognized as a naval power to be reckoned with.[36]

Abul Fazl gives us a detailed description of the riverine system of Bengal.

> Its rivers are countless and the first of them in the province is the Ganges .... near Qazihattah in the sarkar of Barbakabad, it divides into two streams. One of these, flowing eastwards, falls into the sea at the port of Chittagong. At the parting of the waters it takes the name of Padmawati and pursues a southern course. It is divided into three streams; one, the Sarsuti; the second the Jamna and the third the Ganges, called collectively in the Hindi language Tribeni, and held in high veneration. The third stream after spreading into a thousand channels, joins the sea at Satgaon. The Sarsuti and the Jamna unite with it .... Another, river is the Brahmaputra it flows from Khata [China] to Kuch and hence through the sarkar of Bazuha and fertilising the country, falls into the sea.[37]

In addition, the rivers were fairly wide till quite far inland, making them navigable for quite some distance. The Augustinian friar, Manrique, who travelled through Bengal and Arakan between 1629 and 1639 describes the estuary of

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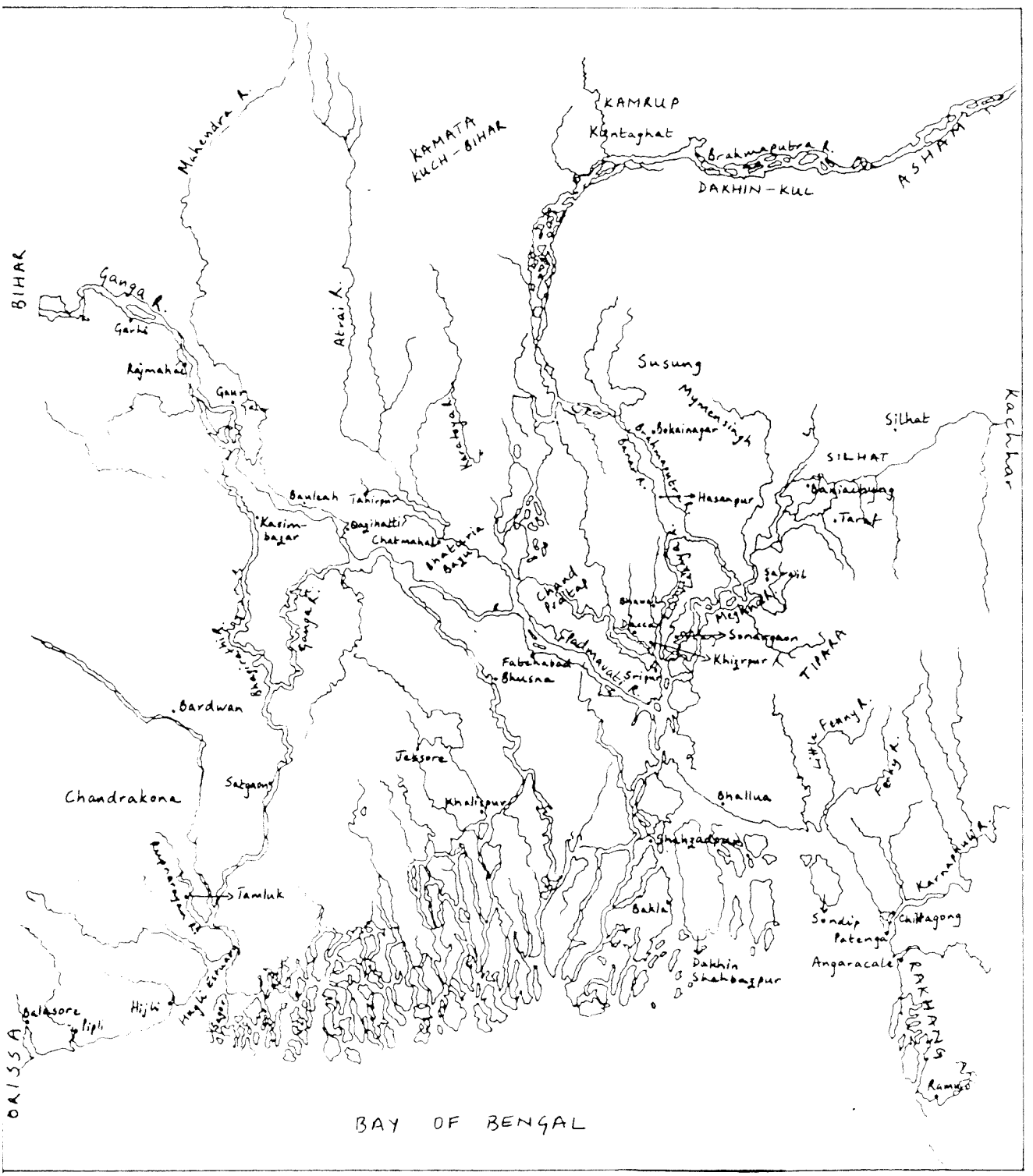
[36]The power of the Portuguese, of the Maghs under their ruler, the king of Arakan, and even of local chieftains, such as Musa Khan of Sonargaon, was viewed with healthy respect by the Mughals, by virtue of their powerful fleets, cf. *Baharistan, ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 330, 332, 334, and passim.

[37]*Ain-i Akbari, op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 133.

MAP 1

BENGAL IN THE SIXTEENTH & SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES



the Hugli river as so broad that it deserves the label of the sea.[38] One hundred and thirty seven leagues, which is equal to 400 miles, upstream, the Ganges was still three fourths of a league, which is equal to 2 miles, wide.[39] Thus, "there is considerable traffic up and down" the river, which "abounds in large cities, many of which, situated on the sea-shore, or on the banks of the Ganges, are frequented by great numbers of merchants and 'foreigners'.[40]

Towns and Commercial Centres

The preceeding descriptions conjure up visions of an intricate network of rivers, streams and rivulets, dotted with numerous towns and settlements, abuzz with boats full of merchants and travellers. It is for these towns and commercial centres that the Portuguese were headed on their arrival in Bengl. Most of the Portuguese settlements in the region were themselves enclaves grafted onto these pre-existing commercial centres, or were new, proto-colonial terms established in the vicinity. These numerous towns and commercial centres, thus, provided the immediate locale of Portuguese settlement and operations in Bengal. It is important therefore, as part of our exercise in reconstructing the geographical setting, to identify and

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[38]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 25.

[39]*Ibid.*, p. 118.

[40]Abbate Tosi, *L'India Orientale, Descrittione Geographica et Historica*, extracts translated by Father H. Hosten, S.J., 'Abbate Tosi's Geographical Description of Bengal' in *The Catholic Herald of India*, 1906, p. 683.

describe the major settlements in the area.

The settlement bearing the title the "City of Bengala" finds the earliest mention in our sources. It was visited by the Italian traveller, Varthema, on his way back from Tenasserim in AD 1505.[41] Duarte Barbosa mentions it in his description of Bengal in 1517-18.[42] The great historian of the history of the Church in India, Father Hosten tells us that it is referred to several times in old missionary documents examined by him, including a letter written by Father Fernandez from Sripur in 1599[43] and the Abbate Tosi's geographical description of Bengal, first published in 1669.[44] As late as the beginning of the 18th century, it still finds mention in the *Lettres Edifiantes*.[45] There has been much speculation and conjecture over the identity of this city, it having been identified variously with different settlements in Bengal. Thus, Yule and Burnell believe it to be Chittagong;[46] Father Hosten equates it with Satgaon;[47] Varthema's translator, G. Badger, identifies it with Bacola

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[41]Ludovico di Varthema, *Travels*, extracts translated and reproduced in J.N. Dasgupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century, op.cit.*, p. 117.

[42]Barbosa, in Dasgupta, p. 115; and M.L. Dames' translation, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 135.

[43]Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, p. 731.

[44]*Ibid.*, p. 709.

[45]*Ibid.*, p. 732.

[46]H. Yule & A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson, A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, London, 1903, p. 85.

[47]Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, p. 731.

(Bakla);[48] Barbosa's translator, M.L. Dames, believes that the term was used to refer collectively to Gaur, the capital city of Bengal under the Husain Shahi Sultanate in Barbosa's time, along with its feeder ports of Satgaon and Sonargaon;[49] C.E. Luard, Manrique's translator and editor believes it do be Dianga; while in the *Lettres Edifiantes* "A Bengale is equivalent to "A Chandernagore."[50] Thus, while the issue seems impossible to disentangle in any decisive manner, following it in itself sheds high on the names of several important settlements in the region. There is even a suggestion by a historian that the identity of the city referred to kept changing as each traveller gave the label to the most important city of Bengal in the period in which he happened to be writing about the region.[51]

Among the other important towns of Bengal, pride of place goes to Chittagong and Satgaon in all our travellers accounts. Both are described as flourishing port-cities. Satgaon is located a hundred miles up the river Ganges by Caesar Frederick who visited Bengal in AD 1563.[52] He also tells us that a few miles down the river before Satgaon was the site of Buttor till where the river was navigable for

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[48]Cited in analysis by M.L. Dames, Barbosa, *op.cit.*, p. 136, f.n.

[49]Barbosa, *op.cit.*, pp. 141-143, f.n.

[50]Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, p. 732.

[51]Rev. H. Hosten, S.J., "The Twelve Bhuiyas or Landlords of Bengal" in *J.A.S.B.*, Nov. 1913, Vol. IX, No. 10, New Series, p. 444.

[52]Caesar Frederike, extracts translated and reproduced in J.N.Dasgupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century, op.cit.*, p. 103.

big ships. Satgaon was really situated on the river Saraswati which branched off from the main course of the river below Tribeni and then rejoined it. It was the chief port in the western part of Bengal till the latter part of the 16th century when it rapidly declined as the river began to change its course and the branch of the Saraswati on which it was situated began to silt up. Its place as the main port in the area was then taken by the new settlement of Hugli, "which standeth in 23 degrees of Northerly latitude, and standeth a league from Satogan ...."[53]

Chittagong was situated on the border between Bengal and the Arakan at the mouth of the Karnaphuli river. It was, perhaps the foremost port of trade in our region in the 16th and early 17th centuries, and control over it was among the major concerns of the powers in the region.

The political status of Chittagong, thus, seems to have kept fluctuating throughout our period. Thus, in A.D. 1350, when Ibn Battuta was in Chatgaon, it belonged to King Fakhruddin of Sonargaon.[54] When Alauddin Husain Shah founded the new dynasty in AD 1498, Chittagong belonged to the Sultanate of Bengal.[55] In 1512, it was conquered, according to the *Raj Mala*, by the Raja of Tipperah, who drove away the

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[53]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch, op.cit.*, p. 113.

[54]Cited in Blochmann, "Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal," *op.cit.*

[55]M.R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494-1538 A.D., A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca, 1965, p. 55.

Husain Shah's garrison.[56] We are told in the *Raj Mala* that the ruler of Arakan (Rosanga), taking advantage of Alauddin Husain Shah's preoccupation with Tippera, occupied Chittagong.[57] The *Ahadith -ul-Khawanin* states that Nusrat, son of Alauddin Husain Shah, who ascended the throne in 1519, expelled the Arakanese from Chittagong and renamed it Fathabad to commemorate the throne in 1519, expelled the Arakanese from Chittagong and renamed it Fathabad to commemorate the conquest.[58] Thus, evidence gathered from Bengali literature and from the Persian history of Chittagong conclusively shows that the Husain Shahi Sultan of Bengal was able to occupy Chittagong which ultimately formed an integral part of his kingdom.

This is further corroborated by Portuguese sources. The Portuguese emissary, João de Silveira, who came to Chittagong in 1517, found it under the King of Bengal.[59] An anonymous account of a Portuguese mission up the River Ganges, from Chittagong to Gaur, once again places Chittagong under the Sultan of Bengal based at Gaur.[60] In 1528, 1533, and 1534, Portuguese expeditions going to Bengal landed at Chittagong and testify to its belonging to Mahmud Shah, the last independent Sultan of Bengal. In return for the Portuguese

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[56] *Ibid.*; also Blochmann "Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal, " *op.cit.*

[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

[60] Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage dans..., op.cit.*, p. 335-336.

help rendered against Sher Khan in 1535, Mahmud Shah gave them permission to build factories, as well as gave them control over the customs houses of Chittagong and Satgaon.

The political status of Chittagong continued to fluctuate throughout our period. Ralph Fitch, who visited Bengal between 1583 and 1591 places Chittagong under the King of Arakan.[61] So does Abul Fazl, writing his report of the Mughal Subah of Bengal in 1595.[62] Pyrard de Laval, who visited the area for a few weeks in 1607 calls it a port of Bengal with a rather independent governor, who even bore the title of 'king', but who was subject to the king of Bengal.[63] The contemporary *Baharistan-i Ghaybi*, however, places it in Arakan and refers to strenuous attempts to conquer it by Jahangir's governor in Bengal which seems to be more accurate.[64] Any success in this direction would surely have found pride of place in the Persian sources of the Mughal empire, but we have no mention of Chittagong belonging to the Mughals till Shaista Khan's conquest of the port in 1666, in the reign of Aurangzeb. This conquest was prompted to a large extent by the long drawn out piracy and general lawlessness in the area indulged in by unruly elements based at Chittagong, sponsored by the Arakanese ruler. It is itself evidence of the port being under Arakanese control for a

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[61]Ralph Fitch, extracts translated and reproduced in J.N. Dasgupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century*, *op.cit.*, pp. 141-142.

[62]*Ain-i Akbari.*, Vol. II, p.132.

[63]Pyrard de Laval, *op.cit.*, p. 326.

[64]*Baharistan*, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 404-406.

considerable period of time.

We have repeated reference in the travellers' accounts to the 'Porto Grande' and the 'Porto Pequeno' as great commercial centres in the region. These terms are generally translated as the 'great port' and the 'little port' respectively by our modern historians of the Portuguese in Bengal[65] and identified with Chittagong and Satgaon (later shifting to Hugli), "following the Portuguese historians." In our sources, however, it is only Ralph Fitch who categorically states that "they call it [Hugli] Porto Piqueno" and who refers to "Chatigan or porto Grande."[66]

We have a different interpretation of the two terms which changes our understanding of the picture to a large extent. Several letters written by missionaries in the field in the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as the Abbate Tosi's geographical account of Bengal reveal a different understanding of the terms. We first find an indication of this in the writings of the Dutch traveller, John Hugghen van Linschoten, who was in India between 1583 and 1589. He merely refers to the Porto Grande and the Porto Pequeno as two havens that the Portuguese inhabit in Bengal, so that 'haven' need not necessarily correspond to a specific town only.

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[65]Cf., Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 21; Surendra Nath Sen, "The Portuguese in Bengal", in J.N. Sarkar (ed.), *The History of Bengal, Muslim Period, 1200-1757*, Patna, 1977, (reprint), p. 364.

[66]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch, op.cit.*, pp. 113, 115.

> The Portingalles deale and traffique thether [in Bengal] and some places are inhabited by them, as the havens which they call Porto grande and Porto Pequeno, that is, great haven and little haven....[67]

Father F. Fernandez, a Jesuit missionary who was sent to Bengal in 1598, narrates that he embarked at Cochin for the "portus parvus" (the Latinisation of the term Porto Pequeno). He speaks of danger within the portus when his ship ran aground and after sailing for eight days, still in the portus, he reached the station (the Latin word being "statio") of Hooghly. After some months stay he went on to the Portus magnus (the Latinisation of Porto Grande), where he first reached Sripur, which he describes as a "station" belonging to the Portus magnus, and later arrived at Chittagong, also a "station" in the Portus magnus.[68] Father Fernandez thus certainly did not mean the town of Hooghly when referring to the Portus parvus nor Chittagong, when referring to the Portus magnus; he seems, instead, to have been referring to the river which he called "portus", which could have several towns or "statios" along its banks.

In his letter dated "Siripur in Bengal, January 17, 1599" Father Fernandez tells us that Siripur is "*une demeure des dependances du Grand Port*" (a place of residence or an

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[67]Linschoten, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, Ch.16.

[68]Quoted in W.H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar, An Economic Study*, Delhi, 1974, reprint, (1920), pp. 307-309.

abode of the dependants of the Grand Port), while Chittagong in "*une demeure au Grand Port*" (a dwelling of the Grand Port).[69] With reference to Siripur and Chittagong Father du Jarric tells us in 1615 that "*duae sunt Lusitaniarum coloniae haud procul a Magno Portu*" (there are two colonies of the Portuguese not far from the Porto Grande).[70] While this is further evidence against interpreting Porto Grande and Porto Pequeno" as specific ports, it is the Abbate Tosi however who is very clear in his usage of the two terms."As we drop down one of the embouchures of the Ganges, which forms the *Porto Pequeno*, we notice *Angelim*, the chief city of the Province of the same name...." [71] He thus describes not a great port and a little port in Bengal, but two embouchures of the river in the region. Our picture, therefore, changes to two main estuaries or tracts of the riverine system in the area, peppered with several ports, instead of one main port on each branch of the river.

This impression is corroborated by the accounts of travellers in the region in the 16th and 17th centuries. We have, accordingly, reference to several towns, both along the coast and upriver, in the region. Most of the travellers who visited Bengal journeyed through it following the coastal and riverine route. We have, thus, more than one description

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[69]Quoted in Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, p. 684. I thank Fr. George Gispert-Sauch, S.J., of Vidyajyoti, Delhi, for the translation.

[70]Quoted in *ibid.*

[71]*Ibid.*, p. 709.

of these tracts and of the townships that lay along them, which together give us a very full picture of the set-up. Among the earliest such accounts available to us is that of a journey made up the Ganges in 1521 by a Portuguese mission travelling to the court at Gaur, seeking trade concessions.[72] It is a first hand account of great value and the route as well as the townships described by it are easily identifiable on Lavanha's sixteenth-century map of Bengal. Starting from Chittagong, our travellers journeyed six leagues along the coast till they reached the busy port of Aluia, situated on the mouth of an unnamed river.[73] When the tide was in reportedly a ship of three hundred tons capacity could stay afloat there. However, when the tide was out, the area became dangerous as it had so many sand banks that there was always a risk of ships running aground and sinking, as happened to three ships of the expedition being described. This, too, was a peculiar feature of the navigable tract of the Bengal region, both along the coastline, as well as upriver. Thus, Friar Manrique refers to the spot called the "Braces of Bengala.... which is the most dangerous of all along that coast, on account of the great number of sand-banks and shallows, which lie ... off the coast ...."[74] Our account of 1521 even describes sand-banks in the middle of the Ganges,

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[72]Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage dans ...., op.cit.*

[73]*Ibid.*, p. 309. This could have been the Bulua of the Abbate Tosi, who describes this township as "the last of the Mogol's towards the Kingdom of Arracan and bordering on Chatigan, the first city and fortress of the Mags," *op.cit.*, p. 684. 'Bulloah' is also marked on Rennell's map at the mouth of the Meghna.

[74]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 8.

and the banks of the river as sandy and very dangerous. This is reiterated by Father Fernandez -

> ... at the mouth of the Ganges, there are sand-banks, ... and albeit we were very careful in passing them, however little we might deviate by mistake from the right channel, we ran upon these shoals....[75]

From Aluia after about forty-five leagues along the coast, the route turned up the river and passed by the towns of Noamaluco, Meinatpur and Maulana Danga before reaching Gaur, a hundred leagues upstream.[76]

We thus have four large towns situated on the stretch of river between Chittagong and Gaur. It is Moreland's contention that perhaps, as a result of Portuguese trade with only one of the several towns situated along a tract of the river this particular town gained so much in importance that the name of the whole tract of the river got transferred to it. This is what happened with the Porto Grande and the Porto Pequeno, which names came to settle on Chittagong and Satgaon (later Hugli) respectively, from being used earlier for the whole estuaries themselves.[77] This would explain Ralph Fitch's usage of these terms in 1585.

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[75]Quoted in Abbate Tosi, p. 732.

[76]All these places are clearly marked in Lavanha's map.

[77]Moreland, *op.cit.*, p. 309.

This argument does not, however, stand in the light of the description of the geography of Bengal by the Abbate Tosi. As late as 1669, he continues to use the terms Porto Grande and Porto Pequeno for the estuaries and not for the ports and in keeping with this, locates several large port-cities along the rivers. This description fellows the route down the river. Starting at 'Benaros', he moves down the Ganges to 'Patana'

> which is second to none in extent and wealth.... The streets are full of people, the inhabitants numbering two hundred thousand, not counting the foreigners, whom commerce attracts in large numbers .... Lower down, we come to Monguer [Monghyr], the capital of another province and the residence of a Nawab. Continuing our journey we pas near Rajamol [Rajmahal], a town which extends for the space of a league along the river ....: Lower still, on the other bank of the river, lies the ancient city of Gour [Gaur], the capital and seat of the former Rulers of Bengal .... On the same side of the river [as Gaur], Baligata and further inland, Katabro, the chief city of a Province .... Next comes Bulua, the capital of another Province and the last of the Mogol's toward the kingdom of Arracan and bordering on Chatigan, the first city and fortress of the Mogo.[78]

Both our descriptions of the rivers in stretch upstream from Chatgaon, though separated by a century and a half, and mentioning completely different settlements that we cannot

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[78]Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, pp. 683-684.

identify in terms of each other, are common in the fact that both enumerate numerous big towns along the river. Our impression of there being several important towns, and not just a single one along a particular branch of the river contrary to Moreland's contention, thus holds good for our entire period of interest in the region.

The city of Dacca was apparently also a great commercial centre of the time and was made the capital of Bengal by Islam Khan in Jahangir's reign. It was situated "upon the banck of the Ganges" and "stretches out near a League and a half in length, along the side of that river."[79] The city was "a very large and spacious one," which "standeth upon low marshy Swampy ground."[80]

The "River that runneth close by the walls thereof, [was] navigable for ships of five or six hundred tunns burthen ...."[81] Thus,

> Many strange nations resort to this City on account of its vast trade and commerce in a great variety of commodities, which are produced in profusion in the rich and fertile lands of this region. They have raise the City to an eminence of wealth which is actually stupefying especially when one sees and considers the

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[79]Thevenot, quoted in Bowrey, *op.cit.*, p. 141, f.n.

[80]Tavernier, quoted in Bowrey, *op.cit.*, pp. 149-150, f.n.

[81]*Ibid.*

> actual quantities of money which lie principally in the houses of the Cataris [Khatris] in such quantity that, being difficult to count, it used commonly to be weighed. I was informed also that the indigenous population of this Gangetic emporium and its suburbs exceeded two hundred thousand, irrespective of visitors who come in great numbers from all parts.[82]

Among the other important cities in the vicinity, we hear of "Serrepore [Sripur]. which standeth upon the river of Ganges .... Sonargaon is a town six leagues from Serrepore," both of which are in the vicinity of Dacca.[83] "Siripur" is described by the Abbate Tosi as "a much frequented harbour."[84] The other such busy ports located hear Sripur by him are "Noricul" and "Tamboli."[85] Noricul is identified by Father Hosten as the Luricul of Rennell's map; situated many miles south of Dacca, near Bulua, which was probably washed away by one of the many tidal waves up the Meghna.[86] Tamboli can only be equated with Manrique's Tambolim , which would be the present-day Tamluk on the Rupnarayan river in Orissa.[87]

Upstream from Dacca, Tosi locates, on the some side of

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[82]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 44-45.

[83]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch*, *op.cit.*, pp. 118-119.

[84]Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, p. 684.

[85]*Ibid.*

[86]*Ibid.*

[87]*Ibid.*, p. 685.

the river as Dacca, the cities of "Solimanuas and Bacala, each of them the capital of a Province."[88] "Solimanuas" is probably identical with Solimabad. The territory of Solimanuas is described as contiguous with the territory of Dacca of Manrique and is found on an ancient map to the north-east of the junction of the Dhalesari with the Brahmaputra.[89] The position assigned by Tosi to Solimanuas, thus, could be correct. Bacala, however, is hopelessly mislocated. It is in the extreme south of the delta as marked on Irfan Habib's map. It was visited by Ralph Fitch, who places it between 'Chatigan' and 'Serrepore' (Sripur) "From Chatigan in Bengala, I came to Bacola .... From Bacola I went to Serrepore."[90]

We have similar testimony of there being a sprinkling of towns all along the other riverine belts of Bengal as well. In the region generally perceived as Orissa, too, there were a number of important port-cities that lay along the coast and up the rivers. In terms of the access to them there was little demarcating them from Bengal proper, since one only had to sail a little further along the coast or follow a different branch of the riverine network of the area to arrive at them. These ports were usually visited and described by travellers in the course of their travels in 'Bengal' itself. The same can be said of the upper Arakan

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[88] *Ibid.*, p. 708.

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] Ryley, *Ralph Fitch, op.cit.*, p. 118.

coastline as well.

Father Manrique made a journey from Balasore on the Orissa coast to Patna in Bihar in 1640-41, taking a route that went through Bengal.[91] While he does not describe Balasore, Manrique gives it the designation of a "city", which serves as an indication of its size and importance in the area. Crossing the river, he passed through the town of Ramxandrapur, which he describes as "a small place of no great account." Eight leagues away, however, was the *City* of Jalasor (emphasis mine), "an important, populous trade centre." Several leagues from Jalasor, across a stretch of swampland, lay the *City* of Narangor [Narayangarh]. Thirty four leagues later he reached the *City* of Burduan in Bengal. Manrique notes that each of these last three cities possessed excellent "Caramossoras" (caravanserais) for travellers to pass the night in, indicating that these were important commercial centres with a fairly large and consistent floating population of merchants and travellers, for whom such facilities had been provided. Manrique describes this whole tract as "flat, highly populated, fertile country." Next he reached the *City* of Masumabazar, which "is of the greatest importance and is, an account of its size, called by the people Masumabazar, which means in our tongue, 'The place of mighty marts and markets'", (from 'mu'zam' or 'superior'). Manrique describes it at length as a great commercial centre, himself being "struck by the abundance

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[91]See Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 97-140.

I noticed of everything in those marts." He then recrossed the Ganges, which at this point is about three-quarters of a league wide," and reached the *City* of Baligata on the opposite bank. (O'Malley identifies this with Beliaghat near Raghunathganj and Jangirpur (Jahangirpur) on Bhagirathi river). He gives the distance he travelled from Balasore to Baligata as one hundred and thirty seven leagues. We, thus, have located in a stretch of 400-odd miles, six large, populous, commercially important cities - Balasore, Jalasor, Narayangarh, Burduan, Masumabazar and Baligata.

The Abbate Tosi, whose geographical description of Bengal is based mostly on Manrique, adds the city of "Midinimpur" (Midnapur) to our list of important populous cities in this area.[92] Its location, however, is badly confused; he situates it between the coast and Ramchandrapur, when it should have bene placed between Narayangarh and Burduan (see Rennell's map of Bengal).

Tosi also mentions Massuma-Bazar, upstream from both Dacca and Satagam -

> We now recross the Ganges and come to Massuma-Bazar, a large and mercantile city, as the name indicates; for Massuma-Bazar means only the great piazza or mart.[93]

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[92]Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, p.755.

[93]*Ibid.*, p. 708.

It is equated by Father Hosten with Kasimbazar, which flourished after Satgaon had been ruined, after the silting up of the mouth of the Saraswati, and before Calcutta was founded (see Rennell for location).

Further south of Balasore Manrique visited a number of towns on the Orissa coast. He mentions "Angelim" (Hijli) as an important town of the region which he visited twice, on his way to Hugli in 1628-29 and again on his way back from Arakan in 1635-36.[94] Hijli was situated on the coast, just across from the mouth of the Hugli river, and seems to have been a flourishing port of the time. It was visited by Ralph Fitch in 1586, who describes it thus -

> Not far from Porto Pequeno southwestward, standeth a hauen which is called Angeli, in the country of Orixa. It was a Kingdom of it selfe, and the king was a great friend to strangers .... To this hauen of Angeli come euery yere many ships out of India, Negapatan, Sumatra, Malacca and diuers other places....[95]

In the district of Hijli Manrique also locates the port of Banja "were a large concourse of merchants was want to assemble to deal in sugar, wax, and ginghams....[96]

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[94]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 12-26.

[95]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch, op.cit.*, pp. 113-114.

[96]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.42.

Down the coast from Hijli Manrique came to the harbour or "muana" of Pipli (from the Arabic word 'mawani' meaning 'impediment' or 'bar'). Manrique tells us that his ship "could not enter the harbour owing to the Bar which gave some three fathoms of water and was full of sand banks."[97] It was noted by Schouten, too, as having a very exposed harbour and being very shallow.[98] The town of Pipli, which "is about a league from the harbour"[99] is described by Manrique as "a busy port, frequent by many Asiatic nations owing to the large quantity of merchandise which came there from ... Bengala."[100]

'Arepur' and 'Arcepur' in 'the Kingdom of Ourixa' were also visited by Manrique in 1640. There is, however, some confusion about these towns in his narrative. He landed at the port of Arcepur which lay on the coast, at the mouth of a river some 30 leagues south of the Muana of Piple.[101] A little later, however, he refers to this as the port of Arepur" (after reaching which I decided to travel to Europe by land."[102] Manrique then reached the City of Arcepur which "lay eight leagues inland, up a river covered over by great, pleasant, shady trees, whose thick branches here and there

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[97]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 91 and f.n. 26.

[98]Quoted in Bowrey, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

[99]Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, p. 732.

[100]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 440.

[101]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 91.

[102]*Ibid.*, title to Ch. XLIX, p. 95.

interlaced so as to look like an artificial avenue."[103] The port of Arcepur/Arepur on the coast, is identified by Luard as Harsapur, north of the mouth of the Patua river.[104] The inland city of Arcepur is Hariharpur, on the Alanka river, given in Rennell's map as Harriorpour. Father Hosten, however, identifies Arcipur with Hurrishpur, on the right bank of the Mahanadi river and Aripur, which he cannot equate with any particular coastal port, he assumes to be on the mouth of the Mahanadi, following the Abbate Tosi.[105] The mouth of the River Mahanadi is, however, almost one hundred forty miles from Pipli harbour, and thus very far from Manrique's estimate of ninety miles (thirty leagues). On Irfan Habib's map of Orissa on the other hand, Harishpur (which is, Tosi's & Hosten's Arcipur, eight leagues up the river) is very clearly marked at the mouth of the river Mahanadi, while another settlement of Hariharpur is shown some distance up the river.

Father Manrique also travelled into the Arakan between 1628-29 and 1637 and enumerates the important coastal towns of the region. He tells us that he travelled the three hundred leagues between Hugli and Arakan in a very swift 'Gelia' and reached Dianga in fourteen days.[106]. Dianga is marked on several early maps of the region variously, south

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[103] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 96, f.n. 3.

[105] Abbate Tosi, *op.cit.*, p. 755.

[106] Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 83.

of Chittagong, on the left bank of the Karnaphuli river and north of Chittagong. Blochmann traces the etymology of the world 'Dianga' to "danga", signifying "high land," and places it on the Sangu river, south of Chittagong.[107] According to Father Hosten, Dianga was the first Portuguese settlement on the Gulf of Bengal and Father Barbe, Vicar of Chittagong wrote on 5 September 1843, "The first church of the Portuguese on the Chittagong side was built by them at Deang [Dianga] which is at the mouth of the river. The spot may yet be traced: it is on an elevated ground....[108]

Manrique also visited Angaracale, which was three miles south of Dianga.[109] He also mentions Patanga, a port two leagues below Dianga, right on the north bank at the entrance of the Karnaphuli river.[110] Three days' journey along the coast from Dianga stood Ramu,[111] (modern Panwa), which is prominently marked on all our maps of the period. From Ramu Manrique journeyed inland, on elephant back, on foot, and by boat down the rivers and streams that took him ultimately to the 'City of Arracan' (Mrauk-u).[112] He mentions, however, the port of Orietan, south of Ramu, on the coast (modern

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[107] *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83, f.n. 6.

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[112] *Ibid.*, p. 163.

Ponnagyin).[113] He also tells us that the City of Arracan was situated on a river, which joined the sea at two points, one at Orietan and the other at Dobazi[114] (= Dubashi, which name cannot be identified on any map, and was hence probably a nickname for a foreign settlement.)

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The region we are talking about, thus, covers the width of the region recognized as Bengal in the contemporary sources and goes north of the coast approximately till Dacca, i.e. till about the 24th parallel. It also spills out on both sides, east and west, beyond the, strictly speaking, borders of the region of Bengal, as it includes, inevitably, ports in Orissa like Hijli, Pipli and Balasore, as well as those in the Arakan, like Chittagong, Dianga and Angaracale. It was a region lapped by the ocean all along its southern face, traversed by innumerable rivers, streams, channels and rivulets that cut it into several swamps and marshes.

The climate of this region is generally described as "healthy" and the water of the Ganges and other rivers as

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[113] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

[114] Manrique, *op.cit.* Vol. I, p. 208.

"excellent."[115] The weather is generally found to be "temperate" and the winter season short.[116] The longest season was the rainy season which began in May and continued for somewhat more than six months."[117] The rains were usually very heavy and often threw life out of gear, "the plains being under water and the mounds alone visible."[118] Storms at sea were a common occurrence. Life in the region, in general, followed the rhythm of the temprementalities of nature.

The agrarian economy moved according to the cycle of the season - preparing the fields, sowing the seed, tending the crop and reaping the fruit. Activity along the coast and up the rivers too was to a large extent at the mercy of the vagaries of nature. Merchants and travellers timed their arrival in and departure from Bengal according to the monsoon winds. Missing the monsoon could not be afforded; it would mean missing the trading season and delaying travel by a year.[119] Within the region itself, travel along the rivers would become hazardous in the rainy season when the rivers were in full spate and often in flood.[120] Along the coast,

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[115]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 54; Pyrard de Laval, *op.cit.*, Ch. XXIV, pp. 326-336.

[116]Pyrard de Laval, *op.cit.; Ain-i Akbari, op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 132.

[117]*Ain-i Akbari, op.cit.*

[118]*Ibid.*

[119]While this is clear in almost all the travel accounts of the time, sec, for instance, Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 444-445.

[120]Manrique describes the hazards of travel in the rains in the region, *op.cit.* See, for e.g., Vol. I, pp. 104-106; also *Baharistan, op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 408.

movement was often threatened and even thrown out of control by storms. Merchants and travellers would end up at quite a different destination from the one they had set out for if they were caught in a tempest at sea.[121] The risk of ship-wreck was a living reality and a common occurrence.[122] Trade, military campaigns, and travel, in general, had to be conditioned according to these natural phenomena.

In the swampy terrain the elephant assumed a degree of importance for travel and transportation. Travellers in the region often moved through unnavigable stretches of country on elephant back.[123] Elephants also seem to have been more important than horses in the military system of the region.[124] The *Baharistan* is full of instances of the organisation of elephant hunts and of the great triumph felt by Mughal nobles on the capture of wild elephants. Elephants were also among the prized articles of the booty captured at the end of successful military expeditions. This would explain, at least to some extent, the legend of the famous white elephant in the possession of the King of Arakan, that the Mughal emperor and the ruler of the Kingdom of Pegu constantly lusted

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[121]This was experienced by, for instance, Caesar Frederike, Purchas, *op.cit.*, Vol. X, p. 135-136.

[122]Manrique himself suffered two shipwrecks in Bengal, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 8-12, Vol. II, p. 90.

[123]Cf. Manrique, *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 95-96.

[124]Cf. *Baharistan, op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.385.

after.[125] Basic survival and ultimately success in the region were to a large extent dependent on the ability to overcome and harness the forces of nature to one's own advantage.

It was not a coincidence that the region of Portuguese Bengal corresponded to this coastal and riverine belt. It was in this area, traversed by numerous streams and rivers, that they were able to establish themselves and carry on their commercial and other activities. Because of the pronounced maritime background and orientation of the Portuguese, the topography and terrain of this region suited them very well. Being masters of navigation, they were able to show themselves off to their best advantage. This was Bengal's rich, fertile belt, this was its busy commercial region that those of them who were merchants were seeking. This was a well populated region in which the slave traders and pirates could seek their goods and disappear into the intricate network of streams and rivulets to escape capture themselves. Also, during the period of Portuguese importance there, this region had little political stability. Throughout the second half of the 16th and the early 17th centuries it was the area of operation of the Barah Bhuyas and the numerous other small chieftains, besides greater powers like the Arakan king and the great Mughal, struggling against each

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[125] *Ibid.*, p. 387-404; cf. Father Fernao Guerreiro, S.J., *Relaçam annual das cousas que fizeram os Padres da Companhia de Iesus na India, & lapao nos annos de 600 & 601 & do precesso da conversao, & Christandade daquellas partes: tirada das cartas geras que de la vierao pello Padre Fernao Guerreiro da Companha de Iesus*, extracts translated by C.H. Payne, *Jahangir and the Jesuits With an Account of the Travels of Benedict Goes and the Mission to Pegu*, London, 1930, p. 185.

other for supremacy. It was against such a geographical and political background that the Portuguese presence was created in medieval Bengal.

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II The Political Canvas

In the period we have chosen to study, from circa 1517, to which we can firmly date the first Portuguese expedition to Bengal, till 1666, when Aurangzeb's general, Shaista Khan, invaded and conquered Chittagong, making it part of the mighty Mughal Empire, Bengal was in a state of political turmoil. There were several political players on the scene, and the politico-territorial status of many areas fluctuated constantly.

The major political landmarks in our entire period of study can be chalked out as follows. Bengal was ruled by the independent Husain Shahi dynasty, based at Gaur, from 1494 to 1538 A.D. It was conquered by Sher Shah in 1535 and remained consolidated under him and his son, Islam Shah, till 1553. Thereafter, Bengal was fragmented under the last few rulers of the Sur dynasty till 1564, when it was replaced by the new Karrani dynasty. Munim Khan defeated the last ruler of this dynasty and conquered Bengal for Akbar in 1575.

1575, however, merely marked the de jure annexation of Bengal to the Mughal Empire. Most of the province continued to remain under the dispossessed Afghan nobility and soldiery and several independent zamindars and chieftains, referred to as the twelve Bhuiyas of Bengal. The ruler of the Arakan, with a constant lust for Chittagong, was another destabilizing factor on the scene. So were Bengal's other neighbours, Tippera in the east, and kingdom of Orissa with its capital at Cuttack in the west.

Much was achieved towards extending de facto Mughal control over Bengal in the reign of Jahangir, when the great Mughal general, Islam Khan, conquered most of the region in a series of campaigns between 1607-1613. Nevertheless, the pacification of the eastern frontier of the empire continued to remain a major preoccupation of the Mughal Emperors, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.

The political history of this whole period reads as a very confusing account of innumerable quarrels and skirmishes between the several contenders for power in the region. The power politics of Bengal in this period was operating on more than one plane. At one level, there were powers with an ambition to establish themselves as rulers of the whole region - powers of the like of the Husain Shahs and the Karranis. At a level above them there were powers desiring to establish their mastery over the whole region with the aim of linking it up with their larger, imperial presence -

powers of the like of the Surs and the Mughals. And at the lowest level there were the innumerable local powers - the zamindars, chieftains, and rajas - operating in their own small, and not so small, areas of influence, struggling for dominance over each other and resisting the lust for their little kingdoms of the more powerful and ambitious 'regional' and 'imperial' contestants on the scene.

It is our contention that it was against such a political background that the Portuguese were able to make their mark in the history of the period. In the context of their being several contestants for power on the scene, they were able to carve out a place for themselves as one more power centre among the several others in the region. In the incessant struggle for supremacy between the several contenders for power the Portuguese came to be perceived as an element powerful enough to alter the balance of power in a conflict. This section thus concentrates on recapturing the political atmosphere of 16th and 17th century Bengal by discussing the various characters in the running for power in this period of political flux.

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João de Barros refers to an Arab merchant who landed at Chittagong and went on to capture the throne of Bengal

and become Alauddin Husain Shah, the founder of a new dynasty in the region's history in 1494 A.D.[126] He held the territory as far as a few miles from Patna in the west, till Orissa in the south-west, including Kamrup in the north and till (including) Chittagong in the east - "from the frontiers of Orissa to the Brahmaputra."[127] His western boundary touched the Lodi Sultanate of Delhi, in the south-west was the independent king of Orissa, in the north the Ahom king and the kingdom of Kuch Bihar under the dynasty founded by Bishwa Singha Kamateshwar in 1515.[128] Chittagong was fought over in the east between the Husain Shah, the Raja of Tipperah and the Raja of the Arakan.[129]

In the reign of Husain Shah's successor, Nusrat (1519-32), the Lodis in the upper and middle Gangetic valley were replaced by Babur, while Bihar became independent under the Afghan chiefs under the leadership of Sher Khan Sur, who fluctuated between allying with Nusrat in an anti-Mughal confederacy and accepting Mughal vassalage. We also have reference to the independent Lohani Afghan chiefs based at Patna, while we know that Kamrup was lost to Bengal during his reign. In the reign of Nusrat Shah, thus, both Bihar and

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[126]Cited in J.N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal, op.cit.*, p.142, and f.n. 2.

[127]*Ibid.*, p. 152.

[128]For an account of Alauddin Husain Shah's reign, see Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-68; Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 142-152.

[129]See Section I above, *Towns and Commercial Centres*.

Kamrup were lost to the kingdom.[130]

Nusrat Shah was succeeded on the throne by Mahmud Shah (1533-1538).[131] During his reign Sher Khan was the major rival of the Sultanate of Gaur. In 1534 Sher Khan defeated and eliminated the Lohanis of Patna under Jalal Khan Lohani and thus came into direct confrontation with Mahmud Shah. Bengal was finally conquered by Sher Shah in 1538 and the region came under Afghan ruler marking the end of the Husain Shahi dynasty.

With the conquest of Gaur, however, Sher Shah's control over the whole of Bengal the region was not established. We have reference to a large piece of territory in eastern Bengal under Mahmud Shah's officer, Khuda Baksh Khan.[132] We also have reference to another officer, Amirza Khan, obviously another territorial magnate in the area, staking a claim to Chittagong.[133] Sher Shah ultimately established his authority over the whole area of Gaur, Sharifabad, Satgaon and Chittagong.[134] In the far eastern corner, the stretch of country between the Brahmaputra and the Surma

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[130]For Nasir-ud-din Nusrat Shah's reign, see Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, pp. 68-78; Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 152-159.

[131]Tarafdar, *ibid.*, pp. 82-90; Sarkar, *ibid.*, pp. 159-165.

[132]There is a region marked in Lavahna's map as the 'Estado do Covasdocam' or the State of Khuda Bakhsh Khan, see Barbosa, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, map facing p. 135.

[133]Khuda Bakhsh Khan (Codovascao) and Amirza Khan (Amarzacao), 2 'generals' of Mahmud Shah, are referred to by Castanheda, cited in Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

[134]Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 174.

rivers known as 'Bhatti', was not under his rule, but was captured by one Barbak Shah, who struck independent coins in his own name.[135]

There appears to be some controversy about the exact location of the area known as Bhati. While J.N. Sarkar, thus, locates it between the Brahmaputra and the Surma rivers, according to the *Ain-i Akbari*,

> Bhati is the name given by the Mohammedan historians to the coast-strip of the Sunderbans from Hijli to the Meghna, Latitude 20° 30′ to 22° 30′ N., longitude 88° to 91° 14′. The name means 'low lands overflowed by the tide' and is applied to the Sunderban tracts of Khulna and Bakarganj district.[136]

Beveridge thus takes it to mean the whole coastal strip. In Irfan Habib's map of Bengal, however, Bhati is marked over a large area in eastern Bengal, that is considerably to the south and west of J.N Sarkar's Bhati, but does not cover coastal western Bengal, as does Beveridge's identification of its location. Nevertheless, whatever its exact location, the notion of Bhati having an independent ruler is quite clear and will recur in our narrative.

Sher Shah died in 1545, and along with the rest of his

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[135] *Ibid.*

[136] *Ain-i Akbari*, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 130 & f.n. 4.

empire, Bengal too passed under his son and successor, Islam Shah. During his reign, (1545-53), Sulaiman Khan, an immigrant Bais Rajput, set up an independent principality in the Bhati region, in the north-eastern portion of Mymensingh and Sylhet [137] (i.e. in J.N. Sarkar's Bhati, not Beveridge's or Irfan Habib's Bhati). In Akbar's time the Bhati region, (geographical location that given in the *Ain-i Akbari*), was ruled by Isa Khan Afghan.[138]

In 1553, Muhammad Khan, the Sur Viceroy of Bengal declared his independence with the title of Shamsuddin Muhammed Shah Ghazi. He was killed by imperial Sur forces in 1555 and replaced by Shahbaz Khan as governor of Bengal. However, Shamsuddin's son, Khizr Khan, overthrew Shahbaz Khan, made himself master of Bengal in 1560, and assumed the title of Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah. He remained master of Bengal till his death in 1560.[139] Meanwhile, Bengal's north-western neighbour changed as control over north India passed from Afghan hands to those of Akbar with the latter's victory in the second battle of Panipat in 1556. Bengal remained under the successors of Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah till 1564, who maintained his policy of not provoking the Mughal Empire and thus peacefully co-existing while Akbar was involved on other fronts (Rajputana, Gujarat etc.)[140]

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[137]Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 177.

[138]Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, translated by Beveridge, 3 Vols, 3rd edition, New Delhi, 1978, (reprint), Vol. III, p. 376.

[139]Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 179-180.

[140]*Ibid.*

Meanwhile, political disturbance within Bengal caused a dynastic change. In 1564, the nameless successor of Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah was killed by Taj Khan Karrani, one of the chief officers of Sher Shah and a product of the fallout of the general turbulence and power struggle among the Afghan nobles after Islam Khan's death. Taj Khan Karrani thus became the new ruler of Bengal in 1564.[141] He was followed by his brother, Sulaiman Karrani in 1565. Under him the Bengal Sultanate was very strong and extended from the Kuch frontier in the north to Puri in Orissa in the south, and from the River Son in the west to the Brahmaputra in the east. Beyond the Son river lay the Mughal empire. By now all the various branches of the Sur family had been eliminated, so that Sulaiman Karrani had no rivals and all the Afghan soldiery gathered together under his banner. Sulaiman Karrani also accepted the suzerainty of Akbar - he read the *khutba* in Akbar's name, and never sat on the throne himself or issued coins in his own name. Orissa under the Gajapti dynasty was the neighbouring kingdom on the south-west. In 1560-61, the minister of the Gajapti ruler, Harichandan Mukund-dev, better known as Telingana Mukund-dev, assumed the crown. In 1563 he swore allegiance to the Mughal throne. In 1565-8, Sulaiman Karrani conquered Orissa from him. Bengal was also invaded during the reign of Sulaiman Karrani in 1568 by the ruler of Kuch, Nara Narayana (1538-87), son of Kamateshwar (1515-38), which attack was, however,

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[141] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

successfully repulsed by him.[142]

Sulaiman Karrani died in 1572. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Bayazid, who was however, replaced within a few months by a younger son, Daud Karrani. He threw of Akbar's allegiance, insulted senior Afghan nobles at home, and created a lot of enemies. In 1575, Munim Khan defeated Daud Karrani in the battle of Tukarai and Bengal passed into Mughal hands.[143]

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> When Daud Karrani laid down his sword at the feet of Munim Khan in the darbar tent at Katak, the ceremony merely proclaimed the de jure annexation of Bengal to Akbar's empire; but the actual imposition of imperial peace and orderly Mughal administration on Bengal was still far off. That province remained for many years a scene of confusion and anarchy. The Mughal military officers held a few towns in Bihar and fewer still in Bengal, but these places were only the head quarters of sub-divisions (sarkars) and even in them the imperial authority was liable to challenge and expulsion from time to time. Outside these towns lay the vast no man's land, a constant prey to roving bands of dispossessed Afghan soldiery and Akbar's officers out on raid for their private gain.... Under Akbar through Bengal was officially part of the Mughal Empire, Mughal rule did not as yet touch the following

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[142] *Ibid.*, pp. 181-185.

[143] *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

> areas - the whole of East Bengal; the entire coastal region south of an east-west line drawn through Hugli; the Chota Nagpur jungles; the south-eastern part of Pabna district which was intersected by a labyrinth of channels formed by the lower Karatoya and the then mighty Atrai river; the north Rangpur and the Jalpaiguri districts.[144]

This description by a historian of the political condition of Bengal on the morning of Akbar's 'conquest" of the region sums up the situation rather well. In this context we suddenly have innumerable big and small polities in the picture. The Mughal represented the power with a 'regional' and 'imperial' ambition. The plunge that they took into the troubled political waters of Bengal created waves, riding the crest of which there surfaced innumerable lesser characters who fitted into the category of local polities in our picture.

There dates to this period a tradition of the whole of Bengal being ruled by twelve great princes referred to as the 'Barah Bhuyas' of Bengal, the region itself being referred to as the 'Barah Bhuya Mulk'.[145] The origin of these characters itself is a little documented and controversial matter. According to J.N. Sarkar these were remnants of the dissolving Karrani Kingdom -

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[144] *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

[145] James Wise, "On the Barah Bhuyas of Eastern Bengal" *J.A.S.B.*, part I, No. III, 1874, pp. 197-214.

> ... small baronies created by Afghan fugitives from upper India and the descendants of the princelings and ministers of the last Afghan Sultans from whom the Mughals had wrested the sovereignty of Bengal.[146]

Dr. Wise, however pushes their origin further back into time. He perceives of the Afghan successors of the Karranis and some independent landlords of Bengal as two separate categories in the time of Akbar. He believes that those landlords who held the title of 'Bhumik' (a Sanskrit word) were probably the creation of the Hindu kings of Gaur or Nadiya. Others, referred to as 'Bhuya' (a Mohammedan title) were probably later creations, after the Muslim conquest of Bengal. He suggests that perhaps their origin dates to the time of Sher Shah of whom it is known that he divided Bengal among several officers or governors, independent of each other. It is also known that Islam Shah, Sher Shah's son and successor, abolished all regulations regarding jagirs, further contributing to their independence.[147]

A.C. Roy however, pushes the origin of these Barah Bhuyas further back in time, to pre-Muslim Bengal, in general. He says that there are ample references to 'Bhuiya' in the old literature of Bengal, in the *Chandimangala* of Kavikankan and *Dharmamangala* of Manik Ganguli. It seems that the Hindu emperors of Bengal used to employ vassal rulers

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[146]Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 187.

[147]Wise, *op.cit.*

of different grades for the consolidation and security of the empire. These vassal rules were generally called Bara-Bhuiya (first grade), Madhya-Bhuiya (second grade) and Chhota Bhuiya (lowest grade). Perhaps it was this term 'Bara-Bhuiya' that got transformed into 'Baro' (twelve) in the Bengali language. This becomes easier to understand if we take into account the Hindu tradition, according to which at the beginning of its creation, the universe was ruled by 'Eleven Gods'. In continuation of this tradition, the Hindu Emperor or Samrat ruled his empire with the help of twelve vassal rulers, who enjoyed complete independence in their domains, in return for a fixed tribute.[148]

It is difficult to ascertain the exact status of these Bhuiyas as our sources themselves are not very clear about the issue. Nor can we discerning in them any story about their changing status and any patterned progression away from or towards the greater independence of these local landholders.[149] Ralph Fitch writing in about 1586, refers to them as "kings", all of whom were "rebels against their king Zelabdin Echebar.[150] Purchas, in 1602, describes them as independent rajas in the area, waging wars and entering into

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[148]A.C. Roy, *History of Bengal, Mughal Period, 1526-1765 A.D.* Calcutta, 1968. See also, Hosten, "The Twelve Bhuiyas or Landlords of Bengal, *op.cit.*, p. 447.

[149]This is despite what Dr. Wise tries to establish in his second article, "The Barah Bhuiyas of Bengal" No. II, *J.A.S.B.*, Part I, No. 2, 1875, pp. 181-183.

[150]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch, op.cit.*, pp. 118-119.

treaties and alliances on their own accord.[151] Du Jarric, writing in 1615, who derived his information however from the Jesuit fathers sent to Bengal in 1599 by the Archbishop of Goa, refers to them as the "prefects" of the "twelve kingdoms governed by the king of the Pathans."[152] Friar Manrique, who was in Bengal in 1628-29, calls them the twelve vassal chiefs of the King of Bengal, based at Gaur, whom the natives call the twelve "Boiones de Bengale,"[153] And D'Avily, writing in 1643, changes their designation to "these twelve sovereigns" as he calls them.[154] The issue is thus, sufficiently confused. While we can follow the story of the show incorporation of these landholders into the body politic of the Mughal Empire, it is more difficult to determine their status before their surrender to Pax Mughalica.

Dr. Wise has traced the origin of four Bhuiyas of the time of Akbar - Fazl Ghazi of Bhowal, Chand Rai and Kedar Rai of Bikrampur, Kandarpa Narayan Rai of Chandradip, and Isa Khan, Masnad-i Ali, of Khizrpur.[155] All of them acquired hereditary control over the territories that they came to be recognized as the Bhuyas of as a result of royal action. Thus, the Ghazi family seem to have acquired the parganah of Bhowal when, in the beginning of the 14th century, the

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[151]Cited in Wise, "Barah Bhuyas II, *op.cit.*, p. 182.

[152] Cited in *ibid.*, p. 181.

[153]Manrique, *op.cit*, Vol. I, pp. 52-53.

[154]Cited in Wise, "Barah Bhuyas II, *op.cit.*, p. 181.

[155]Wise, "Barah Bhuyas", *op.cit.*

ruler of Delhi granted it to Kar-farma Sahib, a very holy man of the family, by way of reward, for his performing a minor miracle in the capital for the Sultan.[156] Again,

> the tradition is that about a hundred and fifty years before the reign of Akbar, Nim Rai came from Karnat and settle at Ava Phulbaria in Bikrampur. He is believed to have been the first Bhuya and *to have obtained the sanction of the ruling monarch* to his relating the title as an hereditary one in the family. (emphasis mine)[157]

> It is believed that the sons of the five Kayasthas who accompanied five Brahmanas from Kanauj in the reign of Ballal Sen, settled at Bakla-Chandradip, a pargana which included the whole of the modern zilah of Baqirganj with the exception of Mahall Salimabad. The first of the Chandradip family was Danuj Mardan De. He lived, according to the pedigree, in the 14th century. The Ghataks style him as Raja. The Ghataks also enumerate 17 Rajas of Chandradip upto the present day, while they name 23 generations since the immigration of the Kayasthas from Kanauj.[158]

Of the origin of Isa Khan, Masnad-i Ali of Khizrpur

> The family tradition is that during the reign of Husain Shah (1493-1520) Kali Das Gajdani, a Bais Rajput of Audh, became a Muhammedan and received the title of Sulaiman Khan. He afterwards married a daughter of the

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[156] *Ibid.*

[157] *Ibid.*

[158] *Ibid.*

reigning monarch. He is said to have been killed in battle by Salim Khan and Taj Khan the left three children, Isa, Ismail and a daughter. Isa Khan is said to have married Fatimah Khatun, a cousin of his own, and a grand daughter of Husain Shah of Bengal.

The first event recorded of Isa Khan occurred in 1576. Daud Khan, the last of the Sur dynasty, had been defeated and his scattered forces sought shelter in the Bhati country, where they united under command of Karim Da'd, Ibrahim and Isa Khan. The last is designated as the "rich zamindar" and it is probable that he had already acquired the position of Bhuya."[159]

Three of the four Bhuyas whose origins have been analysed by Dr. Wise - Fazl Ghazi of Bhowal, Chand Rai and Kedar Rai of Bikrampur and Isa Khan, Masnad-i Ali, of Khizrpur, received their principalities at varying moments in time after the Muslim conquest of Bengal, while Kandarpa Narayan Rai of Chandradip seems to have predated them, to the time of the Sena kings of the region.

It is not known whether the number twelve was used literally, or symbolically, to mean more than one or several. The latter seems more likely as several times in our sources, when the Barah Bhuyas are mentioned, more or less than the specified number twelve are listed. Further, the actual names enumerated vary from source to source so that we can trace a change in the actual Bhuyas over time.

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[159] *Ibid.*

It has been suggested by Father Hosten that initially the number twelve must have been literally meant.[160] In this context, the sacredness of the number twelve in the Hindu tradition has already been referred to. We have, in addition, numerous references to twelve vassals or subordinate princelings of different rulers in the subcontinent.[161] Father Hosten suggests in this light, that originally, under the Hindu Rajas of Gaur, the Barah Bhuiyas of Bengal must have been twelve in number. "Yet, if the title was not hereditary, but bestowed at will by a suzerain on the occasion of his accession to the throne, it might have followed that, though it belonged strictly to only twelve dignitaries in each reign, a larger number laid claim to it, or were designated by it among the lower ranks. Those thus designated by a previous ruler might have continued to call themselves or be called Bhuiyas.[162] This may explain how, on several occasion, the actual number of Bhuiyas far exceeded twelve, and how the actual name and principalities of these Bhuiyas kept changing from one account to another.

Du Jarric, using as his source of information letters

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[160]Hosten, "The Twelve Bhuiyas or Landlords of Bengal", *op.cit.*, pp. 447-449.

[161]Thus, E.A. Gait refers to the twelve Bhuiyas or landholders of Assam. Manrique, with reference to the coronation of the Emperor of Arakan in 1631, tells us of the "twelve Kings on the crown of whose heads the soles of his feet always rested." Du Jarric names the twelve sub-kings whom, in 1599, the King of Pegu claimed as his vassals. Friar Jordanus tells us that "in this Greater Indian are twelve idolatrous Kings, and more," while Ibn Batuta writes of the "twelve, idolatrous Sultans" in Malabar.

[162]Hosten, "The Twelve Bhuiyas or Landlords of Bengal," *op.cit.*, p. 448.

received by Father Nicholas Pimenta from Jesuit missionaries in Bengal in 1599, wrote of these twelve Bhuiyas -

> ... they are ... sovereign lords and acknowledge no-one above them. Yet, they do not call themselves kings, though they consider themselves such; but Boyons, which means perhaps the same as Princes. All the Patans and native Bengalis obey these Boyons: three of them are Gentiles, namely those of Chandecan, of Siripur and of Bacala. The others are Saracens [Muslims]... [163]

D'Avily, another missionary in the field, too, wrote much the same thing -

> Of these twelve Lords nine are Mohometans which much retards the progress of the faith.[164]

This classification is not, however, borne out by other evidence. Dr. Wise gathered information on seven Bhuiyas in Akbar's time for the period 1576-93, of whom as many as five seem to have been Hindu. They were, starting from the north and moving in a south-westerly direction -- Fazl Ghazi of Bhowal (north of Dacca), Isa Khan of Khizrpur (south of Dacca), Mukund Rai of Bhusna (south-west of Fatehabad), Lakhan Manik of Bhallua (in the south-eastern part of the delta), Kandarpa Narayan Rai of Chandradip (across the

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[163] *Ibid.*, pp. 437-438.

[164] *Ibid.*, p. 438.

Meghna, west of Bhallua), Chand Rai and Kedar Rai of Bikrampur (Bakla), and Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore.[165] A.C. Roy adds others to this list - Kansanarayan of Tahirpur (in sarkar Barbakabad), Bir Hamir of Bankura-Bishnupur (in Jahangir's time Bir Hamir is referred to as the zamindar of Birbhum in Bihar), Ramkrishna of Santal, Pitambar of Puthia-Rajshahi, and Isa Khan Lohani and Usman of Orissa and Hijli.[166].

There seems to have been a hierarchy of some sort among the Bhuiyas themselves. D'Avily refers to those of Siripur and Chandecan as especially powerful lords, more powerful than the rest.[167] Ralph Fitch's narrative of 1586 tells us -

> From Chatigan in Bengala I came to Bacola, the king of whereof is a Gentile .... From Bacola I went to Serrepore [Sripur} which standeth upon the river of Ganges, the king is called Chondery.[168]

Dr. Wise surmises from this that since Sripur was within the principality of Bikrampur [Fitch's Bacola] and within a short distance of the residence of one of the Bhuyas (Wise's Chand Rai and Kedar Rai of Bikrampur), below some of the Bhuyas

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[165]Wise, "Barah Bhuyas", *op.cit.*

[166]Roy, *History of Bengal*, *op.cit.*

[167]Quoted in Hosten, "The Twelve Bhuiyas or Landlords of Bengal" *op.cit.*, p.438.

[168]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch*, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

were subordinate Choudheries[169] Further, almost all our sources of the period tells that Isa Khan, with the title of Masnad-i Ali was the chief of all the other Bhuyas. In the words of Ralph Fitch -

> The chiefe king of all these countries is called Isacan, and he is chiefe of all the other kings, and is a great friend to all Christians...[170]

D'Avily refers to the other Bhuyas as powerful lords, "but above all the Masandolin or Maasudalin [Masnad-i Ali], as some call him."[171] Again the *Akbarnama* says -

> Isa Khan acquired fame by his ripe judgement and deliberateness and made the twelve zamindars of Bengal subject to himself.[172]

There is some controversy over the actual territory and residence of Isa Khan. The *Akbarnama* refers to Isa Khan as the zamindar of Bhati country.[173]. The entire low-lying coastal strip between Hijli and the Meghna. It, however gives

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[169]Wise "Barah Bhuyas", *op.cit.*

[170]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch, op.cit.*, p. 119.

[171]Hosten "The Twelve Bhuiyas or Landlords of Bengal", *op.cit.*, p. 438.

[172]*Akbarnama, op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 648.

[173]*Ibid.*, pp. 376-377.

Karabuh as his home, which place is identified with Manrique's 'Catrabo', a place (tappa, exactly) on the river Lakhya, opposite Khizrpur. This does not fit into the *Akbarnama's* geographical location of Bhati country, unless we shift Bhati itself further north and east, in accordance with our other sources. Father Hosten too places Isa Khan at the abovesaid Katrabuh.[174] Dr. Wise, however, identified Khizrpur, nine miles from Dhaka, as Isa Khan's residence.[175]

These Barah Bhuiyas were not the only contenders for power in Bengal besides the Mughals, in Akbar's time. At the imperial' level, the ruler of Arracan seems to have had a considerable interest in the region, especially in eastern Bengal.

> The King of Arracan also possesses part of it [Bengal], even of what is on the frontiers, towards the great harbour where lies Chatigan.[176]

In addition, at the local level we have reference to roving bands of Afghan chiefs in the Satgaon-Hugli region, especially those of Mahmud Khan Khas-khel, popularly called Mati, who ultimately surrendered and was put to death by the

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[174]Hosten, "The Twelve Bhuiyas or Landlords of Bengal," *op.cit.*, p. 440.

[175]Wise, "Barah Bhuyas," *op.cit.*

[176]Quoted in Hosten, "The Twelve Bhuiyas or Landlords of Bengal," *op.cit.*

Mughal viceroy in Bengal, Khan-i Jahan, between 1575 and 1578. Again, in Bhawal, in the north Dacca district, we have reference to two defiant Afghan chiefs, Ibrahim Maral and Karim-dad Musazi, who were joined by the Mughal admiral, Shah Bardi, when he turned rebel.[177] Political confusion in the area was thus added to by rebellions Mughal officers who, fired by ambition and encouraged by the chaos they encountered in Bengal, contributed to it themselves. The famous revolt by the eastern nobles of Akbar's empire in 1579-80 was, it will remembered, after all located in Bihar and Bengal.

We have the names of numerous such zamindars and small chieftains in the region depicted as rebels against the imperial Mughal authority in the *Akbarnama*. In the same region of Bhawal, we have reference to Majlis Dilawar and Majlis Qutb who routed the Mughal flotilla between 1575 and 1578. There is also mention of Mukund, zamindar of Fathabad, whose opposition to Mughal authority took the form of the murder of the sons of the faujdar of Fathabad. Gajapati Shah was the rebellions zamindar of Jagdishpur; he was succeeded by his son Dalpat Shah who was ultimately defeated by the imperial forces in 1580. In north Bengal, the Qaqshal clan was in control of Ghoraghat. In the same region, Kalapahar, who "was singular for his skill in river fighting," and Babu Mankali were other important Afghan chiefs.

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[177]Sarkar, *op.cit.*, Ch. X & XI, passim.

Junaid Karrani, the first cousin of the defeated Daud Karrani, served as a leader of the Afghan rebels in the area around his base at Jharkhand in south-east Bihar. Qutlu Khan Lohani, an officer of Daud, drove the Mughals out of Orissa and claimed it for his master in 1580. His military commander Bahadur Kuruh, was an important personage of the time. Masum Khan was a powerful Afghan chief active in the Patna region. He also possessed two forts at Trimohani, the junction of the Ganges, Jamna and Saraswati. He led a major campaign against the Mughals in 1583, in which he led a coalition of the forces of Qutlu Lohani of Orissa and south Bengal, and the Qaqshals of north Bengal. The coalition, however, broke up and the Afghan offensive was unsuccessful. The famous admiral Kalapahar was killed in action and the campaign saw the surrender of the Qaqshal clan to Akbar. The *Akbarnama*, the official history of Akbar records in 1587 that "the conquests now extened upto the port of Satganw."[178]

Qutlu Lohani's successors only submitted to Man Singh in 1590. His nephews, Sulaiman and Usman, however, rebelled in 1593, plundered Satgaon and Bhusna, and joined Isa Khan in the vicinity of Dacca. Thus, the Afghan royal power, rooted out of Orissa by Man Singh was established anew in East Bengal, beyond the Brahmaputra. These elements remained in rebellion till the end of Akbar's life, with Man Singh fighting continuously against them.[179]

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[178] *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

[179] *Ibid.*

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> The reign of Jahangir forms a definite landmark in the history of Bengal. Under Akbar, Mughal rule in Bengal was more like an armed occupation than a settled administration .... It was early in the reign of Jahangir that organised and effective steps were taken to crush all the independent zamindars and impose a uniform administrative system over the entire territory. For accomplishing this task a new policy was adopted, which proved eminently successful. While the governors of Akbar's time adopted a simple, straightforward, and uniform policy in regard to the zamindars and allowed them to enjoy practical independence as long as they professed loyalty and paid tributes to the Emperor, the governors of Jahangir's reign, especially Islam Khan, followed a more diplomatic and tortuous line of action. The zamindars, big and small, seem to have been played off one against the others, with promises of imperial favour and reward, sometimes in the shape of territories, obviously with a view to preventing a unified and concerted resistance, until all of them, one after another, were derprived of their independence and reduced to vassalage.[180]

Our main source of information on the political history of Bengal in the reign of Jahangir is the *Baharistan-i Ghaybi* of Mirza Nathan, an eyewitness account by a contemporary Mughal general who took a leading part in all the campaigns

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[180] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

in Bengal and Assam during Jahangir's reign.[181] In the beginning of Jahangir's reign, our region continued to be a regular melting pot of innumerable big and little contenders for power. The *Baharistan* gives a detailed description of the slow lifting of the haze and the clearing of the picture with the elimination of the smaller polities and the extension of Mughal rule over the whole region.

The twelve Bhuiyas are referred to as the 'Twelve Bhuumias of Bengal' by Mirza Nathan. According to M.I. Borah, Mirza Nathan's translator, from the name of several zamindars and chiefs that we find reference to in the *Baharistan*, who opposed Islam Khan's attempt at subduing them, it is difficult to determine exactly who these twelve Bhumias were.[182] Starting from the east, Bhati country, which had been ruled over by Isa Khan (died 1599), was now divided into two. Isa Khan's son, Musa Khan, inherited most of it, along with the title Masnad-i Ali. He ruled over the part of Bhati country to the west of the Brahmaputra, with his capital at Sonargaon, and important forts at Khizrpur, Katrabhu and Jatrapur in his possession. Among Musa Khan's most important supporters were his brothers, Dawud, Abdulla and Mahmud, and his cousin 'Ataul Khan.[183]

The part of Bhati country across the Brahmaputra was

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[181] *Baharistan, op.cit.*

[182] *Baharistan, op.cit.*, p. 15 & f.n.

[183] *Ibid.*

ruled over by Usman, the Lohani fugitive from Orissa who had sought refuge with Isa Khan after Man Singh's conquest of Orissa. His capital was at Bokainagar; we controlled important forts at Hasanpur and Egarasindur, both on the east bank of the Brahmaputra; and he ruled over his territory with the help of his brothers, Khwaja Sulayman, Khwaja Wali, Khwaja Malhi, Khwaja Ibrahim, and Khwaja Dawud, and his sons, Khwaja Mumriz and Khwaja Yaqub.[184]

With the title of Masnad-i Ali Musa Khan inherited Isa Khan's position as chief of the twelve Bhuiyas of Bengal. The *Baharistan* is quite clear about this and repeatedly mentions Musa Khan and his twelve Bhuiyas. It does not definitely tell us, however, who these twelve were. It merely gives us a list of names at one place, which neither numbers twelve nor consists of the most powerful zamindars of Bengal in that time.[185] These zamindars supporting Musa Khan apparently included Bahadur Ghazi, of the well-known Ghazi family of Bhawal in Akbar's time, who was zamindar of Chaura on the river Lakhya. His nephew, Anwar Ghazi, is mentioned among the twelve Bhuiyas of Musa Khan. Suna Ghazi apparently a member of the same family, was zamindar of Sarail. Pahlawan was the zamindar of Matang, situated north of Sarail and south of Taraf. Further to the west were Binud Ray, zamindar of Chand Pratap, Mirza Mumin Khan, son of Masum Khan Kabuli, who was the zamindar of Chatmohar in Pabna district (the

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[184] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[185] *Ibid.*, Ch. IV.

Chatmahal of Irfan Habib's map) and Madhav Roy, zamindar of Khalsi in the same area. The list also includes the names of Shaikh Pir and Haji Shamsuddin Baghdadi, whose territories are, however, not mentioned. Musa Khan and his twelve Bhuiyas submitted to Islam Khan after a protracted resistence. They then helped in the further consolidation of Mughal rule in Bengal.

There were, besides these several other contemporary zamindars and chiefs in the region. Starting from the east, further east of Bokainagar, was Anwar Khan, zamindar of Baniachung, a zamindari in Sylhet district, and his brothers. He was the chief of all the zamindars in the region and according to the *Baharistan*, was in no way less powerful than Musa Khan, Masnad-i Ali.[186]

Nasir Khan and Dariya Khan Pani were two Afghan chiefs of Tajpur, north-east of Bukainagar, and were allies of Usman against the imperial authorities.[187]

We also have reference to Bayizid Karrani and his brothers, the Afghan chiefs of Sylhet, who, along with a number of smaller Afghan chiefs, known as the Sarhangs, helped Usman against the Mughal offensive in the region.[188] North-east of Mymensingh district, Raja Raghunath was the

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[186] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[187] *Ibid.*

[188] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

zamindar of Susang.[189] He submitted early to the Mughals and was closely associated with the Mughal campaigns against other zamindars in Bengal, particularly Musa Khan and Bayizid Karrani and in the Mughal expedition against Kamrup.

Still in eastern Bengal, but moving further south toward the coast, we come to the zamindari of Bhalwa, with Ananta Manikya, son of Lakhan Manikya of Akbar's reign, as the zamindar.[190] Since Lakhan Manikya is included among the twelve Bhuiyas of Akbar's reign, his son Ananta Manikya should have been one of the twelve Bhuiyas in the time of Jahangir.

West of Bhalwa, following the coast, was the territory of Bakla, the zamindari of Ram Chandra, the son of Kandarpa Narayan Rai of Chandradip of Akbar's reign.[191] North of Bakla, still within the coastal tract, was Shazadpur, the territory of Raja Ray.[192] He was one of the earliest to submit to Islam Khan. Further north, we have reference to Majlis Qutb, zamindar of Fathabad.[193] In Akbar's reign, Majlis Qutb is mentioned in the region of Bhawal, north of Dacca, while the zamindar of Fathabad at that time seems to have been an individual named Mukund. In Jahangir's reign, Majlis Qutb of Fathabad was in close alliance with Musa Khan.

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[189] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[190] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

[191] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[192] *Ibid.*

[193] *Ibid.*

Moving north of Dacca, Pitambar and his nephew Ananta were the zamindars of Chita Juwar, in the pargana of Bhaturia Bazu.[194] In the same area, Ilah Baksh was the ruler of Alaipur.[195]

Moving south towards the coast once again, Raja Satrajit was the ruler of Bhusna.[196] In Akbar's time, Mukund Rai, the Bhuiya of Bosnah was one of the Barah Bhuiyas of Bengal. Raja Satrajit should have occupied a similar position in the time of Jahangir. He was one of the earliest to submit to Islam Khan and rendered very valuable assistance in the further consolidation of Mughal authority in Bengal, in the conquest of Kamrup and in the expedition to Assam.

Among the most powerful zamindars of Bengal was Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore.[197] He, too, submitted early to Islam Khan. From the account given in the *Baharistan*, the Portuguese in the region seem to have played some role in conditioning this surrender.

As part of his general attempt to pacify the region, Islam Khan also despatched an expedition against Bir Hamir, zamindar of Birbhum, Shams Khan, zamindar of Pachet and Salim Khan, zamindar of Hijli, (known as Hijliwal) who was later

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[194] *Ibid.*

[195] *Ibid.*

[196] *Ibid.*

[197] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

succeeded by his nephew Bahadur Khan, all of which were situated in Bihar.[198] We also have reference to Chandrabhan, zamindar of Chandrakuna,[199] and Raja Madhukar Ujjainia, ruler of Ujjainia,[200] identified with Bhojpur in Bihar. The last apparenthy helped a local fakir, posing as Jahangir's son Khusrau, to capture Patna.

Political instability was added to in the region by rebel imperial offices like Baz Bahadur Qalmaq[201] and Ali Akbar, who were often able to enlist the help of local chiefs. For instance, Ali Akbar was helped against Islam Khan's forces by Raja Madhukar Ujjainia.[202]

There were, in addition to these elements belonging to the region itself, several important independent neigbouring rulers who were participant in the power politics of the time. To several of these rulers, the conquest of Bengal by Jahangir was an alarming proposition. It would bring the might of the Mughal Empire in direct contact with them, and with Bengal lying prostrate the imperial ambition of the Mughals would be unleashed next in their direction. Safeguarding the existence of the big and little rulers between their own territories and the Mughal domain was thus

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[198] *Ibid.*, p. 327.

[199] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

[200] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[201] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[202] *Ibid.*, pp. 92-96.

directly in their interest. Thus, Sutradaman, the Raja of Kachar, the country lying to the north-east of Sylhet, sent an army to help Bayizid Karrani against the imperial forces.[203] The Ahom king, the Raja of Assam, readily responded to the appeal for help of Shaykh Ibrahim, a corrupt Mughal *karori*, who had misappropriated Rs. 700,000 of the imperial revenues and who was afraid of an investigation into the account. The deal struck between them was that the Ahom king would help to instate Shaykh Ibrahim as the king of Kuch (the earlier ruler of which country had already surrendered to the Mughals - see below), and the latter would in turn play the role of a buffer between the Mughal armies and the Ahom kingdom and stand in the way of any Mughal attack on Assam.[204]

There was in addition, Raja Lakshmi Narayan, the ruler of Kamata or Kuch Bihar, who acknowledged Mughal suzerainty in 1609, from when onward he served the Mughals as a faithful vassal.[205] Raja Parikshit Narayan, the ruler of Kamrup also first resisted and ultimately accepted Mughal overlordship.[206]

The greatest of these border kings was undoubtedly the Raja of Tippera, who ruled over an extensive territory, hilly and forest-clad, on the south-eastern frontier of the Bengal province. The Tippera king, Bijaya Manikya (1540-71)

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[203] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[204] *Ibid.*, p. 443.

[205] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[206] *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 830.

apparently conquered Chittagong and led a daring raid into Eastern Bengal. His successor, Amar Manikya (1577-86) established his hegemony over a large part of south-eastern Bengal, including Bhulua, Bakla, Sarail and Sylhet and offered asylum to the zamindar of Sarail. Tippera was, however, overrun by the Mughal viceroy in Bengal, Ibrahim Khan Fath-jang, and made the seat of a Mughal *thana* in the early part of the 17th century (1618).[207]

On Bengal's eastern boundary, following the coastline, lay the Kingdom of Arakan with its independent ruler who seems to have had a special interest in Bengal. His interest in the region seems to have increased beyond Chittagong, which was already firmly in his possession at this time. We have in the *Baharistan*, references to at least six expeditions by the ruler of the Arakan into the region of Sripur - Bhalwa - Dakhin Shahbazpur, in the reign of Jahangir itself.[208] There is also the description of one invasion of the Arakan by the Mughal forces in an attempt to capture the fabled white elephant in the possession of the "Raja of the Mags," as well as to pacify the eastern frontier of the Empire.[209] From the descriptions of these expeditions we can make an estimate of the power of the Arakanese king. The *Baharistan* describes him as a powerful ruler in the area. A raid of the island of Baghchar by the Magh Raja was led

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[207] *Ibid.*, p. 571.

[208] *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 329, 383, 629, 639 & passim.

[209] *Ibid.*, pp. 404-420.

by 700 ghurabs (floating batteries) and 4000 jaliya boats, the fleet comprising a total of some 30,000 boats as estimated by the Mughals under attack.[210] And to defend his own kingdom against the invading Mughal army, the Magh Raja was able to furnish a force of some 400,000 infantry, 10,000 horsenmen and "innumerable" war boats and elephants. And this was in addition to the regular force already stationed at Chittagong, which is decribed as already "strongly fortified and fully equipped."[211]

The excussions of the Magh forces into Bengal are labelled in the *Baharistan* as predatory raids.

> When the Maga came with three hundred boats to the envirous of Sripur and became aware that there was no sufficient imperial force in Thana to check their advance, they burnt and looted a large number of villages and carried away the villagers as captives. Before this news reached Islam Khan and before he could send an army, they fled with ease....[212]

However, at least one of the Magh expeditions was more than a mere raid. Judging from the size of the invading force and its actions, it seems to have been a conquest-oriented invasion proper. The ruler of the Arakan led a force of some

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[210] *Ibid.*, p. 629.

[211] *Ibid.*, pp. 405-406.

[212] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

300,000 infantry in 1614-15. Finding the region bare of imperial troops, the Mughal thanadar, Abdul Wahid, having retreated for fear of the large invading army, the Raja of the mags did not content himself with looting the area, but pursued the retreating Mughal force to the Dakhiya Khal.[213] It does seem as though he had loftier ambitions than a mere raiding of the area. That he had territorial interests in Bengal is also borne out by the fact that the village of Nizampur, yielding a revenue of some six hundred rupees per annum, was conquered at this time by the Arakanese king.[214]

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Such was the political backdrop to the Portuguese activities in our region in the 16th and 17th centuries. It provided conditions that afforded the opportunity to the Portuguese to join the fray as yet another among the several contenders for power. They came to be regarded as an element powerful enough to make a difference to the course of political events. While we will trace the constitution and growth of their power in the next chapter, we may illustrate their position among the several political players in the historical setting with a single but lucid example. The *Baharistan* describes the state of mind of Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore, one of the Bara Bhuiyas of Bengal, in the time of Jahangir, before he decided to surrender to the imperial

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[213] *Ibid.*, pp. 332-333.

[214] *Ibid.*, p. 407.

forces -

> . . . he [Pratapaditya] conferred with his son Udayaditya and thus decided - "When we are surrounded by the imperial army from two sides, and when the imperial officers will rush upon us, the Firingis of the 'Harmad' [armada], who never ceased even in time of peace to attack and plunder the territory of Jessore, will now become audacious and will make greater attempts than before to ruin our territory. Nothing will be gained (by us). Therefore it is better that I should voluntarily submit to the imperial officers and present myself before Islam Khan to see what turns out and how my fortune works. After that if we are aided by fortune, an attempt for the preservation of our territory will be made."[215]

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[215] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

CHAPTER II

CONTESTED DOMAINS:

THE GROWTH OF A MULTI-FACETED PRESENCE

> .....The discovery of so great a part of our globe is entirely owing to the following chance:-
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> About four hundred years ago, a ship, beaten by the storm, was thrown upon these coasts, and by chance discovered that land. It was in the year when the Portuguese ships (so called from Portugal, their kingdom) came by chance into India. Those strangers having seen the country and taken a liking to it, formed settlements in that region, and in process of time they became so powerful that they could not be expelled.....[1]

This description of the Portuguese in Bengal by Seid-Gholam-Hossein-Khan, writing in the 18th century, is testimony to the fact that for a period of time the Portuguese had attained a position of some importance in our region. We seem, therefore, to have come a long way ahead in our narrative. Of the several power groups in the historical setting, one of the important ones were the Portuguese, whom we have not yet introduced. Having created the geographical and historical background, it is perhaps

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[1]Seid-Gholam-Hossein-Khan, *The Seir Mutaqherin; or Review of Modern Times: Being An History of India from the year 1118 to the year 1194, of the Hedjrah, containing, in general, the reigns of the 7 last emperors of Hindostan, and in particular, an account of the English Wars in Bengal*, English translation by Raymond (Mustapha), 3 Vols, Calcutta, 1902, (reprint), Vol. III, Section XVII, p. 21.

now time to introduce the main character of our story. This chapter, therefore, will focus on the Portuguese in the Bengal-Arakan region, from the first sojourns of individuals into the area, to their settling down in the region and the building up of their presence there over a period of time.

Which were the settlements of the Portuguese in this region in the 16th and 17th centuries? How did they come to acquire them? Who were the inhabitants of these settlements - i.e. what was the makeup of 'the Portuguese' in our region and why did these elements choose to come to this area? What was the relationship between the different strands of the Portuguese in Bengal and in what way did they constitute a 'presence' in the historical setting? This chapter addresses itself to all these questions and many more.

Vasco da Gama's arrival at Calicut in 1498 saw the entry of the Portuguese into Asian waters. Their arrival in the Indian Ocean was the result of a combination of pull and push factors. A general crisis occurred in the Mediterranean spice trade in the 15th century due to political troubles in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. Asian spices were almost a necessity in Europe, where they were required to preserve the large stores of meat for the long and severe winter, and thus had a very large market there. The spices were carried to the ports of the Red Sea by the

Gujarati and Arab merchants who were dominant in the intra-Asian trade from where they were transferred to the holds of the ships of the Italian merchants who were prominent in the Mediterranean, and distributed all over Europe. Political disturbances in West Asia and Egypt in the 15th century disrupted this smooth flow of goods, leading to a drastic reduction in the supply of spices to Europe, and a sharp rise in their prices. There was, thus, a general urgency to find an alternate route to Asia. Portugal, positioned as she was on the very edge of the seaboard of Europe, recognised the financial prospects of finding a way to the East around the Cape of Good Hope and capturing the spice trade for herself. The huge profits that trade in Asian spices promised thus constituted the main pulling force that brought the Portuguese all around the coast of Africa to Asian waters.[2]

As far as the push factor is concerned, historians like Fernand Brandel and Ralph Davis point out that Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries had reached a structural impasse.[3] The newly-emerging political and economic elite

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[2]There are numerous general histories of the Portuguese in Asia. See C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, London, 1969; B.W. Diffie & G.D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, (Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion, Vol. I), Minnesota, 1977; most recently, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History*, New Delhi, 1993. For a slightly different outlook see Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century - The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade*, originally published as *Carracks, Caravans and Companies*, Copenhagen, 1973.

[3]Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, (Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Vol. II), translated from French by Sian Reynolds, Paris, 1979.

groups in European society found the existing opportunities within the semi-fendalized European economy insufficient and restrictive. Consequently, the entire notion of economic expansion in the post-feudal epoch found expression in overseas ventures, and the frantic attempts to find an alternative route to the East can be described as a transgression of structures.

In addition to these economic motives, the religious factor was also important. Portugal was, after all still in her ethos a crusading nation. It was in pursuit of the Moors and in search of the fabled Prester John that the Portuguese first ventured out of Europe into north-west Africa, and then all the way down the coast to the east.[4]

The carving out of the Portuguese oceanic empire all along the Indian Ocean littoral is a well-known story. Diu-1509; Goa-1510; Malacca-1511; Hormuz-1515; by the first quarter of the 16th century, the Portuguese had as many as fifty fortified settlements stretching from Sofala in Mozambique to Macao in China, strung together to form a thalassocratic empire. This was the Portuguese *Estado da India* with its headquarters at Goa.[5]

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[4]Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, *op.cit.*, Diffie & Winius, *op.cit.*

[5]Boxer, *ibid.*; Diffie & Winius, *ibid.*

The drifting around Cape Comorin to the Coromandel coast and then to Bengal is, however, a lesser known tale. For the first twenty years that they were in Asia, the Portuguese did not develop direct commercial relations with Bengal. They became familiar with Bengali goods, however, which were brought by the existential Indian trading groups to the Portuguese ports of Goa, Malacca etc.[6] The opening up of direct trade with Bengal had, however, always been on the agenda; it was only a matter of time before the first official trading expedition would be sent to the region.[7]

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I. A Pot-pourri of Elements: Contested Domains

It was in A.D. 1517 that the Portuguese king, Manoel, sent Fernão Peres de Andrade with four ships particularly to open trade with Bengal and China. Andrade, in turn, sent his messenger, João Coelho, there, who arrived at Chatgaon

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[6]As early as 1498 Vasco da Gama noted the fine quality and high prices fetched by Bengali textiles at Calicut, M.R. Tarafdar, *Husain-Shahi Bengal 1494-1538, A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca, 1965; Bengali merchants and their goods were so well-known in Malacca that when the Portuguese first ventured into that port they were mistaken for "white Bengalis," Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade', in *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 96.

[7]Vasco da Gama himself had noted that a trip to Bengal would be a profitable venture; Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, p.31 ; Albuquerque, too, had nursed such an ambition and had informed the King of Portugal about possibilities of trade in Bengal, J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1919, p. 26.

in 1517.[8]

Simultaneously, Dom João de Silveira was sent with an expedition to Bengal from the Maldives in A.D. 1517, by Lopo Soares de Albergaria, the Portuguese governor at Goa who had succeeded Albuquerque.[9] These were the first official Portuguese expeditions to Bengal.

The reputation of the Portuguese seems, however, to have travelled before them. On an earlier voyage to the Maldives, Silveira had apparently captured two Moorish ships belonging to a relative of the governor of Chatgaon. On Silveira's arrival at the port the governor began to prepare for a fight, so that the Portuguese envoy had to retire in a hurry without extracting any trade concessions.[10]

Portuguese individuals in Asia, however, already seem to have ventured into the region long before this. They must have been fairly familiar with its geography and products to have furnished so much information to Duarte Barbosa for him to write such a detailed account of the region in his book in 1517, without having stepped east of

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[8]Campos, *op.cit.*, pp. 26-27; Subrahmanyam gives the date as 1516, Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 27.

[10]*Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

Cananor, where he was the *escrivão* (writer) from about 1500 till about 1516 or 1517.[11] As early as 1521, when the Estado was still seeking permission to open up trade with the region, we have evidence of certain Portuguese persons residing at Gaur in their private capacity.[12] An official mission from Goa to the court at Gaur, headed by one Gonçalo Tavares, found a particular Martim de Lucena resident there, complete with indigenous dress and very familiar with the local customs and codes of behaviour.

> That same day I met Martim de Lucena who I did not initially recognize in his Moorish costume. He had a moustache but his hair and beard were shaved. He wore a pointed bonnet turban on his head and looked more like Mohammed than the mummy of him. When I was told he was Portuguese I approached him; he was plodding along on a nag and stopped when I called him. He looked happy to see me. On behalf of Goncalo Tavares I asked him to be kind enough to initiate him in the customs and habits of the country that he knew so well by virtue of living there.[13]

This Martim de Lucena was probably only one among several such Portuguese individuals who had settled down in

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[11]Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa. An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants, written by Duarte Barbosa and Completed about the year 1518 A.D.*, translated by M.L. Dames, 2 Vols, London, 1918 & 1921. Barbosa has 14 pages devoted to his account of 'The Kingdom of Bengala', Vol. II, pp. 135-148.

[12]Genevieve Bouchon and Luis Filipe Thomaz, *Voyage dans les Deltas du Gange et de l'Irraouaddy, Relation Portugaise Anonyme (1521)*, Paris, 1988, p. 319.

[13]*Ibid.*

various parts of Bengal. The notion of their existence being seperate from that of the Portuguese officialdom in Asia was very strong. While the 1521 official mission was keen to seek them out for assitance in approaching the Sultan of Bengal, individuals of the like of Martim de Lucena were particular to make it clear that they were under no obligation to do so. Thus,

> On the same day I was on my way to look for the armourer who was going to polish the arms and sword we had brought for the Sultan when I met Martim de Lucena and asked if he would visit Gonçalo Tavares. He replied that he was indebted neither of him, D. Pedro nor the king of Portugal and that he was in need of nobody. I said that these words were not worthy of him which his response was that if anybody needed him they should take the trouble of going to see him at home. He went on to say other things which I will not report as they were in poor taste".[14]

After 1518 it became a regular practice to send annually a ship from Goa with merchandise for trade to Bengal.[15] These annual voyages referred to as the *carreira de Bengala* would come to Chittagong or Satgaon where the ship would berth and exchange goods till it was time to depart with the monsoon winds. Permission to establish permanent settlements in the region, trade concessions, and

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 320.

[15] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade', *op.cit.*, pp. 104-105.

remission of customs duties - in general, a privileged position in Bengal's trade had not yet been secured by the *Estado da India*. Efforts to this end continued and diplomatic missions often accompanied the annual voyage to Bengal. Thus, the voyage of 1521 carried with it also an official mission to the court at Gaur, seeking trade concessions, particularly the remission of all customs duties payable at Chittagong.

The voyage to Bengal in 1521 seems originally to have been entrusted to a fidalgo named Rafael Perestrelo, who, however, chose to go on to China, allowing another fidalgo named António de Brito to take over. António de Brito led the expedition till Chittagong. He did not seem, however, to want to lead the mission to Gaur, which responsibility he passed on, along with twelve cruzadoes, to Gonçalo Tavares. The embassy was ultimately led to Gaur by Gonçalo Tavares.[16] We have an eyewitness account of the whole expedition related by an anonymous interpreter who accompanied Tavares to Gaur. This narrative is very useful as it gives us a rare insight into the position of the Portuguese in Bengal very early in the century, at a point of time when we have little detailed information about them.

It seems that at this time, along with embassies sent

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[16]Genevieve Bouchon and Luis Filipe Thomaz, *Voyage dans .... op.cit.*, pp. 313-314.

from Goa, private traders were also simultaneously approaching the Sultanate of Bengal seeking trade concessions of their own. Thus, Gonçalo Tavares' embassy met with a second mission headed by a fidalgo, Cristóvão Jusarte, in his private capacity, en route to Gaur at the town of Noamaluco.[17] Tavares' was evidently the official embassy which traced its legitimacy through the governor of Goa to the King of Portugal and bore letters of authorisation.

> .... we were envoys of the Government of India who represented the King our Lord in this part of the world....[18]

Cristóvão Jusarte's was a rival mission. On meeting our author, the interpreter of Gonçalo Tavares, at Noamaluco, Cristóvão Jusarte "asked me why we had come. He said we were deluding ourselves and that he would 'spoil everything' if we did not comply with his demands."[19]

Out on private venture, Cristóvão Jusarte was keen to throw off the yoke of the *Estado da India*, which its official agents were keen to extend all along the Indian Ocean littoral. It is one of our basic findings that the *Estado* was not universally accepted by all the Portuguese

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[17] *Ibid.*, p. 313.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 324.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 313

in Asia. In the long stretches of coastline between official *Estado* settlements, (in which category our region of Bengal falls), where private adventurers and the Portuguese state based at Goa were yet stiff competitors, the private element was particularly careful not to allow the *Estado* an edge in the race. Portuguese indivduals of the like of Martim de Lucena and Cristóvão Jusarte were careful to take every opportunity to reject Goa's yet infounded claims to obedience in the region. Thus, when Gonçalo Tavares requested Cristóvão Jusarte at Chittagong

> in the name of the King, the Governor of India and António de Brito who had received his powers from the Governor, to prepare himself to leave immediately because the monsoon was passing...., Cristóvão Jusarte replied that he did not know the Governor of India and that he did not even know who he was. He said other things which should not be recorded in writing and made remarks about António de Brito which nobody should hear.[20]

Yet, very interestingly, Cristóvão Jusarte sought to give legitimacy to his own embassy to the Sultanate of Bengal by claiming linkage with the Portuguese Crown itself at Lisbon. He claimed at Gaur that

> he was the son of the Regent of Portugal and we [Tavares' embassy] were but mere peasants not worthy

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 336.

> of serving him (the King). He declared that our mission was a hoax.....[21]

We have a similar instance related more than a century later by the Friar Manrique in the region of Arakan. En route to the city of Arakan, the capital of that kingdom, Manrique's party came to an obscure village.

> Here we met the commandant of the Portuguese and other Christians of Arracan with several other vessels containing Portuguese and Indian Christians.... A Gelia now detached itself from the rest. It was very gaily dressed, flying the banner of Christ alongside the Royal Standard of Portugal, from which we presumed that the commandant, Manuel Rodriguez Tigre by name, was coming to meet us with the leading Portuguese residents.[22]

The region of Arakan was not part of the *Estado* da India. Any Portuguese settlements here were unofficial in nature, their 'commandant' being elected by the residents from among themselves. Yet this private Portuguese element in this region deliberately sought to legitimize its presence by pledging allegiance to the Portuguese Crown. While, on the one hand, they refused to acknowledge the authority of Goa, on the other hand, these settlers proudly flew the

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 328.

[22] Fray Sebastien Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique 1629-1643*, translated by C. Eckford Luard & Father H. Hosten, S.J., 2 Vols, Oxford, 1926, Vol. I, p. 160.

flag of Lisbon.

Perhaps such actions hint at an ongoing power struggle between the Portuguese in Asia themselves. The Goa-based authority possessed "official" status by virtue of the sanction of the Portuguese Crown. Perhaps, by conciously claiming legitimacy by proclaiming allegiance to Lisbon, the private elements were attempting to claim an equal status with the *Estado da India* thus contesting its sole claim to being the "official" Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean.

If this were the case, our understanding of the nature of the Portuguese presence east of Cape Comorin becomes somewhat different from George Winius' understanding of it constituting the "shadow-empire" of Goa.[23] The settlers in the BengalArakan region did not seem to view themselves as lying in the shadow of the Goa-based *Estado da India* - far from it; in fact, they seem to have tried to elevate themselves to a similar status. In this context, the labels "private" and "official" commonly attached to the Portuguese presence in Asia would themselves require re-thinking. They are not simple, unproblematic categories that convey a single meaning. The "private" elements were so perceived by the *Estado da India*, which saw itself as the "official" presence of the Portuguese Crown in Asia.

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[23]George D. Winius, 'The "shadow-empire" of Goa in the Bay of Bengal', *Itinerario*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1983.

Portuguese individuals, from their point of view, while disassociating themselves from the *Estado* structure, refused to accord to it an official status. Drawing their own legitimacy from the Crown, on these grounds they saw themselves as no different from the Goa-based setup, with a similar claim to an "official" status.

The two were, in any case not watertight categories. Officials of the *Estado* often traded in their private capacity. *Fidalgos* like Cristovao Jusarte frequently left the fold and made the changeover to the status of private adventures, refusing to acknowledge the authority of Goa. Our 1521 narrative itself furnishes us with yet another example of the porous state of the demarcating line between the "official" and the "unofficial". Thus, Rafael Perestrelo, the *fidalgo* who had originally been given the Bengal voyage in 1521, and who had relinquished it in favour of sailing further east to China, on finding that he had missed the monsoon to China decided to revert to Bengal, instead of returning home empty-handed. Once in Chittagong, Perestrelo quickly turned against the official voyage under Antonio de Brito that was in the port. The interpreter, who was part of the official expedition tells us -

> I would have thought that a man like that [of the status of Rafael Perestrelo] would have acted for the Portuguese, but I found that the opposite was true.

> I say this because I saw him in the company of the Rume Ali Agha and his men, all armed with good arquebuses, lances and shields; and with them were all Rafael Perestrelo's Portuguese followers equipped as archers, most of them clothed in the style of the country. They were now the opponents of all those aboard the King our Lord's ships. On several occasions I saw them come down from the top of the hill [where they were entrenched] to raid the town, seize the other Portuguese and take them back in irons as if they were Moors.[24]

While we have, thus, examples of *fidalgos* turning renegade, we also have, on occasion, instances of the opposite, when renegades aspired and sometimes even succeeded in making it back to the "official" *Estado* circles. One such renegade was Joao Machado, who was exiled from Portugal for committing robbery and rape and who sailed with Pedro Alvares Cabral's fleet in 1500. In India Machado entered the service of Yusuf Adil Khan of Bijapur and became the head of the 'white' component of the Bijapur forces (which could mean Turks and Iranians as much as Europeans). In 1510, when Albuquerque captured Goa, Machado was part of the Bijapuri force that was sent to recapture the city. In the course of this fight Machado defected to the side of the Portuguese and seems to have contributed to the successful defence of Goa. Subsequently Machado gained the full trust of Albuquerque, conducted the negotiations which led to the complete withdrawal of the Bijapuri forces

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[24]Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage dans ..., op.cit.*, p. 337.

from Goa, commanded several minor fleets between 1512 and 1515, and in 1517, even after Albuquerque's death, continued to be the chief *tanadar* of Goa and the commander of the infantry forces there.[25]

We have another such example closer to our region, in the career of Felippe de Brito Nicote. Whether he had any claims to a noble birth or not is a disputed fact, but he was, in any case, clearly an adventurer in eastern Bengal who was employed in the army of the King of Arakan.[26] Father Fernao Guerreiro, writing in the first decade of the 17th century tells us that

> There was at this time in the service of the King of Arracam a Portuguese named Felippe de Brito Nicote a rich and honourable man and the Captain of many Portuguese, whom he had brought with him to Pegu. He had already rendered the King valuable service, having twice restored him to his throne, when he had been driven from it by his rebellious subjects, and in all his wars had proved himself to be the ablest of his subjects. As a reward for all that he had done, the King made him Governor and lord of the kingdom of Pegu

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[25]This account is based on the paper presented by Maria Augusta Lima Cruz titled 'The Wanderings of a Convict-Exile in "Lost Lands": Joao Machado', at the Indo-Portuguese Seminar on 'Cross Cultural Brokers in the Portuguese Asian Experience' on January 18, 1994, at the India International Centre, New Delhi.

[26]Fernão Guerreiro, *Relacam annual das cousas que fizeram os Padres da Companhia de Iesus na India, & lapao nos annos de 600 & 601 & do precesso da conversao, & Christandade dequellas partes: tirada das cartas geraes que de la vierao pello Padre Fernão Guerreiro da Campanha de Iesus;* extracts translated by C.H. Payne under the title *Jahangir and the Jesuits with an Account of the Travels of Benedict Goes and the Mission to Pegu*, London, 1930. The account of Pegu and Felippe de Brito Niote constitutes Part III of Payne's book, pp. 185-276.

> [which the King of Arakan had recently conquered], such as it was, with permission to built at Syriao (which is a port on the shores of the same Kingdom....) a fortress and stockades as a defence against his enemies...[27]

"To render his position secure.... in the year 1603" this independent ruler of the kingdom and fortress which he had "built at his own cost, at the entrance to the port of Siriam, which is the chief port of the Kingdom of Pegu."[28] then "went to India [read Goa], to make over the fortress and the Kingdom of Pegu to the state [the *Estado da India*], and to tender his submission and devotion to His Majesty."[29]

The *Estado da India* accepted the submission and the private adventurer Felippe de Brito became the agent of the *Estado*, looking out for its interests on the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal.

The Portuguese presence in Bengal and the Arakan was, thus, from the very beginning, of very mixed nature. Writing about them in 1594, the Dutchman, John Huyghen van Linschoten, says that in Bengal

> the Portingalles... have no Fortes, nor any

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[27] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

> government, nor policie as in India [read Goa] [they have], but live in a manner like wild men, and untamed horses, for every man doth there what he will and every man is lord [and maister], neyther esteeme they anything of iustice, whether there be any or none, and in this manner doe certaine Portingalles dwell among them, some here, some there [scattered abroade], and are for the most part such as dare not stay in India for some wickednesse by them committed....[30]

The same thing is stated by many other travellers right down to Bernier -

> That Kingdom [of Bengal] was the place of retreat for fugitives from Goa, Ceylon, Cochin, Malacca and other settlements [of the *Estado*] in the Indies, held formerly by the Portuguese; and no persons were better received than those who had deserted their monasteries, married two or three wives, or committed other great crimes. These people were Christians only in name; the lives led by them were detestable, massacring or poisoning one another without compunction or remorse; and sometimes assassinating even their priests, who, to confess the truth, were too often no better than their murderers.[31]

Alot of the contemporary perception of the Portuguese presence in Bengal is, thus, that they were renegades or

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[30]John Hugyghen van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, , translated by A. C. Burnell & P.A. Tiele, 2 Vols, New Delhi, 1988, (reprint), Vol.I, Chap. 16.

[31]Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire, A.D. 1656-1668*, translated by Archibald Constable, London, 1914, pp. 174-175.

marauders who were either ousted from or fled the *Estado* settlements for comitting some crime or to escape the long-reaching arm of the Inquisition. Or they could be respectable *fidalgos* like Cristóvão Jusarte or Rafael Perestrelo, who saw greater opportunity for personal gain in leading an individual existence rather than operating within the structure of the *Estado da India*.

Alongside the growth of these elements in Bengal the *Estado* persistently continued in its efforts to secure a foothold in the region. The 1521 embassy to Gaur yielded results, and the Portuguese were exempted from paying customs duties at Chittagong. They had not yet, however, received permission to build a permanent settlement, and the *Estado's* trade continued to take the form of the annual voyage, to which we get sporadic reference. Thus, we learn that the ship going to Bengal in 1526 was commanded by one Ruy Vaz Pereira.[32] In 1528 the expedition was led by Martim Affonso de Mello.[33]

The pot-pourri of elements that made up the entity of 'the Portuguese' in Bengal and the peculiar relationship between its various strands, the Crown, the *Estado da India*, and the private settler, are clearly encapsulated in the settlements of Hugli and Siriam. Taking Hugli first, it

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[32]Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 30; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade', *op.cit.*, p. 105.

[33]Campos, *ibid.*, p. 31.

is somewhat difficult to determine if it was an *Estado* settlement or a private Portuguese enclave.[34] At the time of its foundation in circa 1579-80, there was a very clear link with Goa and the city seemed to be an *Estado* settlement in the region. Pedro Tavares, the virtual founder of the settlement, was the captain of the annual voyage from Goa in 1579. After receiving the *farman* from Akbar, allowing the Portuguese to build a permanent settlement in Bengal, he immediately informed the Viceroy at Goa of the new developments and maintained a tangible contact with the *Estado*. In the course of its growth, however Hugli's link with the *Estado* seems to have weakened as it came to be peopled with elements who had left the "official" fold. Thus

> The fame of the new settlement spread rapidly, during the first monsoon, over a large part of India, and many Christians, both Portuguese and native, came thither. But these people were generally indigent, most of the Portuguese being highway robbers and men of loose lives.
>
> The city continued to be filled by such folk. The Captain assisted everyone; to some he gave gifts of money, to some he made loans, while he stood security for others. All started trading and soon raised Ugulim to the position of one of the richest towns in the

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[34]Hence the divergent opinions in the historiography. Campos treats it as an *Estado* settlement, *op.cit.*, passim; Sanjay Subrahmanyam views it as private in nature, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade', *op.cit.*, passim.

East.[35]

By 1632, even the *Estado* seems to have accepted the fact that the flourishing settlement of Hugli lay outside its fold. Thus, in 1632, before reaching the decision to attack Hugli, Shah Jahan ordered Asaf Khan to write to the Portuguese Viceroy at Goa to send a force to punish the inhabitants of Hugli for disturbing the peace of the area.

> But the Viceroys were unable to use any coercion, since these people did not live in territory under their jurisdiction. The Viceroy, on getting the letter, therefore, replied that as those Portuguese were men who had retired from his king's service and had gone to live in a foreign country he had no further concern with them.[36]

In Father Cabral's description of Hugli, too, the settlement was independent of the *Estado*. It was not the Viceroy at Goa who appointed the governor and administration for the city; there was "a Captain Convidor and four Assistants yearly elected *by the citizens*." (emphasis added).[37] Another reference in Cabral's letter seems to fit in with our hypothesis that the settlements in

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[35]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 41.

[36]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 316.

[37]Fr. John Cabral, 'The Fall of Hugli', in Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 393.

Bengal sought independence from Goa, but pledged allegiance to Lisbon. Thus, Cabral himself describes the citizenry of Hugli as representatives of the Crown in the region...." *His Majesty had there* a Captain Convidor and four Assistants yearly elected by the citizens", (emphasis added)[38] perhaps a reflection of the settlers' projection of their own image.

Nevertheless, in the perception of at least some contemporaries, the link between the *Estado da India* and Hugli was not broken. Shah Jahan obviously viewed the inhabitants at Hugli as Goa's men when he ordered Asaf Khan to write to the Viceroy and ask him to curb the excesses of the behaviour of the Portuguese settled there. The Arakan raja too "meant to render a service *to the Viceroy of India* and thus bring about negotiations for peace and amity which he desired at any cost", (emphasis added), when he sent a force to assist the Portuguese beseiged by the Mughal forces at Hugli in 1632.[39] The *Estado's* own concern with Hugli did continue to remain, though it was of an indirect kind. This is clearly seen in the Viceroy's letter to the King, written on February 3, 1633, expressing his concern over the loss of Hugli and the way it could affect the *Estado*. He hoped to reopen the port "so that Malacca should not be wanting what used to come from Bengala which is what

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[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

had been to me the greatest source of anxiety."[40]

Hugli can be lOCated, therefore, in the twilight zone between the "official" and the "unofficial" aspects of the Portuguese presence in Bengal. It was for all practical purposes an independent settlement, its association with the *Estado* at the time of its foundation, however, never quite having worn off.

In the settlement of Siriam, on the other hand, we meet with almost the opposite situation. Siriam was very clearly an independent kingdom, the creation of the Portuguese adventurer, Felippe de Brito, who was granted permission to build a fortress here by the King of Arakan in circa 1599. The settlement of Siriam grew to be quite a major one in the region.

> Felippe de Brito made the most of his opportunities. He began by erecting that year, 1599, a stockade of wood, and before the end of the year 1602 he had completed the building of a stone fortress, well equipped with guns and munitions and very favourably situated for defensive purposes. At the same time he laid out a town and built houses for the people of the Kingdom of Pegu, who began to come from divers parts to live in peace and security under his rule. In October, 1603, the town contained fourteen or fifteen thousand inhabitants all engaged in cultivating the

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[40]Quoted in Sushil Chaudhury, 'The Rise and Decline of Hugli', *op.cit.*, p. 47.

> land. Their numbers are increasing and there is good hope that the town will become a populous city....[41]

The settlement also seems to have been a power to be reckoned with in the region. Thus, "seeing the rapid growth of the fortress and city of Siriam, the King of Arracam began to be alarmed at the power which Felippe de Brito was acquiring."[42]

Felippe de Brito, in the meantime

> was procuring from Bengala munitions and other supplies for his fortress... [and] sent ambassadors to the neighbouring kings to make treaties of peace and friendship with them, and to dissuade them from alliances with the King of Arracam, the common enemy of all.[43]

Some rulers, like the "King of Syam", however, saw no reason to ally with him and took the point of view that

> he was nothing more than the King of Arracam's slave, while the dispatch of an ambassador in his company was

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[41]Guerreiro, *op.cit.*, pp. 194-195.

[42]*Ibid.*, p. 195.

[43]*Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

out of the question since the State of India did not recognize him.

Felippe de Brito, therefore, ultimately sought legitimacy for his little kingdom through association with the Estado da India.

> ....Felippe de Brito went to India, to make over the fortress and the Kingdom of Pegu to the State and to tender his submission and devotion to His Majesty .... He returned from Goa in the month of Decmber, 1602, having been very honourably dispatched by the Viceroy, bringing with him sixteen rowing vessels manned by three hundred Portuguese.[44]

In Hugli and Siriam we have encaptured the essence of the nature of the Portuguese presence in Bengal. The line between the "official" and the "unofficial" was always a blurred one. On the whole the settlements in the region led a rather independent existence, some more independent than others. Some kind of a link between the *Estado da India* and these settlements was usually maintained, in some cases more tangible than in others. In the case of Siriam, the link was fairly clear; in others like Dianga or Sandwip island it was not apparent at all. In most cases this link was provided by the Christian missionary in the field. The position of the Church in this whole setup forms the theme

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[44] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

of the next chapter; in this one we have yet to trace the various Portuguese settlements in our region.

It does seem, however, that in the race between the *Estado da India* and private Portuguese elements to establish themselves in Bengal, the latter appeared to be gaining an edge by the end of the 16th century. Hugli perhaps represented the transitionary phase. However, more than the *Estado* losing out in the competition, it appears that it conciously backed out of the region. We have an indication of this in a letter from the King of Portugal to the Viceroy at Goa dated 12 January, 1591.[45] According to this letter.

> The King [of Arakan] is making offers [permitting the Portuguese] to build fortresses in his country. Because new fortresses when they are not quite necessary are useless and quite inconvenient to this State in which it behoves to have more garrisons to increase and preserve, than extra forts to guard and thus divert the forces of the same State, I do not consider it proper that the offers of this King should be accepted and it will be enough to maintain with him good friendship.

Perhaps this is an early rendering of a sentiment that was more commonly expressed from the mid-17th century onwards. In trying to analyse the causes for the drastic

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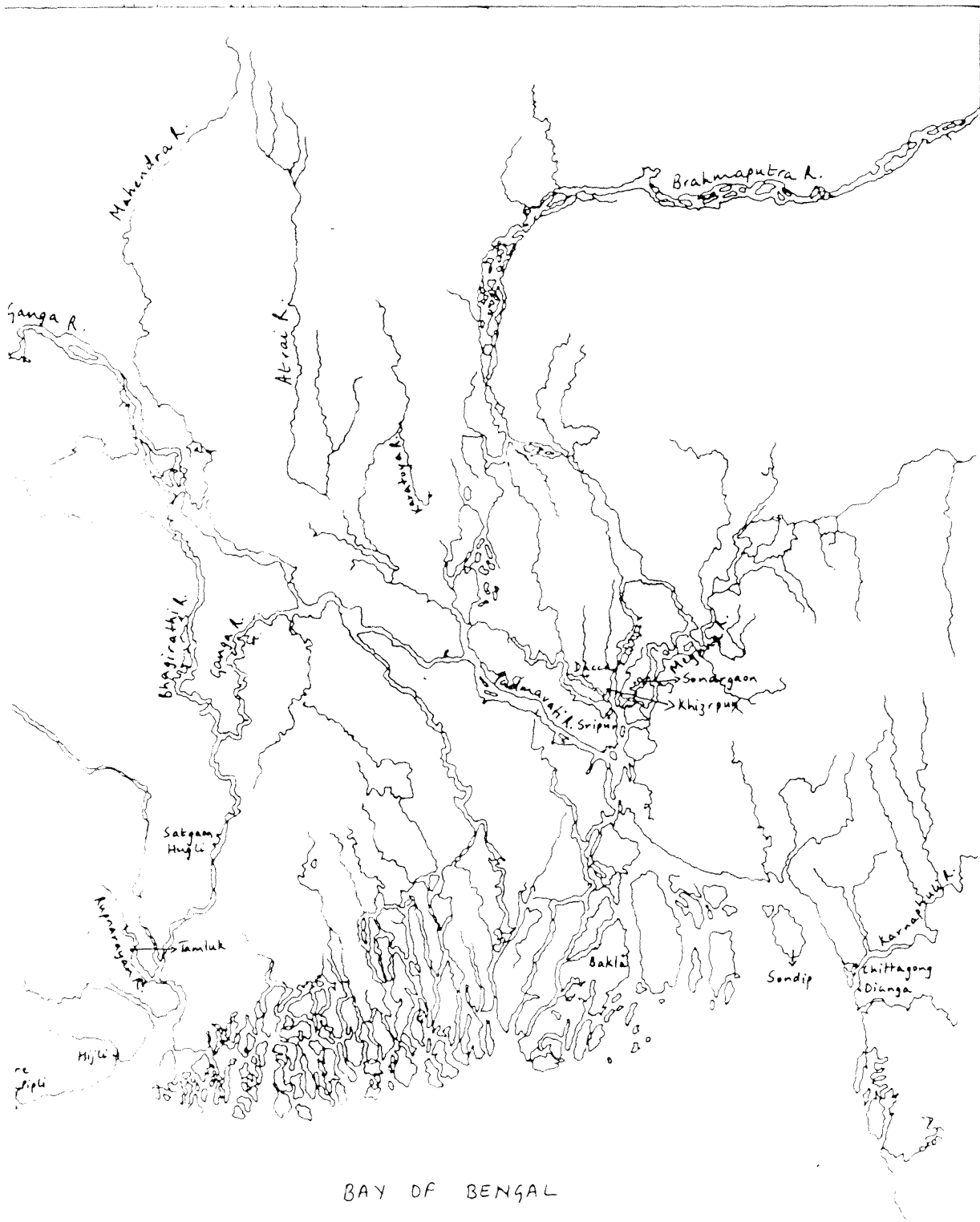
[45]Reproduced in Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

MAP 2

PORTUGUESE SETTLEMENTS IN BENGAL, SIXTEENTH & SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES



decline of the Portuguese Asian empire after 1640, the opinion was often put forth that Portugal had overtaxed her strength in Asia by trying to control more territory than her own meagre resources and population could support. Thus, Captain Joao Ribero wrote in 1685 after serving for 18 years in Ceylon (1640-58)-

> From the Cape of Good Hope to Japan we were unwilling to leave anything outside of our control. We were anxious to lay hands on everything in that huge stretch of over 5,000 leagues from Sofala to Japan. And what was worse we set about this without calculating our strength or realizing that this conquest could not last forever, even if we only had the natives to fight against.[46]

Or perhaps this policy of the Portuguese state was linked to the conquest of Portugal by Spain in 1580 and the general neglect and subordination of Portuguese world-wide interests during the period of the 'Sixty Years Captivity' (1580-1640).[47]

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II. The Locale of Operation: Enclaves of Settlement

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[46]Quoted in C:R.Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century*, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

[47]Guerreiro, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

The Portuguese had numerous settlements in 16th and 17th century Bengal, which were sprinkled over the entire coastal strip and riverine tracts. In several cases, they were enclaves grafted onto the flourishing commercial centres already in existence - i.e., most of the port-towns in our region had a Portuguese section. In other cases, they were settlements that were founded anew in the area by the Portuguese. In either case, they represented the first proto-colonial European towns in the region.

Permission to settle in Bengal was first granted to the Portuguese in 1536-37, when Mahmud Shah, the Sultan of Bengal, allowed them to build factories at Chittagong and Satgaon. Till then they traded in temporary settlements, which they built anew at the beginning of every trading season.

> Every yeere at Buttor they make an unmake a village, with houses and shoppes made of strawe, and with all things necessarie to their uses, and this village standeth as long as the ships ride there, and till they depart from the Indies, and when they are departed, every man goeth to his plot of houses, and there setteth fire on them, which thing made me marvaile. For as I passed up to Satagan, I saw this village standing with a great number of people, with an infinite number of ships and *Bazars*, and at my return coming downe with my captaine of the last ship, for whom I tarried I was al amazed to see such a place so soone razed and burnt and nothing left but the

signe of the burnt houses.[48]

The premier settlement of the Portuguese in Bengal was at Hugli. We have detailed description of its foundation by Manrique. After giving us a long list of the goods imported by the Portuguese into Bengal (of which more later), he tells us that

> All these drugs and goods the more valuable particularly, are taken by the sodagores or merchants of the country to the Court of Agra, where the Padcha generally resides. Now some of these things were brought before him, and hearing that the Portuguese exported them to Ugulim, and learning also through other reports of their arrival at that port, he gave orders that a formon or mandate should be sent to the Nababo of Daack [in whose jurisdiction Bengal lay] requiring him to send two of the leading Portuguese from the country of Satagan, making all arrangements for their comfort and entertainment.[49]

By the time the order reached the Nawab of Dacca and he sent a noble to get in touch with the Portuguese, they had already left, "some for Malacca, some for China, and others for India".[50] They had to, therefore, wait till the

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[48]Samuel Purchas, 'Extracts of Master Caesar Frederike his eighteene years Indian Observations' in *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrims Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and others*, 20 Vols, Glasgow, 1905, Vol. X, pp. 113-114.

[49]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 31-32.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 33.

next year for their fresh arrival in Bengal. The expedition to the court at Agra was then led by Captain Tavares, the captain and owner of the first ship to arrive from Goa that year, "a respectable man well-versed in politics and affairs of state"[51] Against the two Portuguese representatives that Akbar had sent for, for the embassy Tavares chose "three Portuguese and a large retinue of servants, all striking for their fine looks and the magnificence and ostentation of their appointments."[52]

> When all were ready they embarked, taking two months to ascend the Ganges, and reach the City of Patana, where they landed and made their way to the city and court of Agra. The Padcha received them with great honour and kindness, and, after several talks with Captain Tavares, the Emperor took a great liking to him, and Tavares, much gratified, gave him his word that he would come and settle at Ugulim, and bring other Portuguese with him. His Majesty was satisfied and accepted his promise, presenting him with many rich and valuable gifts which they call seripaos [from Hindi *sar-e-pao*, through Persian, used to mean robes of honour]. He also ordered him to be given formones or letters allowing him to build the City wherever he liked, and gave him a grant for the adjoining lands. The Nabab and the above-mentioned seguidars [shiqdars = revenue collectors] were also instructed to supply the Portuguese with all materials necessary for the construction of their houses. The same formones also granted leave to the Brethren to build Churches and

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[51] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Monasteries, and to baptize without hindrance all the heathen who desired to follow the Anzil, that is, the Gospel and the Christian faith. Provided with these favourable documents, Captain Tavares departed.

On reaching Ugulim with these great honours and recommendations from the Emperor, the natives almost worshipped him. Tavares took possession of the site which seemed most suitable, and as soon as the monsoon broke, he sent his ship to Goa with letters to the Viceroy and to the Bishop of Cochin, then the Very Illustrious Lord Don Fray Andres, of the Order of Minorities, to whose jurisdiction the Kingdom of Bengal belonged at the time. The Viceroy then requested him to choose Brethren as Missionaries for those lands, and, after considering to what Order this Mission should be entrusted, he decided on mature reflection to assign it to the Order of my glorious Father Saint Augustin.[53]

This was the origin and foundation fo the city of Hugli, the most important of the Portuguese setltements in Bengal. Manrique does not give any date for the foundation of the city. However, in the *Akbarnama,* under the account of the 23rd regnal year (1579), there is reference to

Partab Tar Feringi, who is one of the officials of the merchants of the ports of Bengal, [who] had the bliss of an audience [with the Emperor]. He and his wife Nashurna were from their happy star amazed at the laudable qualities of the sovereign and from their good sense and propriety of conduct they found favour

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-38.

in the testing eyes of the world-lord.[54]

This Partab Tar should have been Pedro Tavares. In the events recorded for the twenty-fifth regnal year (1581), there is reference to "Partab Bar Feringi," the Portuguese governor of Hugli.[55] Thus, the settlement seems to have been founded at some time between 1579 and 1581.

The foundation of the new settlement at Hugli seems to have been linked to the decline of the port of Satgaon. Satgaon was located on the river Saraswati, through which the main current of the Hugli flowed till the middle of the 16th century. This channel began to silt up around this time, so that with the Saraswati drying up, Satgaon became inaccessible to ships. The Saraswati seems to have begun silting up from the beginning of the 16th century itself for as early as 1532 De Barros found Satgaon "not.... so convenient for the entrance and departure of ships."[56] In 1565, at the time when Caesar Frederike visited Bengal the larger ships had stopped going to the port and anchored downstream at the site of Betor.

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[54]Abu 'l Fazl, *Akbar Nama*, translated by H. Beveridge, 3 Vols, New Delhi, 1979, reprint, (1939), Vol. III, pp. 349-350.

[55]*Ibid.*, p. 469.

[56]Quoted in Sushil Chaudhury, 'The Rise and Decline of Hugli', *ibid.*, p. 35.

> A good tides rowing before you come to Satagan, you shall have a place which is called Buttor, and from thence upwards the ships doe not goe, because that upwards the river is very shallowe and little water.... The small ships go to Satagan and there they lade.[57]

By 1565, therefore, the trading settlement established at Satgaon was no longer very useful. Manrique does not even seem to know of the earlier settlement at Satgaon and refers only to the Portuguese trading in temporary settlements. He tells us that before the foundation of Hugli

> ....some Portuguese traders.....came from various parts of India with their vessels laden, not only to sell the goods they brought, but also to buy and ship the products of that country. With this project they landed their merchandise and had large golas or store-houses erected, which were divided into chambers by screens made of a kind of strong cane which is found in many parts of India, called by the natives bambus. In these, which they thatched with straw, they kept their goods and wintered five or six months until the return of the season favourable for the homeward voyage. This season is in these parts called the steadfast monsoon, and until it arrives they continue buying and selling and generally carry on their business. When the time of which I spoke arrived they left.[58]

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[57]Caesar Frederike, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-114.

[58]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 27-28.

Before they founded the city of Hugli, therefore, the *Estado* was looking for an opportunity once again to build a more permanent trading settlement along the navigable tract of the river.

The foundation of the city of Hugli seems to have hastened the process of Satgaon's decline. Abdul Hamid Lahori, the official chronicler of Shah Jahan's reign blames the Portuguese for robbing Satgaon of its trade.

> Under the rule of the Bengalis, a party of Frank merchants, who are inhabitants of Sundip, came trading to Satgan. One kos above (sic) that place, they occupied some ground on the bank of the estuary... In due course a considerable place grew up, which was known by the name of the port of Hugli... European ships used to go to the port, and a trade was established there. The markets of Satgan declined and lost their prosperity.[59]

The trade of Satgaon, quite naturally, must have got diverted to the new and more accessible settlement of Hugli. The merchants established at Satgaon must also have moved with the trade. Hugli's population, in any case, consisted of immigrants from far and wide. Manrique tells us that

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[59]Abul'l Hamid Lahori, *Badshahnama*, extracts translated by H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as told by its Own Historians*, Vol. VII, reprint, Delhi, 1964, p. 31.

> The fame of the new settlement spread rapidly, during the first monsoon, over a large part of India, and many Christians, both Portuguese and native came thither.[60]

In 1632, at the time of Shah Jahan's seige of Hugli, its inhabitants included, "in addition to the Portuguese, who were generally well to do... twelve or thirteen [natives] in possession of large capital."[61]

In the case of most of the settlements of the Portuguese in Bengal, we are not able to determine the date of their foundation. Their names just spring up in the sources, in a manner probably similar to the settlements themselves. The gathering together of a few Portuguese individuals in a particular area and their settling down there probably gave rise to a settlement. They were not formally sanctioned through *farmans* from the indigenous polity in the way Satgaon, Chittagong and Hugli were. From this itself we can judge that they were different from these settlements associated with the *Estado*. Father Guerreiro gives a good estimate of what most of the Portuguese settlements in the "Ports of Bengala" were all about -

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[60]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 41.

[61]Fr. John Cabral, S.J., Letter dated Ceylon, November 12, 1633, 'The Fall of Hugli', translated by H. Hosten, S.J. Manrique, *op.cit.* Vol. II, Appendix, p. 397.

> More than two thousand five hundred persons, pure Portuguese and half-castes (mesticos),... are living in these ports as outlaws or refugees, serving various Gentile and Moorish Kings.[62]

Sandwip island was among the earliest Portuguese enclaves in Bengal, apparently dating to the period before Akbar's conguest of the region. Abdul Hamid Lahori tells us that "under the rule of the Bengalis a party of Frank Merchants, who are inhabitants of Sandwip came trading to Satganw...."[63] Sandwip, which was visited by Ceasar Frederike in c.1563, is described by him as "the fertilest Iland in all the world" where "all...things for humaine sustenance were... in such abundance, that it is a thing incredible but to them that have seen it."[64] It apparently "belonged to the Kingdome of Bengala" and was ruled by "a very good man of a Moore King" in Frederike's time.[65]

Sandwip was made subordinate to the Portuguese settlement of Chittagong around 1590 by one Antonio de Souza Godinho.[66] Father du Jarric gives us a description of the first actual capture of the island and the establishment of a powerful kingdom there in 1602.[67] Domingo

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[62]Guerreiro, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

[63]*Badshahnama, op.cit.*, p. 31.

[64]Caesar Frederike, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

[65]*Ibid.*

[66]Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 67.

[67]Reproduced in Campos, *op.cit.*, pp. 67-73.

Carvalho, the hero of this story, ruled Sandwip for about a year with a large and powerful fleet that defeated both the Raja of Arakan and the Mughal force stationed outside Hugli. The Raja of Arakan succeeded in forcing Carvalho and his Portuguese followers to abandon Sandwip in 1603. According to du Jarric and Faria y Sousa,[68] the island was then occupied by Manoel de Mattos, the governor of the Portuguese settlement at Dianga. Father Guerreiro, however, tells us that Sandwip was captured by the Arakan King in March 1603.[69] In any case, Carvalho and his band of Portuguese supporters seem to have been powerful enough for the Raja of Arakan to continue feeling insecure as long as Carvolho was alive.[70] It seems that Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore had Carvalho treacherously murdered in 1605, while seeking the friendship of the Raja of Arakan,[71] which is once again testimony to the important position the Portuguese of Sandwip had carved out for themselves in the politics of the region.

Sometime after 1605 Sandwip was captured by Fateh Khan, a Muslim in the employ of the Portuguese. He massacred a number of the Portuguese on the island and then turned his attention towards capturing the other islands in the vicinity from the small bands of Portuguese adventures

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[68]Cited in *ibid.*, p. 82.

[69]Guerreiro, *op.cit.*, p. 211.

[70]Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

[71]*Ibid.*

inhabiting them. The Portuguese, however, emerged victorious in the contest and then banded together under one Sebastião Gonsalves Tibau, to recapture the island of Sandwip. They were helped in this effort by the Raja of Bakla, who was friendly towards them, and another adventurer, Gaspar de Pina, from Hijli. The King of Bakla was promised half the revenue of the trade from Sandwip in return for his help.[72]

Gonsalves' kingdon, based on Sandwip island, extended to the Arakan coast.[73] It was obviously a powerful kingdom; Faria y Sousa testifies that it has a 1000 Portuguese, 2000 well armed soldiers, 200 horses, 80 ships with cannon and much trade with the neighbouring coasts of Bengal and Tenasserim, as well as as far as the Coromandel.[74] Gonsalves was also sought out as an ally by neighbouring kingdoms - the king of Bakla's relationship with him went back a long way, while the Arakanese ruler entered into an offensive alliance with him to attack the Mughal territory of Bengal in 1610.[75]

By 1615 Gonsalves' ambition had extended over the whole of the Kingdom of Arakan. Realising that he was now aiming to bite off more than he alone could chew, he sought

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[72] *Ibid.*,pp. 82-83.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[74] Cited in *op.cit.*, p. 84.

[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

the help of the *Estado da India*. He did not however, submit to Goa; in keeping with the style of Portuguese adventurers in the region he pledged allegiance to the Portuguese King at Lisbon and promised to pay him an annual tribute if his representative, the Viceroy of Goa, agreed to help him.[76] While the scheme never succeeded, what is important to note is that Gonsalves, by pledging allegiance to Lisbon, seemed to treat the Goa authority as his equal.

Du Jarric's description of the Portuguese settlement on Sandwip island simultaneously sheds light on the existence of settlements at Dianga, Caranja, Sripur, Bakla and Chandecan. The settlement of Dianga, on the left bank of the Karnaphuli river, already existed in 1599, from where Father Fernandes wrote a letter dated December 22, 1599, in which he called it a 'ville' (town) in the port of Chittagong.[77] Du Jarric makes reference to it in 1602, when it was governed by one Manoel de Mattos.[78] It seems to have been a popular and powerful settlement as de Mattos was able to furnish 400 men to help Domingo Carvalho in the capture of Sandwip island in 1602.[79] In 1607, du Jarric estimates that there were some 600 Portuguese at Dianga. The settlement was massacred by the King of Arakan in that year as he seemed to begin to fear the increasing number of

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[76] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[77] Cited in *ibid.*, p. 77.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

[79] *Ibid.*

settlements of the Portuguese in his kingdom and their growing power there.[80] However it appears that the Portuguese were back in Diamga in 1615.[81]

In 1628-29, when Manrique visited Bengal, Dianga was a flourishing Portuguese settlement and the Augustinians had a Church and a Residency there.[82]

Father Hosten tells us, using evidence from Father P.N. Pimenta's annual report of 1600, that the Portuguese had a Bandel (i.e., a settlement, the coruption of the Persian word "Bandar' meaning 'wharf') at Sripur.[83] That Sripur was a flourishing port of Bengal in the late 16th century has already been taken note of. According to the evidence of Father du Jarric, in 1603, when the Portuguese under Domingo Carvalho abandoned Sandwip island in the wake of repeated attacks by the King of Arakan, they moved to Sripur, Bakla, and Chandecan.[84] When the settlemnt was founded we do not know, but there certainly were Portuguese merchants at Sripur in 1586, when Ralph Fitch sailed from there to Pegu in a small ship of a Portuguese named Alberto

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[80] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 78,

[82] Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 84.

[83] Hosten's comment in *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 51, note.

[84] Campos, *op.cit.*, pp. 71-72.

Carauallos.[85]

Similarly, Bakla and Chandecan were also Portuguese settlements in this period. Bakla was ruled by one of the Bara Bhuyas of Bengal, who was friendly with the Portuguese. In 1559 he had given them special trading provileges at his port of Bakla. In 1610 he aided Sebastião Gonsalves to capture Sandwip island. Chandecan, which is variously situated by the different authorities of our period, had a Jesuit residency in 1603.[86]

There were Portuguese settlers at Dacca, another major port of the region, as well. We have reference to churches being built *by the earliest brethren* of the Augustians at Dacca, Sripur and Noricul in Manrique.[87] The Augustinians came to Bengal in the 1580's, soon after the foundation of the settlement at Hugli. Their first churches must have been built at sites where there was already a sizeable Portuguese Christian community at this time. In Manrique's time the settlement at Dacca was an important one, and its Captain was named Miguel Rodriguez who was a native of the city of Hugli. It was partly due to Rodriguez's refusal to help Prince Shah Jahan in his revolt against the Emperor Jahangir that Shah Jahan decided to

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[85]J. Horton Ryley, *Ralph Fitch, England's Pioneer to India, His Companions and Contemporaries, With his remarkable narrative told in his own words*, London, 1899, p. 153.

[86]See the discussion in Payne, *Jahangir and Jesuits, op.cit.*, p. 257, note 13.

[87]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 43, 45-46.

evict the Portuguese from Hugli in 1632.[88]

The settlement at Noricul was in existence even in 1665, when Shihabuddin Talish described it as "the port of Ladhikol which is near Dacca and where Feringi merchants, engaged in the salt trade live."[89]

In 1586 Ralph Fitch makes mention of "Sinnergan" (Sonargaon), which was within the Kingdom of Isa Khan who was "the chief King of all these countries... and ... a great friend to all Christians."[90] There were Portuguese and mestiços settled in the domain of the friendly Isa Khan, at the important ports of Sonargaon and 'Catrabo' (near Khizrpur, on the river Lakhya).

On the Orissa coast the Portuguese had settlements at Pipli, Banja, Hijli, Tamluk and Balasore. Manrique refers to the erection of an Augustinian Church and Residency "in the city of Piple, a port already popular with the various peoples of India owing to its great trade and commerce", in circa 1600.[91] Manrique also refers to Fernando Lopes Pereira, Captain of the port of Pipli, "who had been appointed by the Nababo [of Cuttack]," [92] who was obviously

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[88]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 310.

[89]Shihabuddin Talish, *Fathiyya-i ibriyya*, extracts translated by Jadu Nath Sarkar, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (henceforth *J.A.S.B.*), Vol. II, New Series, No. 6, June 1907, p. 407.

[90]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch*, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

[91]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 43.

[92]*Ibid.*, Vol.I, p. 443.

in the service of the Mughals. According to Hunter, the Portuguese settlement at Pipli dated to 1514 and it was their earliest settlement on the Bay of Bengal.[93]

The Augustinian Brethren also built a church "in the Bandel or Village of Banja, where a large concourse of merchants was wont to assemble to deal in sugar, wax, and ginghams which ... are cloths woven half of grass and half of silk, a very hight stuff, cool to wear in the hot season" in 1600, along with the church at Pipli.[94]

In the same year a church was also built at Hijli, whose king is described by Ralph Fitch as "a great friend to strangers."[95] Wiliam Hedges mentions in his *Diary* that the Portuguese were ousted from Hijli by the Mughals in 1636, and in 1724 Valentyn refers to Hijli as a *former* Portuguese settlement.

The Portuguese also had a settlement at Tamluk, situated on the southern bank of the Rupnarayan. A church was built here in 1635 through Manrique's influence.[96] Shihabuddin Talish refers to the settlement at Tamluk in 1665, when its Captain was asked by Shaista Khan to write to the Portuguses pirates of Chittangong, asking them to

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[93]Cited in Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

[94]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 42.

[95]Ryley, *Ralph Fitch*, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

[96]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 436.

submit to the Mughals.[97] As late as 1724 Valentyn remarks, "Tamboli and Banzia (Banja) are two villages where the Portuguese have their Church and their southern trade. There is much dealing in wax here."[98]

There was also a small settlement at Balasore where there was a Church, no remains of which, however, remain.[99]

On the Arakan side, the major settlements of the Portuguese were at Chittagong and Dianga. While travelling in the Kingdom of Arakan between 1629 and 1637, Manrique came across several other settlements. Thus he refers to "the Portuguese and Bengali residents of Sacassala, most of whom were serving on board the Portuguese Gelias."[100] "Sacassala" was probably located between Ramu and Chitagong.[101] three miles south of Dianga Manrique also visited the "Bandel or town of Angaracale, where we have another Church and Residence."[102] He also refers to the Christian residents of the town of Arakan, or Mrauk-u, who felt affinity for the Portuguese of Dianga and thus sent them a message, warning them of an impending attack by the King of Arakan, and to "the commandant of the Portuguese

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[97]*Fathiya, op.cit.*, p. 408.

[98]Quoted in Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

[99]Campos, *ibid.*, p. 99.

[100]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 89.

[101]*Ibid.*, p. 89, f.n.

[102]*Ibid.*, p. 86.

and other Christians of Arracan", named Manuel Rodriquez Tigre.[103] On the border between the Kingdom of Arakan and the neighbouring Kingdom of Pegu was the settlement of Siriam.

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III From Toe-hold to Stronghold

The story of the slow inroads made by the Portuguese into the region of Bengal is a complex one. First of all, we have to capture the *simultaneous* growth of the presence of the *Estado da India* and Portuguese individuals operating in their private capacity in the region. What we call "the growth of their presence" is reflected most obviously in the steadily more frequent reference to them in our sources of the period. It can be measured by more than one gauge - by their greater participation in the commerce of the region, by the increasing piratical menace created in the area by them, by the greater incidence of slave raids conducted under their aegis. All this is an integral part of our story of the history of the Portuguese in Bengal.

For our present purpose, however, what is really noteworthy in this whole process of the growth of the

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[103] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Portuguese presence in Bengal (and I use the term 'Portuguese' to include all categories of Portuguese in the region) is that it was a steady growth in their stature on the political front. One of our basic contentions is that the Portuguese had an important enough presence in 16th and 17th century Bengal to deserve to be the subject of a whole story. This section, therefore, concentrates on illustrating how, throughout the period of their presence in the region, both the *Estado da India* as well as the private Portuguese, settlers formed a significant power centre to be reckoned with.[104] Putting it somewhat differently, in the context of the political uncertainty that enveloped our region in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Portuguese were, in their own perception, as well as in that of the other political players in Bengal, a not altogether minor contestant in the regional power structure.

As early as 1521, we have evidence of an appreciation of the armed strength of the Portuguese by political elements in Bengal. One of the nobles of the court at Gaur advised the Sultan to grant to the Portuguese embassy the concessions it sought because

[104]C.R. Boxer expresses the opinion that the Viceroy of Goa was regarded as a fellow-potentate by several important Asian rulers, C.R. Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century*, Delhi, 1980, p. 1; it is our contention that in 16th and early 17th century Bengal, the power of the more numerous Portuguese *individuals* in the region was as respected.

> Your Highness well knows that the Portuguese are so powerful here that nothing stands in their way. It would only need for the smallest of their ships to position itself at the harbour bar of Chittagong or Satgaon and no other ship would be able to leave or enter. If this were to happen, if the traders no longer sold the country's goods, if foreigners were no longer able to enter the country, the Governors would find it hard to pay the allowances which are incumbent upon them.... It therefore seems to me that Your Highness should offer them the peace and friendship they have come to seek. The benefit from this will outweigh any harm it might cause and that is all one can expect.[105]

As early as 1528, we have evidence of an understanding by the indigenous polities that the Portuguese could be useful allies in any power struggle between them. Thus, in 1528 Martim Affonso de Mello was approached by Khuda Baksh Khan, a vassal of Sultan Mohammed Shah of Bengal, for military help in an ongoing feud with a neighbouring chief. De Mello's Portuguese fought for Khuda Baksh Khan and won the victory for him.[106] This is the first instance that we have of the Portuguese actively participating in the power politics of the area.

Thereafter, the Portuguese became a more frequent participant in the political scenario of Bengal and figured

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[105]Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage dans...*, op.cit., p. 333.

[106]Campos, *op.cit.*, pp. 31-32.

often in disputes at various levels. In 1533 we have reference to a very rich and influential Persian merchant of Bengal, Khajeh Shihabuddin asking Goa to send an expedition to help him to free himself from some trouble that he had got into with the Sultan of Bengal and to escape in a Portuguese ship to Ormuz. In return the merchant promised to use his influence with the king to secure for the Portuguese extensive trade facilities and permission to build a fort at Chittagong.[107]

This expedition, in 1533, was led once again by Martin Affonso de Mello. It ended disastrously, however as the king of Bengal recognised among the gifts presented to him some goods which had been stolen by a Portuguese pirate from a Moorish vessel, and as a result, threw the Portuguese into prison.[108]

Till this phase the participation of the Portuguese in the power politics of the area had been in the limited capacity of allies of a particular indigenous party in a dispute at the local level. In 1534 there was a qualitative shift in the nature of their participation when, for the first time, they used their military power for the redressal of a personal political grievance. Thus, the Governor of Goa, Nuno da Cunha, sent a fleet of nine ships manned by some three hundred and fifty Portuguese to

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[107] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[108] *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

Chittagong in 1534 under the command of Antonio da Silva Menezes to set the prisoners of the 1533 expedition free. When the Sultan did not comply, Menezes set fire to a large part of Chittagong.[109] The agents of the *Estado da India* had, thus, joined the realm of local politics in Bengal as participants with a personal stake in the field.

In 1535, the representatives of the *Estado da India* were catapulted into the realm of regional politics in Bengal. Sultan Mahmud Shah, under threat of attack from Sher Shah, appealed to the Portuguese Governor of Goa, Nuno da Cunha, to send help. In return, the Sultan promised them land to build factories at Chittagong and Satgaon, and permission to fortify them. Recognizing this as the opportunity to secure the permanent settlements in the region that the *Estado* had long been looking for, Nuno da Cunha immediately despatched an expedition consisting of nine ships to Bengal.[110]

Some Portuguese adventurers in Bengal, in the meantime also understood the potential of the situation and jumped into the fray. The force from Goa needed time to reach Bengal, while the urgency of the Sultan's need was only increasing. Two Portuguese individuals on the spot, João de Villalobos and João Correa, gathered two ships full of

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[109] *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

Portuguese troops and led them to defend the passes of Teliagarhi and Sikligali, which were considered to be the gateways of Bengal, through which Sher Shah was planning to enter.[111] It is important to note that even Portuguese individuals in Bengal were by this time powerful enough to offer to intervene in a power struggle at the regional level. Though they were unsuccessful in their attempt, their services were acknowledged and rewarded by Mahmud Shah, and João Correa was given control over the custom-house at Satgaon.[112]

The *Estado's* attempt to help did not go unrewarded either. Factories were built, as promised, at Chittagong and Satgaon, though permission to fortify them was withdrawn. The *fidalgo*, Nuno Fernandez Freire, was also made chief of the custom-house of Chittagong. In addition, he was granted land with many houses along with wide-ranging powers over the inhabitants, including that of realizing rent from them.[113]

The Portuguese historian, Castanheda, gives the account of an interesting episode of this time that captures very well the state of political flux that Bengal was in. Castanheda's narrative also illustrates how the

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[111] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[112] *Ibid.*, p. 39; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade', *op.cit.*, p. 106.

[113] Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

Portuguese were an important centre of power and were a major contender for control over key coastal settlements, like Chittagong. The fleet sent by Nuno da Cunha under the command of Vasco Peres de Sampayo ultimately reached Chittagong only after Sher Shah had conquered Bengal. In the meantime, a dispute arose between two generals of Mohammed Shah, Khuda Baksh Khan (Castanheda's Codovascao) and Amirza Khan (Amarzacao) over the possession of Chittagong. The Portuguese controller of the custom-house of Chittagong, Nuno Fernandez Freire, who weielded alot of influence in the area, took the side of Amirza Khan. In the meantime, Sher Shah, too, entered the dispute and his captain (Nogazil) captured the town. Seeing an opportunity for the Portuguese to make political gains in this state of great confusion and divided loyalties, Nuno Fernandez Freire advised Sampayo to conquer the town. Sampayo, however, for some reason did not comply. Meanwhile, the Nogazil, faced by an attack by Amirza Khan appealed to Nuno Fernandez Freire for help. The latter responded and used his influence over Amirza Khan's men to persuade them to lift the seige on the Nogazil's house.

A little later, however, Nuno Fernandez Freire himself captured and imprisoned the Nogazil along with 50 Portuguese sent by Sampayo, and became master of Chittagong. At this time, however, Raja Suleiman (of Arakan?) attacked Chittagong in a galleot of 60 armed Moors. Sampayo refused to send an additional force to help,

Nuno Fernandez Freire was badly wounded while conducting the defence and Chittagong was lost by the Portuguese. Castanheda himself concludes his narration of the episode with the observation that considering the fact that Sher Shah himself was preoccupied on the other side of Bengal, Chittagong could easily have been taken possession of by the King of Portugal, had it not been for the folly and indiscretion of Sampayo.[114]

By 1536-37, therefore, the Portuguese had made their presence felt in Bengal. The *Estado* had two settlements at Chittagong and Satgaon, and were a political power to be reckoned with in the region. Portuguese indivdiuals in the area were also among the important personages on the scene, who wielded anough military power to make a difference in a quarrel.

We have further testimony to the influential position held by the Goa-based Portuguese in Bengal in a treaty signed between the Raja of Bakla, Parmanand Rai, and Dom Constantino de Braganza, the Portuguese Viceroy at Goa, in 1559.[115] The subordinate position of the Raja in the treaty-alliance is obvious from the start. First of all, the representatives of the Raja travelled to Goa to sign the treaty with the Viceroy. In addition, the clauses of the

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[114]Related in *ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

[115]Jadu Nath Srkar, *The History of Bengal, Muslim Period, 1200-1757*, Patna, 1977, p. 358.

treaty clearly yielded greater benefit to the Portuguese. The Raja sought military help from the Portuguese in his wars with his neighbours, acknowledged the *Estado da India's* domination of the high seas, and gratefully accepted *cartazes* (licences) for four of his ships to visit Goa, Ormuz and Malacca ever year. In return, the Portuguese were given the right to trade at the port of Bakla, were to pay fixed customs duties there, were ensured a regular supply of all the products of the region at Bakla, and were to be paid an annual tribute of a fixed quantity of rice, butter, oil, tar, sugar and fine textiles by the Raja. Moreover, the Raja relinquished the right to conclude similar treaties with any "enemies" of the Portuguese, while the Portuguese were allowed to enter into similar arrangement with any of his neighbours.

We do not get any other references to the Portuguese in Bengal till 1579 which marked another gaint leap forward in the establishment of their power in the region. We thus pick up the thread of our story in the period of Akbar's conquest of Bengal. Manrique gives a detailed account of the building of the Portuguese settlement at Hugli following its sanction by a *farman* isued by Akbar in 1579. In the *Akbarnama*, under the account of the twenty-fifth regnal year (1581), there is reference to an attack on Mirza Nijat Khan, Akbar's *faujdar* at Satgaon, by Qatlu Khan Lohani, the Afghan chief of Orissa. Nijat Khan "made an unsuccessful fight in Selimabad and fled to the protection

of Partab Bar Feringi," the Portuguese governor of Hugli. Thus, already in 1581, the Portuguese settled at Hugli had come to be perceived as an important centre of power established in the area.[116]

By the time the Friar Manrique visited Bengal in 1628-29, Hugli was apparently a flourishing city and its Portuguese inhabitants a well-respected force on the political front. Thus, when Manrique's ship bound for Hugli was shipwrecked off the coast of Hijli, the ruler of that area reassured the wrecked party that he had no wish to break or violate the treaties made with the Portuguese of the city of Ugulim." [117] Obviously the Portuguese of Hugli had carved out a place for themselves in the region, which made neighbouring rulers enter into treaty alliances with them and respect their worth as treaty partners. Again, the Portuguese at Hugli appear to be quite a powerful entity when Manrique tells us that the authorities at Hijli would have extracted alot more out of his wrecked ship "if these Barbarians had not been dependent on the Portuguese at Ugulim, for all these Asiatic nations look mostly to their particular advantage only."[118]

We have further testimony to the power of the settlers at Hugli in the great deal of independence that they

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[116]*Akbarnama*, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 469.

[117]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 15.

[118]*Ibid.*, p. 23.

enjoyed from interference from the Mughal rulers of Bengal. Thus, Father Cabral writes -

> The supreme power of that country [around Hugli], as of all the other territories of Bengal, belonged to the Mogol King. But, content with receiving the revenues of the markets and of the customs, he abandoned the immediate government to the Portuguese themselves. In fact, they enjoyed absolute independence, so much so that even the King's magistrate had no footing in the town, nor did he even enter it, except with the goodwill and pleasure of the Portuguese. The very fleets of the Viceroy of Bengal, when they happened to seek shelter there, had to submit to certain formalities.[119]

The Mughal seige of Hugli in 1632 itself is testimony to the fact that the Portuguese were an important power in medieval Bengal. Their presence was important enough to prove irksome to the mighty Mughal empire and for it to send its forces to evict them from the region. Accounts of the offensive itself reveal the respect the Mughals had for the power of the Portuguese at Hugli. Father Cabral describes the Mughal Nawab of Bengal, who was in charge of the campaign, as hesitating and reluctant to launch the offensive -

> ... prompted by interested motives, and *fearing most*

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[119]Cabral, 'The Fall of Hugli', *op.cit.*, p. 393.

> *likely that the enterprise might prove a failure*, he ... went on postponing the matter as long as he could, until some favourable occasion should offer itself for carrying it out safely and with as little cost to himself as possible.(emphasis added)[120]

This favourable opportunity presented itself when Martin Affonso de Mello, a Portuguese resident of Hugli, proved traitor to the township and joined the imperial camp, encouraging the Nawab to attack the settlement.[121]

While this version of the story may bear the prejudice of one who was on the side of the Portuguese, the official history of Shah Jahan's reign, too, describes the seige as a campaign into which went a considerable amount of organization and planning. Karim Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, "set about making his preparations at the close of the cold season, in Sha'ban, 1240 A.H.."[122] His son, Allah Yar Khan, several nobles and trusted servants of the Nawab were sent with a large force "to effect the conquest of Hugli."[123] One set of nobles was ordered "to proceed in boats from Sripur to cut off the retreat of the Firingis."[124] In addition to this flotilla of five hundred battleships, a large infantry and cavalry force was utilized in the campaign. Father

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[120] *Ibid.*, p. 396.

[121] *Ibid.*, pp. 396-398.

[122] *Badshahnama, op.cit.*, p. 32.

[123] *Ibid.*

[124] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Cabral estimates its strength to be "150,000 men-at-arms and pioneers."[125]

Cabral's account gives a detailed description of the strong resistance put up by the Portuguese and the exemplary bravery displayed by them, so that the seige turned out to be a long-drawn out affair. The *Badshahnama* itself records that there were as many as seven thousand musketeers employed in the defence of Hugli, who inflicted considerable damage on the beseiging forces. Thus, "the royal army was engaged for three months and a half in the seige of *this strong place*." (emphasis added).[126]

The Mughal victory over Hugli in 1632 reads as one of the important military achievements of the time. If the Persian chronicles treat it as one of the great triumphs of Shah Jahan's reign, this only reflects the general strength and importance of the Portuguese in the region of Bengal in the 17th century.

1632 seems to have broken the back of the power of the Portuguese in Bengal. Their effete position in the 17th century should be understood in the context of the changed political scenario in the region. The first fifteen years of the 17th century had seen a gret deal of clearing up by the Mughals of the political jungle in Bengal. Most of the

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[125]Cabral, 'The Fall of Hugli', *op.cit.*, p. 398.

[126]*Badshahnama*, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-34.

local chieftains and powerful zamindars had been defeated and incorporated into the body politic of the mighty Mughal empire.[127] It has been our argument throughout that the Portuguese had managed to become a power centre in the region against a certain political background. When the political setting had a number of players, and the Portuguese were one among the several, their power was able to make a difference to the course of events. In the first quarter of the 17th century, with the extension of Mughal rule over the region and the disappearance of the numerous smaller polities, the Portuguese suddenly found themselves in an altered context where their political presence had to be measured in terms of the strength of the great Mughal empire. In the changed political terrain, now away from the jungle of numerous powers, out in the open field, facing a sole and mighty adversary, the power of the Portuguese was suddenly greatly diminished. As their premier settlement was wiped off the map with one swipe of the Mughal paw, the insecurity of their position stood out in sharp relief.

The Portuguese settled at Chittagong and other settlements in eastern Bengal and the upper Arakan region, however, continued to figure as an important element on the political scene. In alliance with the ruler of Arakan, they regularly ravaged large areas of the coastal and riverine tracts of Bengal. Their activities were menacing enough for the Mughal empire to unleash its wrath in their direction

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[127]See Ch.I, Section II.

once again, in 1666. As part of the general effort to pacify the eastern frontier of the empire, Shaista Khan was sent by Aurangzeb to conquer Chittagong in 1666. The Portuguese in the Chittagong area were perceived by the Mughal general as the strength of the Arakan king. They were wooed over to the Mughal side by Shaistan Khan and with their aid the campaign against the Arakan king ended successfully with the conquest of Chittagong in 1666.[128]

It is important to understand the basis of the phenomenon of the power of the Portuguese in medieval Bengal. In terms of numbers, the Portuguese in the region were not many. On the other hand, the contemporaries' peception of their power rested on their naval strength and capability. It was generally acknowledged among contemporaries that "the fleet of the Firingis" was superior to any other in the region. With a mere "four or five *galleasses* they would attack, and generally capture and destroy, fourteen or fifteen of the Mogol's galleys."[129]

But, the navy was in any case, not the strong point of the Mughals. The "Raja of the Mags," who sent naval expeditions to raid deltaic Bengal with alarming frequency, and who could furnish upto thirty thousand war-boats for these raids, was the premier naval power in the region. And

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[128]For an account of the conquest of Chittagong, see *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, *op.cit.*, pp. 405-417; and Bernier, *op.cit.*, pp. 179-182.

[129]Bernier, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

the Mag Raja himself admitted, "the fleet of the Firingis is more powerful than my own."[130]

In addition, the geographical setting in which the Portuguese were operating in Bengal provided a backdrop against which their maritime skills showed up particularly well. In the fine network of rivers, streams and rivulets that criss-crossed our entire region, naval power presupposed a familiarity with the riverine route. As the Mughal forces under Islam Khan trying to impose their control over Bengal soon realized, "as there were many streams and 'nalahs' (canals) on the way, very few men except the Mags and the Firingis were familiar with that route."[131] Therein lay their strength and advantage in the region, in addition to their naval power, that made the Portuguese in Bengal an eagerly sought-out ally and a formidable foe.

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[130]Shitab Khan (Mirza Nathan), *Baharistan-i Ghaybi*, translated by M.I. Borah, 2 Vols, Gauhati, 1936, Vol. I, p. 334.

[131]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 635.

CHAPTER III

BETWEEN GOD AND KING:
THE PADRE AS INTERMEDIARY

We have seen that the curious mix of elements that together made up the category of 'the Portuguese' in Bengal, can be divided, at one level, into the official agents of the *Estado da India* and the private elements, who generally maintained an independent existence. The private Portuguese settlers in our region seem to have insisted on distancing themselves from the *Estado* structure, while the *Estado*, itself, was keen to extend its yoke and influence over them. Towards the end of the 16th century, this tussle between the two seemed to be going the way of the private elements, especially in the context of the *Estado* realizing the inadvisability of over-stretching its resources beyond its capacity, and deliberately withdrawing from the region.

Another dimension to the whole conflict was provided, however, by the Christian missionary in the field. Treated as an arm of the state by the Crown and the *Estado*, and welcomed as a man of God by the individuals, the padre formed an intermediary of sorts between them. This chapter, therefore, seeks to further examine the makeup of 'the Portuguese' in medieval Bengal by placing the Church in this entire setup.

The Church was an essential part of Portugal's seaborne empire in Asia; it was an essential part of the *Estado da India*. C.R. Boxer, explaining the nature of the Portuguese colonial empire, describes it as a thalassocracy, existing in a deeply religious age. It was, thus, a maritime and commercial empire, cast in a military and ecclesiastical mould.[1] What is suggested is that there was, thus, an essential unity of state and church in the environment, a linking together of the two in the whole visualization of the Portuguese colonial enterprise. As a Jesuit missionary wrote from God to a friend in Portugal in 1637, God's purpose in inspiring the Portuguese seaborne trade with India was to increase the harvest of souls.[2] More clearly Portugal was conceived of as a missionary state and the future of the two - the Church and the state were seen as converging. This sentiment was expressed by Padre António Viera, S.J., in a letter to the King dated April 1657 -

> The other nations of Christendom, Sire, have as their purpose the preservation of their vassals, so as to achieve temporal felicity in this life and eternal felicity in the next. And the Kingdom of Portugal, besides this purpose which is common to all, has for

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[1] C.R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415-1825*, Oxford, 1963, p. 2.

[2] Cited in C.R. Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century*, Delhi, 1980, Preface.

> its particular and special purpose the propagation and the extension of the Catholic faith in heathen lands, for which God raised and founded it. And the more that Portugal acts in keeping with this purpose, the more sure and certain is its preservation; and the more it diverges there from, the more doubtful.[3]

As Boxer so succinctly puts it, these were all "in practice so closely intertwined that they were often inseparable -- Cross and Crown, Throne and Altar, Faith and Empire, God and Mammon."[4]

This union of church and state can be seen most clearly in the institution of the *Padroado Real*, the royal patronage of the Church overseas exercised by the Portuguese Crown. It was a combination of rights, privileges and duties granted by the papacy to the Portuguese Crown as patron of the Roman Catholic missions and ecclesiastical establishments in Africa, Asia and Brazil, which were granted through a series of papal Bulls and Briefs between 1452 and 1514 A.D.[5] When in 1501 the Portuguese King Dom Manuel I assumed the high-sounding title of 'Lord of the conquest, navigation and commerce of Ethiopia, India, Arabia and Persia', the Portuguese had not yet conquered any of these lands, but their right to do so

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[3]Quoted in C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, London, 1969, p. 231.

[4]Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, op.cit.*, Preface.

[5]C.R. Boxer, *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion, 1440-1770*, Baltimore & London, 1978, pp. 77-78.

was understood to be implicit in the series of papal bulls, briefs and donations which had been granted to the Portuguese kings in the preceding years. Justifying his King's assumption of this grandiloquent title, the 16th century historian, Joao de Barros, wrote that the Popes "are universal lords, empowered to distribute among the faithful of the Catholic Church the lands which are in the power of those who are not subjected to the yoke thereof."[6] In contemporary understanding the Pope had granted to the King not simply the right to spread Christianity abroad, but, along with it, the right to conquer the regions specified. The idea of patronising the Church overseas and spreading the Christian faith in heathen lands, thus, bore within it the idea of some kind of conquest. The conquest undertaken by the Portuguese nation overseas had twin dimensions - spiritual and temporal. The Macaonese Franciscan chronicler, Father Paulo de Trinidade, wrote in his *Conquista Spiritual do Oriente* (Spiritual Conquest of the Orient) at God in 1638 (the title of his book itself is significant in this context) -

> The two swords of civil and ecclesiastical power were always so close together in the conquest of the East, that we seldom find one being used without the other. For the weapons only conquered through the right that the preaching of the Gospel gave them, and the preaching was only of some use when it was accompanied

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[6]Quoted in Boxer, *Race Relations, op.cit.*, p. 3.

and protected by the weapons."[7]

By the *Padroado*, the Portuguese kings were authorized by the Papacy to (a) erect or permit the creation of all cathedrals, churches, monasteries, convents and hermitages within its sphere of patronage, i.e., in Africa, Asia and Brazil, (b) to present to the Pope a list of suitable candidates for all colonial archbishoprics, bishoprics, and abbeys; and to present to the bishops concerned the lists of lesser ecclesiastical dignities and offices, and (c) to administer ecclesiastical jurisdictions and revenues and to veto papal Bulls and Briefs that were not first cleared through the Crown chancery.[8]

We have evidence to prove that these were privileges actually exercised by the Portuguese Crown. Our evidence is really from a rather late period - the 18th century. However, it will suffice for our purpose, as if we can show that these privileges were actually being exercised by the Portuguese Crown as late as the 18th century, they must undoubtedly have been a reality in the 16th and 17th centuries, when Portuguese power in Asia was in its heyday.

Thus, we have the copy of a letter sent by the Portuguese King to the Viceroy of India, dated Lisboa Occidental, 3 April 1720, sanctioning the opening of a church built by the French Capuchin missionaries of

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[7]Quoted in Boxer, *Church Militant*, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

[8]*Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

Chandernagore.[9] It includes the copy of a memorial sent by the Capuchins to the Bishop of Meliapur (in which bishopric Bengal fell at the time), which was forwarded by the Bishop to the Pope in Rome, and by the latter to the King in Lisbon. The memorial refers to a papal Bull issued on June 20, 1714, empowering the Capuchin missionaries to build a church at Chandernagore, which was to be opened, however, only after it was visited and approved of by an Ordinary. The memorial says that the Visitor-General, a Portuguese Augustinian by the name of Father Françisco da Purificação, after excusing himself on various pretexts,

> finally visited us, as an act of civility, and then openly declared to us that he could not give us the permission asked for, as the Bull of your Highness was not passed through the chancery of Portugal. It was for this defect that he could not help us in the matter. He was afraid to incur the displeasure of the Viceroy, and also of the Archbishop [of Goa], as such, he affirms had been the case to another Portuguese in the time of the Patriarch of Antioquia, Cardinal de Tournon.[10]

The Portuguese King's right to sanction the building of all churches in India, as well as the annulment of any papal Bull that did not go through the Crown chancery, was clearly respected by the entire Church hierarchy from the

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[9]Jno Godinho, *The Padroado of Portugal in the Orient, 1454-1860*, Bombay, 1924, p. 13.

[10]*Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

Bishop of Meliapur, to the Archbishop of God, to the Pope himself.

As far as the King's privilege to select, or at least sanction the appointments, of ecclesiastical personnel in the lands falling under his jurisdiction, we have the instance of the above-mentioned Charles Thomas Maillard de Tournon who was sent by Pope Clement XI to China as Visitor - Apostolic in 1702. The incident is related by Dom Thomas Caetano de Bem.[11] On his arrival at Macao, the Visitor - Apostolic was unable to produce, along with his Bulls, the consent of the King of Portugal, in whose domains he sought to exercise jurisdiction. Dom Thomas Caetano de Bem tells us that

> Learned jurists and theologians debated this point in Goa. The result of their deliberations was that they were unanimous in the opinion that the Patriarch could not, and should not, be allowed to exercise any jurisdiction, before presenting his Bulls and the consent of His Majesty.
>
> The consultants based their opinion firstly, that the Crown of Portugal was in possession, and without its approval, no Apostolic Legate could exercise any jurisdiction.
>
> Secondly, Pope Nicholas V and other supreme Pontiffs his predecessors, had conceded to the Kings of Portugal remunerative, perpetual and irrevocable

[11] 'Memorias historicas chronologicas dos clerigos regulares por D. Thomas Caetano de Bem', extracts translated and reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 3-11.

privilege, in virtue of which, without his Royal consent, no ecclesiastic, whether Bishop or Archbishop, or any other superior dignitary of the Church, could exercise any jurisdiction in the East Indies (Indias Orientias), and which privilege was further extended by Pope Leo X to all the countries discovered and to be discovered, even if they should not be subject to Portugal.

The Committee also declared that even if the Patriarch had exercised some jurisdiction in China or Macao, with the consent of the Bishop, such concession could not be converted into a legitimate right by the Curia, which right, as a prerogative of Royalty, could only be conferred by this Majesty, the King; any concession made without the knowledge of this Majesty, who alone could confer it, was in itself well and invalid.

In conformity with the above resolutions the Viceroy [Dom Rodrigo de Costa, Viceroy from 1706-1712] in May 1706 issued instructions to the Bishops in China, Macao and the Governor of this city [of Macao], not to allow the Legate to exercise any jurisdiction.

On his part, the Primate of the East [Dom Father Agostinho de Annunciam of the Order of Christ, Archbishop from 1691-1731], issued a pastoral to all the Ecclesiastics and laymen residing within the limits of his Primacy, that they should on no account, obey the Patriarch of Antioch [which the above-mentioned Visitor-Apostolic was consecrated by the Pope before his departure for China], unless he first presented the Bulls of his credentials, approved of by the Secretary of the State, and that all the censures, the papal Legate might fulminate, before exhibiting the said Bulls, were null and void, and that no person should obey them.[12]

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[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

In this instance, the Pope continued to sponsor the appointment of de Tournon and even raised him to the position of Cardinal, while in Asia itself there was a division among the clerics, some missionaries ultimately recognizing his authority. The hierarchy of the Church in Asia and the *Estado*, however, continued to resist his appointment. The Governor of Macao ultimately "conceiving that spiritual weapons were inadequate to cope with the turbulent spirit of the religious orders ... had recourse to civil weapons, to recall the Portuguese priest ... to a sense of their loyalty and vassalage."[13] The conflict continued till the death of the Cardinal ultimately in 1711.

By the *Padroado*, the Crown not only had the right to make, or at least approve of, all ecclesiastical appointments, it also held the purse-strings of the overseas clergy. The *Padroado* gave the Portuguese monarch the privilege of collecting tithes and administering some forms of ecclesiastical taxation in the overseas possessions. These tithes collected by the Crown were supposed to be used to meet the expenses of the missions and Church establishments in these regions. Often, however, these funds were insufficient, and were supplemented by royal grants and subsidies.[14]

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[14] Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, *op.cit.*, pp. 229-230.

The Portuguese king, thus, had so much authority over the Church in Asia. He chose the Archbishop of Goa (or at least approved of the candidate chosen for the post), just as he chose the Viceroy of the *Estado da India*. Both were his agents in Asia. He heard of, and formally approved of, the construction of every church and monastery, just as he was kept informed of every new territorial acquisition of the *Estado da India*. The Church was, in other words, another prong of the Portuguese imperial enterprise in Asia, of which the *Estado* structure was one prong. In several areas where there were no fortified settlements as outposts of empire, the King of Portugal was represented in the small buildings bearing a cross on their roofs.

The advantages that accrued to the Papacy by forming such a union of church and state through the *Padroado* were rather obvious. As Boxer explains it -

> The worldly Borgias and other Renaissance popes were primarily preoccupied with family aggrandizement, with European politics, with the Turkish menace in the Mediterranean and the Balkans, and after 1517, with the rising tide of Protestantism. They certainly did not concern themselves closely with the evangelization of new and distant lands beyond the rim of Christendom. Successive Vicars of Christ saw no harm in letting the Iberian monarchs bear the expense of maintaining the Church Militant overseas in return for the privilege of controlling it.[15]

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[15]Boxer, *Church Militant, op.cit.*, p. 78.

The Church was, thus, truly the arm of the State. It was so perceived, both, by itself, as well as by the State. The overseas clergy were frequently treated as state functionaries by the Crown, as well as by the Viceroy. Within the *Estado*, official appointments were sometimes combined with ecclesiastical ones. Thus, in 1702, Dom Joao do Casal was both Bishop of Macao and Governor of that place.[16] Lower down in the official hierarchy, we have reference in the second half of the 17th century, to Jesuits being asked to administer the funds ear marked for local fortifications, since the captains of the fortresses themselves were being found guilty of fraud and embezzlement. In 1667 the Viceroy, Conde de Sao Vicente referred to the fact that in several places the Crown had given the Jesuits exclusive right to administer all such funds. The Viceroy, in turn, recommended to the Crown that the Jesuits should always be entrusted with this work, since the captain could not be trusted.[17]

The missionaries also sometimes played the role of diplomats for the state. Thus, it seems that the peace negotiations with the Dutch of Goa in 1644 were conducted on the Portuguese side by the Jesuits.[18]

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[16]Godinho, *The Padroado, op.cit.*, p. 4.

[17]Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, op.cit.*, p. 47.

[18]*Ibid.*, p. 49.

Most importantly, the missionary mobilized loyalty for the Portuguese Crown in its overseas possessions. In the days before newspapers, radio and television, the pulpit was used as a form of propaganda for culling loyalty for the state. Conversion was seen as as much a service to the Crown as to God. In 1608, a Jesuit chronicler could claim in his officially approved history of the Portuguese missions in Asia:

> As many heathen as are converted to Christ, just so many friends and vassals does His Majesty's service acquire, because these converts later fight for the State [of Portuguese India] and the Christians against their unconverted countrymen.[19]

This is borne out in the converts' spirited defence of Hugli in 1632. Father Cabral, in his eyewitness account of the fall of Hugli, describes the natives fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Portuguese inhabitants of the city against the Mughal force that had besieged it.[20] In fact, it seems that one of the principal difficulties that the missionaries had to face was the suspicion of the Asian ruler that those of their subjects who converted to Christianity tended to identify their own interests more

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[19]Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, op.cit.*, p. 81.

[20]Fr. John Cabral, 'The Fall of Hugli', in Fray Sebastien Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique 1629-1643*, translated by C. Eckford Luard & Father H. Hosten, S.J., 2 Vols, Oxford, 1926, Vol. II, Appendix, passim.

closely with the Europeans than with their own country.

It was exactly this that Manrique referred to when he anticipated opposition to his project of moving some Christian families, living in the midst of pagans in the Kingdom of Arakan, to reside among other Christians in the area.

> Considering ... that it would be difficult for them to adhere to the sacred faith, which they had embraced, while living among pagans, I took steps to find some means of settling them at the place where the other Christians lived, and this in spite of numerous difficulties which arose in connexion with the various methods tried; the greatest obstacle, it should be noted, being the timidity, weakness, and suspicious nature of the King and his Council, who would attribute my desire to move those Christians to the wish to unite them all for some malicious purpose. Affected by this, I remained irresolute without wishing or daring to mention it to any of the Christians, for fear it should come to the ears of the Portuguese Captain. Had he known of it he would have hindered me to the utmost, as being am affair which touched him personally as well as the other Christians, and he would have urged the King and his Council not to concede me to this, as they would then be free from all the suspicion to which they would be liable if the change was affected.[21]

The Crown's reliance on the Church to bind the diverse

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[21]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 192-193.

populations of its overseas empire together as its loyal subjects should also be understood in the light of two other contexts. Substantial military garrisons were not stationed anywhere in the Portuguese overseas possessions. In fact, Boxer estimates that "it is doubtful if there were ever as many as 10,000 able-bodied Europeans and Eurasians available for military and naval service between Moçambique and Macao."[22] In addition, the missionaries usually stayed a lifetime in Asia, thus providing a forum for a continuing influence, in contrast to the Viceroys and Governors who normally had a short-lived term of three years each.[23]

The Church was also used as a 'frontier institution' to extend the boundaries of the empire. In Spanish America, in the absence of enormous numbers of military personnel, the responsibility for the pacification of the border regions was placed primarily on the missionaries of the religious orders, accompanied, where necessary, by small military escorts of garrisons, whose role was to be purely defensive and limited to the protection of the missionaries and the "reduced" Amerindians. When a region was thoroughly pacified and converted and the inhabitants resettled in villages and agricultural communities, the missionaries would move on into the interior. The use of the word 'conquest' was forbidden and was replaced by "discovery" or

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[22]Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, op.cit.,* p. 53.

[23]Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, op.cit.,* p. 19.

"pacification."[24]

The situation was similar in Portuguese India. Especially in a region like ours, where the hold of the *Estado* was always precarious, the missionary was the representative of the State. While the missionary was often used to extend the frontier in the Spanish and Portuguese overseas empires, in the case of Bengal, he arrived there only after the Portuguese Crown's interest in empire-building in that area had reached an ebb.[25] Nevertheless, he played an important role. In the absence of any other, he was the *Estado's* agent in the area, the diplomatic envoy to other courts, the only link with settlers in regions outside the *Estado's* formal control.

This is clearly encaptured in the attitude of the Viceroy towards the Bengal mission in the beginning of the 16th century. When, in 1601, the Jesuit fathers in Bengal appealed to Father Pimenta, the Visitor in India, to send more missionaries to the field, the Visitor was reluctant as the Mission to Japan had greatly exhausted his supply of workers. The Viceroy, Ayres de Saldanha, however, ordered him under pain of severe displeasure to send at lest four more Fathers to Bengal. The Viceroy had evidently been greatly impressed by the optimistic account he had received

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[24]Boxer, *Church Militant, op.cit.*, p. 72.

[25]See Chapter II, Section I, *A Pot-pourri of Elements: Contested Domains*.

from Felippe de Brito of the prospects of the Portuguese in those parts. In his letter to Father Pimenta, ordering the dispatch of the missionaries he wrote -

> By letters and informations which I had from the Kingdoms of Bengala and Pegu, I learned of the great fruit and notable service to our Lord which the few Fathers of the Company residing in those parts obtain and render by teaching, and instructing, and the example they give to the Portuguese, and by the conversion of the Infidels, and that they are earnestly invited by the infidel Kings and Lords, who promise to give them leave to preach the holy Gospel and build churches among them even offering the needful for their expenses .... I therefore request and charge your Paternity (thus discharging my own conscience in the matter) to send to those parts many Religious of the Company that they may satisfy the desires of those Kings and Lords, and by preaching the holy Gospel may spread Holy Church throughout all those Provinces, chiefly, throughout Aracao, Pegu and Martavao.[26]

The Church being needed by the State as frontier institution is implicit in this stance of the Viceroy. When we talk about the "Portuguese presence" in Bengal, therefore, we cannot leave out the Church, which embodied

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[26]Fernao Guerreiro, *Relacam annual das cousas que fizeram os Padres da Companhia de Iesus na India, & lapao nos annos de 600 & 601 & do precesso da conversao, & Christandade dequellas partes: tirada das cartas geraes que de la vierao pello Padre Fernao Guerreiro da Campanha de Iesus*, extracts translated by C.H. Payne under the title *Jahangir and the Jesuits with an Account of the Travels of Benedict Goes and the Mission to Pegu*, London, 1930, pp. 255-256.

yet another face of 'the Portuguese' in the region.

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Before venturing into an assessment of the position of the Church in 16th and 17th century Bengal, it would perhaps be in order to place the region within the structure of the Church setup itself. After the granting of the *Padroado*, it took a short while for an organized Church setup to be created for the Portuguese empire in Asia. From the very beginning, Portuguese ships brought to India priests, both secular and regular, to look after the spiritual needs of the Portuguese themselves, as well as to direct the work of converting non-Christians. The fleet of Vasco da Gama which made the voyage to India in 1498 was accompanied by two priests. Cabral, it seems was accompanied by one vicar, eight secular priests, eight Franciscans, an organist, a 'chorist', and one lay brother. Similarly in 1503, Albuquerque brought with him five Dominicans.[27] At first there seems to have been no co-ordination in the work of these priests, until the office of vicar-general was created early in the 16th century. The vicar-general was required to look after ecclesiastical affairs in India and send reports to the king from time to

[27]Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India, The Beginnings to A.D. 1707*, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 113-114.

time.

In 1514, the bishopric of Funchal in Madeira was created with jurisdiction over all Portuguese possessions in the East. In 1533, Funchal was raised to the dignity of an archbishopric, and new sees were created for the Azores, the Cape Verde islands, San Thome (in Europe), and Goa,

In 1534, the diocese of Goa was formally constituted. Its boundaries were defined as being in one direction the Cape of Good Hope and in the other the kingdom of China. The archbishopric of Funchal was to exercise metropolitan authority over the whole area.

On February 4, 1558, the diocese of Goa was separated from the ecclesiastical province of Lisbon and made an arch-diocese. The dioceses of Cochin and Malacca were created on the same day and assigned to Goa as its suffragan sees, the three together making up the new ecclesiastical province of Goa.

The region of Bengal fell within the diocese of Cochin till 1606, when the diocese of Mylapore was created. From 1606 till 1834, when the Vicariates Apostolic were created, Bengal Arakan, and the whole of the Choromondel coast depended upon Mylapore.[28]

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[28]The above discussion has been drawn from *ibid.*; Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. II, Bangalore, 1982; J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Bandel Convent and Church*, Calcutta, 1922.

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The Christian missionaries first entered Bengal in the 1580s, after the foundation of the Portuguese settlement at Hugli. At that time Bengal lay within the diocese of Cochin. Pedro Tavares, after taking possession of the site which seemed most suitable for the settlement,

> sent his ship to Goa with letters to the Viceroy and to the Bishop of Cochin, then the Very Illustrious Lord Don Fray Andres of the Order of the Minorities, to whose jurisdiction the Kingdom of Bengal belonged at the time. The Viceroy then requested him to choose brethren as Missionaries for those lands, and, after considering to what Order this Mission should be entrusted, he decided on mature reflection to assign it to the Order of my glorious Father Saint Augustin.
>
> This decision was at once communicated to the Viceroy and to the Reverend Father Provincial, that he might send out Brethren worthy to labour in that vineyard of the Lord. Acting on these orders, the Father Provincial appointed Father Fray Bernardo de Jesus, a man of true Apostolic spirit, as Superior of the Mission, and to act in his absence Father Fray Juan de la Cruz, a Brother imminent for his learning and exemplary life. Three other Brethren accompanied them, and on their arrival at Cochin, they went together at once to call on the Bishop, who received them most affectionately. When the time came for them to start for Bengal, he appointed Father Fray Bernardo as Vicario de la Vara, delegating to him all ordinary

jurisdiction within his powers.[29]

Viewing these missionaries against the background that we have painted of the Church in the Portuguese overseas empire, and considering that they were personnel handpicked by the Father Provincial of the Augustinian mission and the Bishop of Cochin, themselves the Crown's men in Asia, these missionaries were going to Bengal not only as men of God and His Church, but as agents of the Crown as well. Bengal being a frontier region of the empire, these Brethren were going forth not only to fulfil the spiritual needs of the Portuguese community that was settling there and to claim more souls for God, but to claim them for the Portuguese Crown too. While, by now, the Crown had slowed its efforts to increase the number of its own fortified settlements along the Indian Ocean littoral in an effort not to overstretch the capacity of its temporal arm in Asia (which perhaps it had already done), it could yet spread its influence over new regions through its spiritual arm, the Church. There were, thus, secular expectations of the missionaries who went into the field; perhaps the fact that the private Portuguese settlers in this region had begun to pledge allegiance to the Crown was not entirely an unrelated development and can be attributed in part to the efforts of the missionaries to bring them back into the fold and thus extend the territorial influence of their

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[29]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 38-39.

Lord, the King.

More tangibly, the missionaries are visible as agents of the Crown in the region, in their role as diplomatic envoys to other courts. There are several references in Manrique to his being a diplomatic messenger bearing 'certain instructions' from the Viceroy of Goa to various polities in Asia, which business, like a true diplomat, he never elaborates on. Thus, when assigned to the Bengal mission, he was also the Viceroy's envoy to the court of the King of Arakan.[30] In 1632 he was once again being sent to Bengal with a message and a handsome gift for the Governor of Hijli, when news of political disturbances in that area led to the expedition being abandoned.[31] Instead, Manrique set out for Japan, carrying with him a message for the Governor of Manila, where he was to stop en route.[32] In fact, Manucci commented that 'the Portuguese in any negotiations they have with the Mogols or the Rajas in India are accustomed to send priests as ambassadors."[33]

The Church itself seems to have recognised its duty to the Portuguese Crown to help in extending the frontier of its empire. Speculating that if rulers of Asian kingdoms

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 322.

[31] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 5-6.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[33] Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, or Mogul India, 1653-1708*, translated by William Irvine, 4 Vols, London, 1907, Vol. III, p. 199.

could be converted, their subjects would follow and mass proselytisation be made possible, it converted a number of Asian princes and heirs- apparent between the 16th and 18th centuries, the names of whom are listed in the document compiled by the Augustinian friar, Manuel da Purificacao, in about 1720, titled "Princes and persons of royal blood converted in the Orient by the religious of Saint Augustine."[34] At the same time, these efforts also had a political objective since it was acknowledged that Christianity was a means of making Asian rulers subordinate to the *Estado da India*. This is quite clearly portrayed in the case of the prince of Arakan, Dom Martinho de Alemão, who fell into Portuguese hands about 1612 during a power-struggle in the Kingdom of Arakan itself.[35] The prince was converted and brought up in the Augustinian convent at Hugli, with the long-term aim of helping the Portuguese king to acquire the whole Kingdom of Arakan. Thus, in the early 1640s the Arakanese heir-apparent was encouraged by the Augustinians to visit Portugal and present to the Portuguese king a project of conquest. Under this, Dom Martinho was to march at the head of an expeditionary force (provided to him by the Portuguese king) into Arakan, displace the ruler, his distant cousin, recover his kingdom and then leave it in his testament to the Portuguese king

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[34]Reference in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Quisling or Cross-Cultural Broker? Notes on the Life and Worlds of Dom Martinho de Alemão, Prince of Arakan', paper presented at the Indo-Portuguese Seminar on Cross Cultural Brokers in the Portuguese Asian Experience, on January 18, 1994, at the India International Centre, New Delhi.

[35]*Ibid.*

whose vassal he was. While the project never left the realm of Augustinian intention due to the disinterest in it of the prince himself, the episode clearly encaptures the Church's own understanding of its link with the state in Portuguese Asia.

The private Portuguese settlers in the Bengal-Arakan area perceived the Church in their own way. Most rudimentarily, the padre was welcomed by them for the fulfillment of their spiritual needs. These Christians had often not been visited by a missionary for years; they had thus not legalised their unions with local women according to Catholic marriage rites, nor baptized their children, nor been for confession for a long time, often for several years at a stretch. Manrique's account is full of such episodes in which the Portuguese individuals in Bengal repeatedly petitioned the Archbishop of Goa to send them missionaries to administer the sacraments to them; quite simply, as Manrique put it, "the Christians would not stay [in the region] without their priests."[36]

At one level the private settler's relationship with the Church was spiritual in nature. The relationship, however, also extended to another level which had a political flavour. While, on the one hand, these settlers often flew the flag of Lisbon as a source of legitimacy and

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[36]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 40. For instances of Christians settled in this region asking for priests to be sent to them, see, for example, pp. 38-39, 172.

authority, similarly they seem to have seen in their association with the Church, a means of enhancing their own power and prestige in the eyes of the indigenous population. Thus, when Manrique arrived at the city of Arakan, the capital of the Kingdom with the same name, the Portuguese community settled there

> made such excessive demonstrations in my honour that I felt overpowered and ashamed and told them that such demonstrations were out of place with a Priest whose watchword was humility ...
>
> The Captain-major replied that among infidels it was essential that such demonstrations should be made in order that they should appreciate the position held by the members of our Religious orders and by Priests and respect them. The more so in this case, since the news that the boro Padre which is to say great Priest, was arriving had spread throughout the whole country ....
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> So great is the respect with which they treat members of Orders and Priests who come to these parts that once four of the Principal Portuguese themselves carried an Ordained Priest, in a cirion, on their shoulders in place of the slaves who usually preform this duty. This was done simply to prove to the infidels that if they showed such respect for their false priests how much greater was the obligation they were under, as Catholics, to respect and honour their own true Priests.[37]

While the generation of awe and respect for their clergy among the indigenous population was the explicit motive of

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[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

these demonstrations, the creation of similar awe and respect for themselves through association with the 'great Priest' was implicit in the whole affair. It was perhaps with such a motive that Portuguese adventures in the region, like Felippe de Brito, set about making large donations to the Church and founding Colleges for it;[38] apart from thus gaining some kind of a hold over the church and being able to employ its services to strengthen his position among his own subjects in Pegu, he anticipated also that part of the goodwill of the church would rub off on him.

The great esteem that the missionary was held in can be seen in the general treatment of him as almost the head of the settlement. Thus, when the Portuguese settled at Arakan wished to send a warning to their brethren at Dianga of the impending attack on their settlement by the Raja of Arakan in 1629, the messenger came straight to Manrique's house. And it was Manrique who ultimately went with one of the Portuguese captains of Dianga as the envoy of the settlers to the court at Arakan.[39]

The practice of using the priest as their political

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[38] 'Father N. Pimenta's Annual Letter of Margao, Dec. 1, 1601' translated and edited by the Rev. H. Hosten, S.J., *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXIII, 1927, No.1. Of Felippe de Brito the Father wrote, "This man is very rich and can found many Colleges; and to our residence of Negapatao he has given big alms. He wrote to me offering to be the founder of the College of Coulao [Quilon] .... I answered him, confirming him in his good resolution, and telling him that thirty thousand pardaos would suffice for the foundation."

[39] Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 93.

envoy was also often resorted to by the private settlers, in a manner not dissimilar to the *Estado* itself. Thus, Felippe de Brito Nicote sent Father Natal Salerno as the envoy of peace to the Arakan court in 1604 at the end of a skirmish that had broken out between the kingdoms of Siriam and Arakan. On the failure of the peace mission, the same missionary was then sent as de Brito's envoy to the Portuguese Viceroy, who was then at Malacca, to obtain naval assistance against the Arakanese raja.[40] Similarly, in 1632 the Portuguese under siege at Hugli sent Father John Cabral, who was in their midst, first to the Nawab of Bengal, Qasim Khan, and then to the court of Arakan.[41]

The Church, on its part, seemed to express complete solidarity with these settlers. The missionaries in the field willingly carried messages for these communities and even assumed responsibility for their trespasses before the local rulers. Thus, Manrique, while defending the loyalty of the Portuguese settled at Dianga before the Arakanese raja, declared -

> If you find the Portuguese are traitors, remember that they did nothing save under my advice, hence as the prime mover of their actions let me be the first to pay the penalty for so great a fault."[42]

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[40]Guerreiro, *op.cit.*, pp. 219, 221.

[41]Cabral, 'The Fall of Hugli', *op.cit.*, p. 391.

[42]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 147.

We never find the missionaries reproaching these settlers for anything beyond their straying from the true Catholic path and relapsing into a pagan way of life. The Church did not view them as renegades, as the *Estado* did, but merely as wayward lambs of the flock of Christians that it tended for God. It was apparently perfectly aware of the slave-trading and piratical activities that they indulged in, and it was not disapproving.[43] And there is never a complaint against their not accepting the authority of the *Estado*. As long as the padres could get these settlers to mend their "unchristian" ways - which they usually succeeded in doing - they had little else to complain about. Between the two lords that the Church served, God ultimately prevailed over the King, at least in the Bengal-Arakan region.

The link between the Portuguese and their clergymen was understood to some extent even by the indigenous polities. These powers thus often used the priests in their kingdoms as their means of communication with the Portuguese authorities at Goa and even at Lisbon. Manrique thus carried a letter from the Governor of Hijli to the Viceroy of Goa in 1637.[44] The Governor of Manila entrusted him with some work to be done when he returned to Portugal.[45] Again, en route to Europe from Lahore, Manrique

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[43]See Chapter IV, Section II, *Pirates, Raiders and Slave-traders*.

[44]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 438, Vol. II, p. 5.

[45]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 97-98 & f.n. 7.

had to make a detour to Sind "because Prince Assofo Kan had intimated his wish that I should personally undertake certain negotiations and business which he had to carry out with the Viceroy of India in connexion with the Portuguese who lived in the factory there.[46]

Most interestingly, the clergymen were even held hostage by the indigenous powers in order to increase their bargaining capacity with the Portuguese in Bengal. A fleet of Portuguese 'gelias' from Dianga captured a Moorish ship off the coast of Pipli in 1637. On complaint by the captains of the captured ship, a high-ranking Mughal noble at Pipli set about to have the ship restored to its owners. Thus he summoned before him, apart from the Portuguese captain of Pipli, the priests on the scene. And it is the priests who ultimately became the intermediaries in the whole bargain. While Father Baltasar de St. Ursula went back to negotiate with the offending Portuguese captains from Dianga, Manrique was held hostage at Pipli, to ensure that the ship was returned.[47]

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[46] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

[47] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 443-444.

CHAPTER IV

DIMENSIONS OF PORTUGUESE ACTIVITY : TRADERS, RAIDERS AND SOLDIERS

The Portuguese claim to fame in the Bengal-Arakan region in the 16th and 17th centuries is based, at one level, on their being militarily strong enough to be among the contenders for power, particularly in the context of political flux that our region underwent in this period. At another level, and more importantly at that, they created their presence through the activities that they indulged in. In the discussing the Portuguese presence in the region at the time, it is essential to examine what was the precise nature and dimension of activities undertaken by the different elements who cumulatively constituted the phenomenon of Portuguese colonialization. This chapter, therefore, will focus on the economic activities of the various categories of Portuguese settlers in Bengal.

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I. Traders

The *Estado da India* as well as Portuguese individuals

came to Bengal, basically, with the intention to trade. The region was first taken notice of for its commercial potential by the Crown's agents in Asia; the first reports filed by individuals who drifted into the area contained detailed information about its ports and products. This in itself quite clearly indicates the interest of the Portuguese in the region from the outset.

While 'the Portuguese' in Bengal were not a homogenous entity, we have evidence of all categories of the Portuguese in the region trading. The *Estado*- conducted trade with Bengal began in 1517 when the first two official expeditions were sent under Fernão Peres de Andrade and D. João de Silveira in quick succession.[1] These expeditions seem to have inaugurated the *Estado's* annual voyage to Bengal (*the carreira de Bengala*). The *carreira de Bengala* usually came from Goa; in the late 1530s, however, some ships seem to have left from Malacca.[2]

The official voyages to Bengal took place in ships of the Crown till the 1530s. The captains of these ships, apart from conducting trade on behalf of the Crown, undoubtedly also traded in the region in their private capacity. By the 1530s the private interests had prevailed over those of the Crown to grant licenses to private

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[1] See Ch.II.

[2] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade' in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire, Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 106.

Portuguese individuals in Asia to lead their own ships to Bengal.[3] Through this mechanism, *fidalgos*, governors and viceroys of the *Estado da India* legally entered the trade of our region in their private capacity. By the 1540s, the number of such licenses granted to Portuguese individuals had increased to such an extent that the official *carreira* found itself facing numerous competitors coming from its own home. With the profitability of Crown trade in the region thus becoming greatly reduced, the whole logic of the *carreira* began to be called into question.

The issue was ultimately resolved with the merging of the official *carreira* and the private licensed voyage in the new system of concession voyages in the 1560s,[4] whereby the interests of the Crown underwent further subordination to the lobby of private interests. Under the new system Crown shipping to Bengal was entirely abandoned. The Captain-Major of the concession voyage was the appointee of the Crown who was to make the voyage in his own ship, or in one freighted by him for the purpose. He was not, however, granted monopoly trading rights over the region that he was headed for, as the Crown had claimed for itself in Bengal. It was realized that there were too many Portuguese individuals trading in the region, unregulated by the *Estado da India*, for any such grant to be made. For the duration of the voyage, however, the Captain-Major was

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[3] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

recognised as chief of all Portuguese ships and individuals that he might encounter on his way as well as in the port of Bengal that he was headed for. In this context, he was given the privilege of trading first at the port of destination and the designation of *provedor dos defunctos* or Custodian of the Property of Deceased and Absent Persons. This was really the most profitable and valued part of the concession, by which the Captain-Major was made settler of the effects of all those Portuguese individuals who came under his jurisdiction who might die during his term in office (unless they had already appointed another trustee or custodian in their wills). In return for services rendered he received a legally laid down percentage, as well as plenty of opportunity for embezzlement. These concession voyages were not always led by the *fidalgo* to whom they were granted - they were often sold by the original grantees to private Portuguese in Asia for a fixed sum of money.[5] There were three concession voyages in our region - to Chittagong, to Satgaon (later Hugli), and to Pipli. They seem to have originated from both Goa and Malacca.[6]

In addition to these forms of trade which were conducted under the banner of the *Estado da India*, there were a host of private Portuguese individuals trading in

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[5]For a good discussion of the system of concession voyages in Portuguese Asia see C.R. Boxer, *Fidalgoes in the Far East, 1550-1770: Fact and Fancy in the History of Macao*, The Hague, 1948.

[6]Subrahmanyam 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade', *op.cit.*, p. 110.

our region. Of the settlers in Bengal, a substantial number were traders. It is to their mercantile activities that contemporary travellers in the region usually refer when they talk of the Portuguese trade in Bengal. Father Cabral is very clear in his categorization of the population of Hugli at the time of its siege in 1632 - "All the inhabitants were merchants ...."[7] Even persons generally perceived of as adventures in the area, people of the like of Domingo Carvalho and Sebastiao Gonsalves Tibau were, (apart from their more colourful activities), actively engaged in trade in salt from the island of Sandwip where they were based.[8]

The missionaries of the Catholic Church in our region were also actively engaged in trade. It is a well-accepted fact in the history of the overseas Church that the missions often participated in trade to be able to support themselves. While there were those among the clergy who took objection to these men of God serving Mammon and saw the trading padre cast in too worldly a mould for comfort, the reality was well expressed by a 17th century traveller to Asia -

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[7]Fr. John Cabral, S.J., Letter dated Ceylon, November 12, 1633, translated by Fr. H. Hosten, S.J., in *The Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique, 1629-1643*, translated by C. Eckford Luard and Fr. H. Hosten, S.J., 2 Vols. Appendix, 'The Fall of Hugli', Vol. II, p. 418.

[8]J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1919, p. 67; Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade,' *op.cit.*, p. 113.

> ... here these Padres trade in shipping, goods, and buildings, alleging the necessity of it, as the great charge they are at in sending their brethren to sundry posts where they have residences, with their maintenance etc., there.[9]

And mercantile activity by the missionary in the field was usually sanctioned by both the Papacy and the Crown for the support of the overseas missions. With its more secular imperial preoccupations, the Portuguese Crown was seldom able to fulfill its financial commitment to the Church as was understood by the terms of the *Padroado*. The Church Militant was, therefore, of necessity, also the Church Mercantile.[10]

Instances of members of the clergy trading in Asia, therefore, are numerous. A Dominican friar claimed in 1658 that he had personally made more than 40,000 *pardaos* in the sandalwood trade in the Lesser Sunda Islands.[11] The Friar Manrique carried with him a large amount of merchandise for Makan Das, a Hindu trader, on his journey from Pipli to Goa in 1637.[12] And we have the instance of a ship which made the journey from Goa to Macao in 1658, owned one-third by the

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[9]Peter Mundy, quoted in C.R. Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century*, Delhi, 1980, p. 49.

[10]I have borrowed both terms from C.R. Boxer, cf., *The Church Militant in Iberian Expansion, 1440-1770*, Baltimore & London, 1978, C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, London, 1969, p. 77.

[11]Cited in Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, op.cit.*, p. 46.

[12]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 445.

Jesuit Province of Japan, one-third by the Jesuit Vice-Province of China, and the remaining third by a *fidalgo*, Simao de Sousa de Tavora, ex-captain of Salsette.[13] The missionary trade could, therefore, be conducted independently, or in alliance with indigenous Asian merchants, or in conjunction with Portuguese individuals in Asia.

In short, then, no matter what their other involvements might have been, all categories of the Portuguese in our region - as in Asia, in general - were active participants in trade. The situation was well captured by Diogo do Couto who complained in his *Dialogo do Soldado Pratico* (1612) -

> In the old days, when men reached India they asked "which is the most dangerous outpost?" or "where are the fleets in which the most honourable service can be done?" Whereas nowadays covetousness has got such a hold, that on their arrival they ask, "who is preparing for a trading voyage to China, or Japan, or Bengal or Pegu, or Sunda?" Everybody flocks to those parts, which makes one think that the Muslim proverb will come true, for they say that we gained India like warriors and will lose it like merchants.[14]

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[13]Cited in Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century*, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

[14]Cited in *ibid.*, p. 42.

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Historical literature on the Portuguese mercantile activity in our region has not really moved to keep pace with revised views of their commercial presence in the Indian Ocean as a whole. The early historians conceived of the Portuguese as a dominant trading element in Asian waters who, from their string of fortified settlements spanning the whole stretch of the coastline, and through the use of naval-military force, gained control over the bulk of the trade of the Indian Ocean. This enormous intra-Asian trade, as well as the trade with Europe, was, from the beginning of the 16th century, either Portuguese-conducted or Portuguese-controlled, so that this era truly merited the designation, 'the Vasco da Gama epoch' in Asian maritime commercial history.[15] It was with such an understanding that J.J.A. Campos wrote one of the first histories of the Portuguese in Bengal, in which his position on their commercial presence in the region is very clear. Thus,

> the high hopes which the Portuguese had entertained regarding the possibilities of trade in Bengal were realized beyond their expectation. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century a great part of the Bengal

[15] 'The Vasco da Gama Epoch' is K.M. Panikkar's phrase, cf. K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance, A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945*, London, 1953; this view is also held by B.W. Diffie & G.D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, Oxford, 1977.

trade and shipping had passed into the hands of the Portuguese.[16]

This opinion of the Portuguese trading enterprise in Asia began to register a change in the 1970s. It was realized that the Portuguese stranglehold on Asian trade was not really so complete as had been made out to be. Their failure to capture Aden left a large hole unplugged in their attempted stranglehold of the trade with Europe and allowed a quick revival of the Red Sea trade.[17] In addition, the very logic of their system of taxing the indigenous intra-Asian trade required that the Portuguese, in fact, should facilitate the smooth flow of the pre-existing trade of the Asian merchants. Thus, the Portuguese did not stamp out the activity of the Asian merchants but, since their trade in effect provided major revenues to the *Estado da India*, they ended up actually encouraging it.[18] Ultimately, the Portuguese trading activity in Asia came closer to van Leur's much earlier categorization of it as merely "one thread more in the fabric of the international exchange of goods carried on in the lands from Suez to

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[16]Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

[17]C.R. Boxer, 'A Note on Portuguese Reactions to the Red Sea Spice Trade and the Rise of Atjeh, 1540-1600', in the *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, X, Singapore, 1969; reproduced in C.R. Boxer, *Portuguese Conquest and Commerce in Southern Asia, 1500-1750*, Hampshire, 1990.

[18]Niels Steensgaard, 'The Return Cargoes of the *Carreira da India* in the Sixteenth Century' in T.R. de Souza (ed.), *Indo-Portuguese History: Old Issues, New Questions*, New Delhi, 1984; this view is also expressed in K.N. Chaudhuri 'European Trade with India' in Tapan Raychaudhuri & Irfan Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.I, c.1200-c.1750*, Hyderabad, 1984, pp. 382-407.

Nagasaki."[19]

Research on the Portuguese in Bengal, however, remained neglected after Campos, till the recent writings of Sanjay Subrahmanyam. Subrahmanyam's argument, no doubt, takes account of the new evidence. Thus,

> The Portuguese presence in its various layers [in maritime Asia] was undoubtedly an important one, but it was not achieved by wholly excluding other traders, be it in Gujarat, Malabar, Coromandel or Indonesia. The desire to gain exclusive rights - which no doubt existed often enough in sixteenth century Lusitanian hearts and minds - was difficult to translate into achievement.[20]

The Portuguese community in our region was composed mostly of individuals who lay outside the fold of the *Estado*, the region was beyond the pale of the *cartaz-cafilla* brand of *Estado* - controlled commerce. The Portuguese participation in the trade of this region must have been of a different kind. It is our contention that, first of all, the Portuguese commercial presence in Bengal was not in the nature of capturing and controlling the entire trade of the region in a way that was attempted by

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[19]J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History*, The Hague, 1955.

[20]Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade', *op.cit.*, pp. 97-99.

the *Estado* in, for instance, the western Indian Ocean and Malacca. Secondly, most histories of Portuguese trade in Asia restrict themselves to viewing it as a trading enterprise operating along the major trade routes of the Indian Ocean, indulging in the act of transportation. There is in all this altogether a great deal of the ocean and only too little of the land. This, too, has been a criticism of the bent of the historiography. It is in this context, in a humble attempt to begin to straighten the tilt in the historiography, that we will view the Portuguese in Bengal not just as traders in the waters of the region but as buyers and sellers in its markets.

The focus of this section, therefore, will be on reconstructing various aspects of Bengal's trade in the 16th and 17th centuries, with special reference to the Portuguese. We may follow the traditional historiography at the outset, and divide our broader time period into three phases - the period before the coming of the Portuguese traders to our region, the period of the Portuguese participation in Bengal's trade, and the period of the Dutch and the English.[21] Beginning with such an a priori time division, however, is really to illustrate its irrelevance as far as we our concerned. We view the Portuguese traders in Bengal as entering a commercial

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[21]For the perception of such a time division see Campos, *op.cit.*, Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century, The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade*, originally published as Carracks, *Caravans and Companies*, Copenhagen, 1973.

structure that long preceded them, operating within it, and creating patterns that the Dutch and English built on in the years to come. The underlying hypothesis is that the European trading elements in Bengal in the time period under survey made no structural difference to the trading patterns that predated them. They really adapted themselves to the commercial mechanisms in existence on their arrival. While examining the various dimensions of Portuguese commercial activity in Bengal, we get an impression of some change within a definite continuity.

Commodities of Exchange and Changing Patterns of Trade

The most striking feature of Bengal's trade throughout our period is the persistence of the same commodity structure. As far as the products of Bengal and her exports are concerned, it would be useful to compare a few accounts at different points of time in the period under survey. Table 1 shows at a glance that the composition of Bengal's exports remained identical over a period spanning more than two centuries. Column I is drawn from information given in Haraprasad Ray - *Trade and Diplomacy in India-China relations: A Study of Bengal during the 15th century.*[22] Columns II, III, IV, and V from the respective travellers accounts,[23] and Column VI from Walter Clavell's. 'The

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[22]Haraprasad Ray, *Trade and Diplomacy in India-China Relations: A Study of Bengal during the 15th Century*, New Delhi, 1993.

[23]Column II is taken from Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa, An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants, written by Duarte Babosa and completed about the year*

TABLE I **THE COMMODITY STRUCTURE OF**

FEI XIN (1436) & MA HUAN (1451) I	DUARTE BARBOSA (1500 - 1517) II	J.H. VAN LINSCHOTEN (1583 - 1589) III
Cotton textiles-Bifu (bafta), Manzheti (Pachadi/Pitcharies), Shanabafu (Sanahbaf - Muslin), Xin bailedali (Gauze Silk), Chaotaer (Chautar), Moheimoluo (Cotton Velvet), Sahala(Scarlett stuff) Zhefu(Woollen blanket) **Silks**	**Cotton Goods** - Estravantes(Sirband - headband), Mamonas, Duguazas, Chautars, Sinabafas, Beatilhas	**Cotton Cloth** - Sarampuras, Cassas, Comsas, Beatillias, Satopassas,Grasscloth & Silk woven together
Paper		
Wine		
Precious Stones-Coral, Pearl,Agate,Crystal		
Horse Saddles		
Rhinocerous Horns		**Rhinocerous Horns,** Teeth & Claw
Lacquered Articles		
Steel tools,Knives, Spears		
Timber		
Lign Aloes		**Aloe**
Pepper	**Long Pepper**	**Long Pepper**
Coarse Rhubarb		
Amalaka - emblic myrobolan		**Myrobalans**
Rice		
Millet		
Ginger	**Ginger**& Ginger Conserve	**Ginger Conserve**
Sugar	**Sugar**	**Sugar**
Butter & Ghi		**Butter**
Mango,Pineapple,Banana Pomegranate, Coconut	**Orange**,Lemon & Other fruit conserves	**Mangoes** & Figs
Onions,Mustard,Garlic		
Milkmade Sweets		
	Eunuch slaves	
		Rattan reeds
		Civet

BENGAL'S EXPORTS (1436 - 1676)

PYRARD DE LAVAL (1607) IV	FRAY SEBASTIEN MANRIQUE (1629 - 1643) V	WALTER CLAVELL (1676) VI
Cotton Cloth & Raw cotton Embroidered Cloth	**Cotton Goods**	**Cotton Cloth**
Silk & grass/herb silk	**Silks** Ginghams made of grass	**Tussar Silk**
Lign Aloes **Long Pepper** & Green Pepper preserves	**Long Pepper**	
Rice **Ginger**	**Rice**	**Rice**
Sugarcane & Sugar **Butter** **Citrons**, Lemons, Orange, Pomegranate, Pineapples	**Sugar** **Ghi**	**Sugar** **Oil** & Butter
Milkfoods **Slaves** **Reeds** **Carpets** **Horse** Harnesses **Furniture** & Vessels **Black & Red Pottery**	**Slaves** **Bamboos** to make palanquins **Indigo** **Quilts** **Wax** & Lac **Saltpetre** **Opium**	**Opium** **Wheat** **Hemp** **Gunny Sacking**

Accompt of the Trade of Hugly' in the *Diaries of Streynsham Master*.[24]

The list of commodities that Bengal imported in return is more difficult to come by, as several accounts do not mention imports, while those which do usually have items imported into Bengal scattered among exports from other regions. From this we are able to piece together a list, which once more shows remarkable consistency in composition. The Chinese accounts of Fei Xin and Ma Huan mention China as exporting to Bengal gold, silver, copper coins, satin, coloured tafettas, porcelain, musk, vermilion, quick-silver, and grass mats.[25] Caesar Frederike, writing around 1563 mentions that the ship on which he travelled from Pegu to Chatigan carried silver and gold and no other kind of merchandize" (apart from provisions and ballast)[26] Pyrard de Laval mentions cowries and tortoise shell being exported from the Maldives to Bengal in great quantity -

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1518 A.D., translated by M.L. Dames, 2 Vols, London, 1918 & 1921; Column III from J.H. van Linschoten, *The Voyage of J.H. van Linschoten to the East Indies*, translated by A.C. Burnell & P.A. Tiele, 2 Vols, New Delhi, 1988, reprint; Column IV from Francois Pyrard, *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard de Laval*, translated by A. Grey and H.C.P. Bell, 2 Vols, London, 1888; Column V from Manrique, *op.cit.*

[24]Walter Clavell, 'The Accompt of the Trade of Hugly', in Streynsham Master, *The Diaries of Streynsham Master, 1675-1680*, edited by R.C. Temple, 2 Vols, London, 1911.

[25]Cited in Ray, *op.cit.*

[26]'Extracts of Master Caesar Frederike his eighteene yeeres. Indian Observations' in Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrims and Lande Travells by Englishmen and others*, Glasgow, 1905, Vol, X, p. 135.

> "... in one year I have seen thirty or forty whole ships loaded with them [cowries] without any other cargo. All go to Bengal, for there only is there a demand for a large quantity at high prices."[27]

Manrique's list of goods sold by the Portuguese traders in "Ugulim" (Hugli) includes

> "caurim or sea-shells from the Maldive Islands, chanquo [shank] from Tutucurim and the Pescaria coast [the coast of Tinnevelly], pepper from Malabar, and cinnamon from Ceilam .... The Portuguese also bring from China great quantities of porcelain, and many kinds of gilt articles, such as bed-steads, tables, boxes, chests, writing desks, as well as many other curios, of which there are large numbers in China. They also bring pearls and jewels of great value set in European style, but made with greater skill .... From the kingdoms of Solor and Timor the Portuguese import also great quantities of sweet-smelling sandalwood, both of the white and the red kinds .... The Portuguese also bring into this Kingdom of Bengal cloves, nutmegs, and mace from the Maluca isles, and Banda, and from the Isles of Borneo the very precious camphor.[28]

Thomas Bowrey mentions Bengal importing elephants from

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[27]Pyrard, *op.cit.*, Vol, I, Ch. XXIV.

[28]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 29-31.

Ceylon and cowries and coir from the Maldives.[29] And Walter Clavell, in his description of the Dutch trade in Bengal in 1676 mentions the whole range of goods -" ...

> Gold from Japan, Copper of Japan, Tuttenag [spelter], Tinn from Malaya, Pepper, Chanck [sankh, conch shells], bettlenutts, Elephants and Elephants teeth, Cloves, Mace, Nuttmegs, Gaunce [ganza, bell metal] (all which turne them to great accompt); alsoe Brimstone, Quick Silver, Vermillion, and some cloth, which sell not soe well."[30]

Broadly, then Bengal's seaborne trade was oriented more towards exports than imports and the favourable balance was settled in precious metals..

We may follow K.N. Chaudhuri in classifying the major commodities traded in the Indian Ocean before the mid - 18th century into bulk and low value items, luxury and high value commodities, and gold and silver.[31] Within this classification we note that Bengal exported mostly bulk and low value goods (foodstuffs) and some luxury and high value goods (cotton and silk textiles, opium etc.) In return, she imported mostly gold and silver, and luxury goods of

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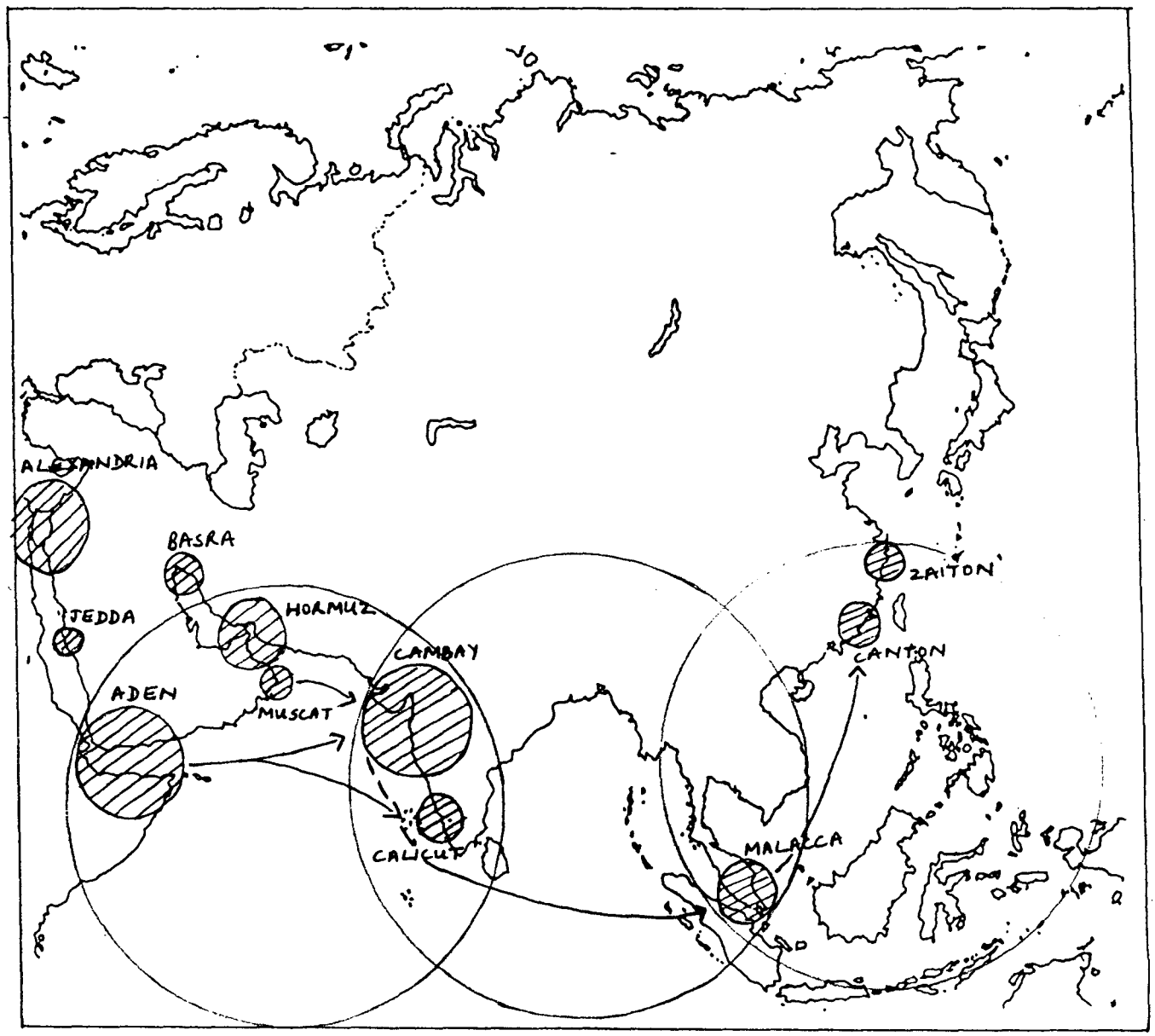
[29]Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of the Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679*, edited by R.C. Temple, Cambridge, 1903.

[30]Clavell, 'The Accompt of the Trade of Hugly', *op.cit.*

[31]K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean, From the Rise of Islam to c. 1750 A.D.*, Cambridge, 1985.

MAP 3

THE STRUCTURE OF EMPORIA TRADE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN BEFORE 1500



Source: K.N. Chaudhuri, Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean, Cambridge, 1985, p. 104.

consumption.

It would also be useful to follow K.N. Chaudhuri's classification of trade into local trade, inter-regional trade, and true long-distance, trans-continental trade. Taking up the latter two categories first, we can discern an important change wrought by the Portuguese in Bengal's position in the intra-Asian trading network. Trade in the Indian Ocean between the 10th and the 15th centuries had settled into the pattern of emporia trade. We note a clear perception in both Tome Pires and Duarte Barbosa,[32] that the trading world of the Indian Ocean was divided into three commercial segments - the zone lying between the Red Sea and the Indian west coast, that lying between Gujarat and Malabar and the Indonesian archipelago, and that lying between South East Asia and the Far East. At the junction of each of these segments had developed great entrepots of trade - the trading emporia of Aden, Cambay, Calicut, Malacca and Canton. Within this pattern of emporia trade, the two categories of inter-regional and trans-continental trade had become enmeshed in one another - all the trading regions of Asia traded with these great emporia, while it was the emporia that indulged in long-distance, trans-continental trade. In this period, Bengal was part of the middle segment of the three commercial segments of the Indian Ocean, but was not a trading emporia in her own right (see Map 3).

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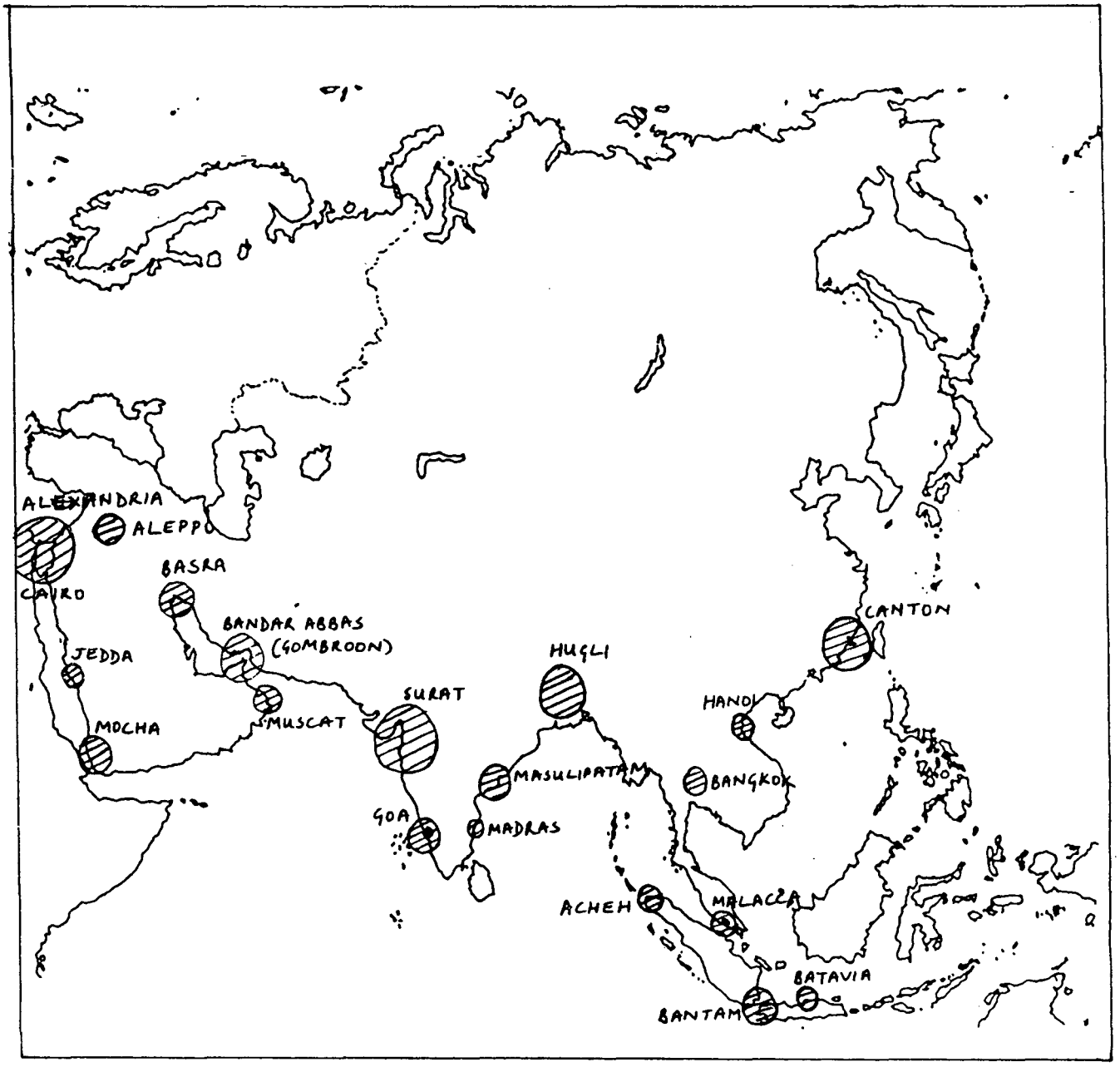
[32] *Ibid.*

MAP 4

THE STRUCTURE OF EMPORIA TRADE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AFTER 1600



Source: K.N. Chaudhuri, Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean, Cambridge, 1985, p. 115.

Within this pattern of trade, Bengal was important for the foodstuffs that she supplied to various deficient areas in Asia. Thus, Pyrard de Laval commented that

> ... there is such a quantity of rice [produced in Bengal], that, besides supplying the whole country, it is exported to all parts of India, as well as Goa and Malabar, as to Sumatra, the Moluccas, and all the Islands of Sunda, to all of which lands Bengal is a very nursing mother, who supplies them with their entire subsistence and food. Thus, one sees arrive there every day an infinite number of vessels from all parts of India for these provisions....[33]

In addition, Bengal's bulk, low value commodities formed an extremely suitable ballast for ships, which could not afford to bear the risk of shipwreck if their holds were filled only with luxury items and gold and silver.

On the other hand, the advent of the Portuguese, and later of the English and Dutch on the trading scenario in the Indian Ocean, led to a change in the pattern of emporia trading. The triple segmentation of long-distance trade in Asia was replaced by a more random pattern based on commodity production and specialisation (see Map 4). No

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[33]Pyrard, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, Ch. XXIV.

longer was trade between the emporia the only long-distance trade. In the new pattern, Bengal began to come into her own in the trans-continental network. Now not only did rice from Bengal contribute to Malacca's subsistence[34] and Bengali textiles supply consumption markets in south-western India, but textiles from Bengal began to be exported increasingly to Europe as part of the private cargoes on the Carreira da India. The increasing importance of the these textiles in Euro-Asian trade has been shown by Niels Steensgaard, the percentage weight share of textiles going from 0.2% in 1513-19 to 12.2% in 1600-03.[35] And the importance of Bengal's textiles in the European market in the period of the Dutch and English is well known.

Apart from the change in Bengal's status in the trans-continental trade, we notice a change in her orientation towards her inter-regional trading networks in the period under review as well. In the early 16th century, the trade routes emanating from Bengal were 1) the coastal trade to south-eastern India, that seems to have been so well known that it is not well documented, though Kunjimedu and Kayal on the Coromandel coast receive mention 2) eastward routes, mostly to Malacca, though also to Pasai and Pidie in

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[34]Cf. Genevieve Bouchon & Luis Filipe Thomaz (eds.), *Voyage dans les Deltas du Gange et de l' Irraouaddy, Relation Portugais Anonyme, 1521*, Paris, 1988, p. ---- and the Viceroy's letter to the King, Feb.3, 1633, reproduced in Sushil Chaudhury, 'The Rise and Decline of Hugli - a port in Medieval Bengal', *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. 86, No.1, January-June 1967, p. 47.

[35]Niels Steensgaard, 'The Return Cargoes of the *Carreira da India* in the Sixteenth Century', *op.cit.*

northern Sumatra and Cosmin in Burma 3) routes to the middle Indian Ocean, specifically to Sri Lanka, Malabar and the Maldives and 4) routes to the western Indian Ocean - the Red Sea, Cambay and Dabhol, and the Persian Gulf.[36] Subrahmanyam notes that in the beginning of the 16th century there are several references to shipping between Chittagong and the Red Sea ports and between Bengal and the Gujarat ports in the Portuguese sources. There is merely an odd reference to these westerly trade routes by the 1580s and no mention of this trade by mid-century. The official Portuguese trade with Bengal which took the form of the annual voyages (*carreiras*) to Chittagong and Satgaon, starting 1518, began from Goa. From the late 1530s some ships began to leave for Bengal from Malacca as well. When, in the 1560s, the *carreira* gave way to the concession voyages, the starting point was usually Malacca. All this suggests a reorientation of Bengal's trade in favour of the east in the course of the 16th century.

In explanation of this reorientation, Subrahmanyam suggests that the decline of the Husain Shahi dynasty and its capital city of Gaur in the 1530s led to the decline of its port of Chittagong. The conquest of Chittagong by the Arakan ruler in the 1540s, and the simultaneous rise to importance of the port capital of the Arakan kingdom, Mrauk-u, led to a cruel neglect of Chittagong and hastened

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[6]Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade, *op.cit.*, pp. 99-103.

its downfall. In the process, the Persian merchants who were based at Chittagong and were particularly conspicuous on the westerly routes to the Red Sea, Cambay, the Konkan ports, the Maldives, and the Malabar ports also became inactive. The rise of Hugli and the Portuguese mercantile element in their stead contributed to this shift in the direction of Bengal's overseas trade.[37]

Mechanisms of Procurement of Goods

As far as the procurement of goods for trade is concerned, we have indication allowing us to surmise that with the commodities being exported from the region remaining identical over a period spanning over 200 years, the economic mechanisms of procurement that were employed by the merchants showed a certain continuity of their own. We know from the English factory records, which are mostly concerned with taking stock of the existing situation and making an assessment of trading possibilities for the English in Bengal in our period, that as far as cotton and silk textiles, saltpetre etc. are concerned (which formed

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[37]Subrahmanyam, *ibid.*, Sushil Chaudhuri notes another such reorientation in the direction of Bengal's trade in the period between 1680 and 1720, when what he calls Bengal's "traditional trade" with the Maldives, Achin, Pegu, Tenasserim, and Gale, almost dried up, while trade with Surat, Madras, and Cambay considerably developed. He attributes this to the decline of the Mughal Empire and the withdrawal of the Mughal nobility from participation in overseas trade, as well as to the decline of the two prominent Bengal-based merchants, Khemchand and Chintaman Shah. The withdrawal of the traditional participation led to the withdrawal of trade along traditionally popular routes; see Sushil Chaudhuri, "Indian Merchants and Shipping in Bengal Ports, Circa 1680-1710" in N.R. Ray & P.N. Chakrabarti (ed.), *Studies in Cultural Development of India (Essays in Honour of Professor Jagdish Narayan Sarkar)*

a major area of interest for the English Company), it was necessary to place advance orders with local merchants and brokers. Thus, in his 'Accompt of the Trade of Hugly' in 1676, Walter Clavell wrote,

> The way of procuring these [goods] is to agree upon Musters [samples] with the Merchants of Hugly, or to send Bannians who can give security to buy them on our accounts in the places where they are made or procurable at cheapest hands.[38]

Edwards, in his 'Accompt of Maulda', also written for Streynsham Master in 1676, indicated that the local textile weavers were long used to meeting advance orders and that too according to specifications provided to them.

> "The weavers very willingly ingage in any new sort of worke, either of white cloth or silk of different lengths, breadthes, fineness, colour, or stripe, is [? if] bespoake .... Money is given out by the merchants ... and used to carry on their Investments all the yeare, but chiefely from February to September ...."[39]

Determined by the monsoon winds, the shipping season

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[38]Walter Clavell, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

[39]Edwards, 'The Accompt of Maulda', in *The Diaries of Streynsham Master, op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 400.

would have been the same in 1500 as in 1676. The simultaneous arrival of several ships immediately seeking goods for lading leading to a sharp increase in prices in the market, which is what necessitated the slow building up of stocks in the slack season, would have applied as much to the earlier periods as to that of English trade. Also, while the English and Dutch traders required textiles to be made to particular specifications to suit the demand in the European market, there is no reason to presume that Asian merchants before them did not place similar orders to meet the peculiar demands in particular Asian markets where they operated. We can, thus, reasonably say that the general instability of prices would have necessitated the building up of stocks of all commodities, while the peculiar demand for commodities like textiles would have required the placing of advance orders. There would have, thus, been in the market dealers who had built up stocks over a period of time, and with whom merchants indulged in on-the-spot bargaining to procure goods at advantageous prices, as well as brokers with whom advance orders would have been placed to procure specific textiles from the weavers.[40] The first kind of mechanism would possibly have been employed to obtain the bulk, low value commodities of our region mostly foodstuffs, while the second would have been used for the procurement of high-value, luxury textiles. We have for the Portuguese traders operations in the markets of Bengal the

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[40]Cf. K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade & Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

sole reference in Manrique who states that they left behind

> with certain local merchants over 200,000 rupees to be utilized in purchasing al kinds of merchandise such as cotton goods, ginghams made of grass, and silks of various shades, as well as sugar, ghi, rice, indigo, long pepper, saltpetre, wax, lac, and many other articles so abundant in the Gangetic provinces.[41]

The reverse would also have worked by the same logic. The sudden flooding of the market, by the arrival of several ships, with commodities from overseas, would have led to a sharp drop in their prices. To avoid selling at unremunerative prices, the overseas traders would have looked for contracts with local merchants to relieve them of their goods at fixed prices, which the latter could them sell in the market after the ships sailed away and prices began to look up. In the *Diaries of Streynsham Master*. There is reference to the English facing difficulties in disposing of their bullion or getting it minted into coins in time to employ it to pay for goods being loaded onto there ships, and thus continually facing a shortage of liquid cash. Master is portrayed as having done the Company a great service by contracting with the merchants Khemchand to supply them with coin in return for their bullion at a fixed rate, thus, getting rid of a great inconvenience to

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[41]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 33.

English trade in Bengal.[42] Similar arrangements would no doubt have been entered into in the earlier periods as well. Manrique, in his account of the Portuguese trade in the Hugli-Satgaon region, says

> All these ... goods [brought into Bengal by the Portuguese traders], the more valuable particularly, are taken by the sodagores, or merchants of the country, to the Court of Agra, where the Padcha generally resides ...[43]

While there is no direct reference to these being the same merchants who regularly dealt with the Portuguese through contracts, it is not unreasonable to surmise as much.

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The geography of Bengal seems to have affected the trade of the region in several ways the chief commercial tract was riverine and several principal ports were upriver. This was possibly a reason why Bengal did not gain prominence in the Indian Ocean trading network for so long. There is a suggestion in the Chinese sources that the fact

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[42] Streynsham Master, *op.cit.*

[43] Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, pp. 31-32.

that the huge Chinese armadas could not sail beyond Chittagong was a discouraging factor in the way of direct trade relations between the two countries, and led to Bengali merchants seeking to trade with the Chinese junks either at entrepots like Calicut or in China itself.[44] We detect a similar tone in Francois Pyrard de Laval who wrote in 1607 that "....I believe it [overseas trade in Bengal] would be still greater, were not the navigation so perilous by reason of the banks and shallows wherewithall this Gulf of Bengal is full.[45] It was only traders who were abe to overcome this problem that developed close trade relations with Bengal. The Portuguese were the first to achieve this - their trade in Bengal "took off" after they acquired a foothold in Hugli, till which point the river was easily navigable in their day, while Bengal too gained importance in the Indian Ocean trading network simultaneously, as already noted. An important impediment in the way of English trade with Bengal was their reluctance to sail their ships up river to Hugli, and their trade too only became important (to the English Company as well as to the economy of Bengal) after they stopped transshipment at Balasore and began to sail directly to Hugli.[46]

Along the riverine tract were strung a series of marts

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[44]Haraprasad Ray, *op.cit.*

[45]Pyrard, *op.cit.*, Ch. XXIV.

[46]Thomas Roe, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India 1615-19: As Narrated in his Journal and Correspondence*, edited by W. Foster, London, 1926, passim; Streynsham Master, *op.cit.*, passim.

or 'ganjs' in which trade was conducted every year. Caesar Frederike writing around 1563 says,

> I was in this Kingdome [of Bengal] foure moneths, whereas many Merchants did buy or fraight boates for their benefits, and with these Barkes they goe up and downe the River of Ganges to Faires, buying their commodity with a great advantage, because that everyday in the weeke they have a Faire, now in one place, and now in another, and I also hired a Barke and went up and downe the River and did my businesse...[47]

Trade by the annual Portuguese voyages to Bengal was conducted with the native merchants at these marts of habitual exchange. Hugli was one such mart at which the Portuguese used to sell their cargo of salt from Hijli. In fact, one of the suggestions for the origin of the name 'Hugli' is based on this trading practice. The Persian word 'ganj' appears in Father Cabral's narrative as 'chandeu - gandja'[48] A storehouse of salt, or any other commodity, is called in Bengali a 'gola', and this word in the mouth of the Portuguese perhaps became 'o golim', 'o' being the definite article in the Portuguese language, and a nasal suffix being added to most Indian place names. The Bengalis, in turn, may have turned 'o-goli' into 'Hugli'.[49]

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[47]Caesar Fredericke, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

[48]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Appendix, 'The Fall of Hugli, Vol. II, p. 392.

[49]J.N. Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 317-328.

Betor, Chitpore, and Sutanuti are other such marts which find mention in the Portuguese sources,[50] where the Portuguese goods were stored in thatched houses of straw or bamboo and sold or exchanged in the big local markets. These storehouses were burnt at the end of every trading season by the Portuguese before their departure, and reconstructed anew on their arrival at the beginning of the next season.[51]

The riverine setting allowed the Portuguese traders to penetrate quite far inland into the region. Letters from the English agent Robert Hughes, who was sent from Agra to Patna to investigate the possibilities of trade and to set up a factory there in 1620, refer to the Portuguese commercial presence as far inland as Patna. In a letter dated July 12, 1620 written to the President and Council at Surat, Hughes writes,

> There are some Portingalls at present in towne, and more are latlye gon for theire portes in Bengala; into whose trafiqe I have made enquirye, and gather that they usialye bringe vendable here all sortes of spices and silke stufes of Chyna, tyne and some jewellers ware; in lewe where of theye transporte course carpets of Junapoore [Jaunpur], ambertyes, cassaes, and some

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[50]Campos, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

[51]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 28; Caesar Frederike, *op.cit.*, p. 135.

silke."[52]

In another letter to the same, dated August 6, 1620, Hughes complains of his inability to procure enough "ambirtyes" from the weavers of

> Lackhoure" [Lukhawur, some 30 miles south of Patna], as "the rain have hindered the weavers from bringing in their goods, and there are latlye come up divers frigitts of Portingalls from Sutgonge whose merchants buye up all theye can laye hand of."[53]

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A Conglomerate of Merchants

An important feature of trade in Bengal throughout our period is the very mixed nature of the elements participating in it, a feature that runs like a thread through all our accounts. Varthema, who paid a passing visit to Bengal in 1505, came from Tenasserim in a ship belonging to one of the native merchants of that region. He had a Persian companion, while he met two Christian merchants from the city of Sarnau in Cathay, in the city of "Benghalla" the identification of which remains disputed.[54]

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[52]William Foster (ed.), *English Factories in India, 1618-21*, Oxford, 1906, p. 194.

[53]*Ibid.*, p. 197.

[54]Ludovico di Varthema, *Travels*, reproduced in J.N. Dasgupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century*, Calcutta, 1914.

Barbosa talks of Bengal's trade being in the hands of Muslim merchants ("The Moors dwell in the seaports where there is great traffic in goods of many kinds and sailing of ships both great and small to many countries),[55] by which he means both local Muslims as well as foreigners ("there dwell there as well strangers from many lands, such as Arabs, Persians Abexis and Indians).[56] Caesar Frederike refers to "many Merchants" trading in and around Satgaon where "every yeere they lade thirtie or five and thirtie ships, great and small..." Linschoten tells us that besides the Portuguese, "there is great trafficke used in those partes by divers ships [and marchants], which all the year divers times both go to and from all the Orientall parts."[57] And as late as 1669, Thomas Bowrey refers to "the two fine European Factories, namely the English and Dutch" [58] in Hugli, in addition to which "there are many Moor merchants there who carry on a great trade. There are also a number of Idolators, Benjanes and Gentives, who live peaceably under the government of the Moors."[59] By this time, however, the Portuguese trade from Bengal had declined greatly, and was usually freighted aboard Moor and English and Dutch shipping.[60]

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[55]Barbosa, *op.cit.*, pp. 135-148.

[56]*Ibid.*

[57]Linschoten, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 97.

[58]Bowrey, *op.cit.*, p. 167.

[59]Schouten quoted in Bowrey, *op.cit.*, p. 168, f.n. 2.

[60]The episode of de Soito, Streynsham Master, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, pp. 175-185.

There is little indication in our sources of indigenous trading elements suffering displacement and economic decline as a result of the advent of the new European traders. There is, on the other hand, allusion to their continued prosperity and even a hint that the Portuguese trade in fact proved beneficial to the local merchants. The indigenous merchants would no doubt have profited, in their role as middlemen and inland traders, from the increased trade of the province with the coming of the Portuguese. Thus, Manrique mentions that after a few years of coming to the region only during the trading season, when some of the Portuguese traders stayed on for one or two years at a stretch,"the natives" as well as "the Moorish Siguidar, who governed that district," encouraged them to establish permanent settlements there.[61] Again, when the settlement of Hugli was founded in 1579-80, the Augustinian mission which was sent to the new settlement was welcomed by Christians and Moors alike, "the pagans for their own private reasons, mainly, indeed, because they knew the Portuguese would not stay without their priests."[62] Once again, he refers to Akbar and Jahangir conferring lands on the Augustinian Brethren, in the hope that the presence of the Brethren would attract more Christian merchants to their country. There is even a suggestion that if the presence of the missionaries did not lead to an increase in trade, and if the missionaries did not resort

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[61]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, pp. 28-29.

[62]*Ibid.*, p. 41.

to trade themselves, they were punished and expelled from the lands formerly conferred on them.[63]

Father Cabral, in his account of the fall of Hugli in 1632, mentions that in addition to the Portuguese at Hugli who were well to do, there were twelve or thirteen natives in possession of considerable capital.[64] It is only in this context that we can make sense of Manrique's description of Asaf Khan arguing in favour of the Portuguese traders and trying to prevent Shah Jahan from attacking Hugli in 1632, and his intervening to prevent the execution of the four Portuguese priests who were among those taken captive after the siege. Manrique also mentions "a friendly Moor merchant" who gave the Portuguese head priest of Hugli three thousand rupees to arrange the flight of the Portuguese captives from Agra, where they were being detained, to "Christian territory"[65] and "a Heathen Merchant ... who was a friend of the Father [Cabral]" coming to treat him secretly after he had incurred terrible wounds inflicted on him by the officers of the state.[66]

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[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

[64] *Ibid.*, Appendix to Vol.II, *op.cit.*

[65] *Ibid.*, Vol.II, p. 331.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 337.

II. Pirates, Raiders, and Slave-traders

All the Portuguese in Bengal were not merchants; at least trade was not the only facet to their activities in the region. In terms of the impression that they made on the indigenous population, they are remembered more often for their non-mercantile activities. The contemporary perception of the Portuguese in Bengal is very clear in our sources - based on the activities they indulged in, the settlers in the area around Hugli were considered different from their brethren in eastern Bengal, around Chittagong, Dianga, Sandwip etc. This impression is well preserved in the typical reaction of two Bengalis to Manrique and his companions, whom they came across somewhere along the riverine stretch between Bengal and Orissa in 1629. While Manrique was travelling through Bengal on his way back from Arakan and looking for assistance to reach Banja in Hijli district, he encountered these Bengalis in a small boat. When he approached them to ask for help,

> ...seeing that two of us were Portuguese, they were so put out believing that we were soldiers from Chatigan, that they came weeping ashore and threw themselves at our feet, being certain that they would be made slaves .... On discovering their false impression we said what was necessary to reassure them: that we were not the people they took us for, but were merchants from Ugulim [Hugli] who were traveling from that port to Banja .... On hearing this account, and on our also saying that we wished to go to Banja, they were fully

reassured...[67]

In the official understanding of the Mughal state, too, there were two different categories of Portuguese residing in different settlements of the region. Those who lived at Chittagong were "the Feringis [who] engaged in piracy, kidnapping and plundering the inhabitants of Bengal."[68] On the other hand, in "the port of Ladhikol [Luricul], which is near Dacca, ... Feringi merchants engaged in the salt trade, live."[69] Before launching the attack on Chittagong, Shaista Khan asked these Portuguese settlers residing at Luricul, Hugli and Tamluk to "write to their brethren, the pirates of Chatgaon, offering assurances and hopes of imperial favours and rewards, and thus make them come and enter the Mughal service."[70] While the Portuguese residing at Chittagong were, thus, viewed as a menacing, piratical element, those at Hugli, Luricul and Tamluk were seen as a peaceful, law-abiding set whose services could be profitably enlisted to tame the nuisance of their brethren in the east.

These Portuguese inhabitants of the Chittagong area

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[67]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, pp. 405-406.

[68]Shihabuddin Talish, *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, extracts translated by J.N. Sarkar, 'The Conquest of Chatgaon, 1666 A.D.' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (henceforth *J.A.S.B.*), Vol.III, New Series, No.6, June 1907, p. 406.

[69]*Ibid.*,p. 407.

[70]*Ibid.*, pp. 407-408.

were "renegades [who] pursued no other trade than that of rapine and piracy."[71] They were in league with the Magh raja of Arakan - they "lived at Chatgaon under the protection of the zemindar (sic) of Arracan, giving half their booty from Bengal to him."[72] Both Bernier and the *Fathiya-i ibriyya* give a graphic description of the doings of these pirates.

> From the reign of the Emperor Akbar, when Bengal was annexed to the Mughal empire, to the time of the conquest of Chatgaon during the viceroyalty of Shaista Khan, Arracan pirates both Magh and Feringi used constantly to [come] by the water-route and plunder Bengal.[73]

According to Manrique, "they usually made these general attacks three or four times in the year, irrespective of minor raids which went on most of the year..."[74]

> They scoured the neighbouring seas in light galleys, called *galleasses*, entered the numerous arms and branches of the *Ganges*, ravaged the islands of *Lower Bengale*, and, often penetrating forty or fifty leagues up the country, surprised and carried away the entire

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[71]Francois Bernies, *Travels in the Mogol Empire, A.D. 1656-1668*, translated by Archibald Constable, London, 1914, p. 175.

[72]*Fathiya-i ibriyya, op.cit.*, pp. 406-407.

[73]*Ibid.*, some more extracts translated by J.N. Sarkar, 'The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon, 1665 A.D.' *J.A.S.B.*, Vol.III, New Series, No.6, June 1907,p. 422.

[74]Manrique, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

population of villages on market days, and at times when the inhabitants were assembled for the celebration of a marriage or some other festival. The marauders made slaves of their unhappy captives and burnt whatever could not be removed. It is owing to these repeated depredations that we see so many fine islands at the mouth of the Ganges, formerly thickly peopled, now entirely deserted by human beings, and becoming the desolate lairs of tigers and other wild beasts."[75]

These pirates entered Bengal by the riverine route.

When the pirates came from Chatgaon to molest Bengal, they passed by Bhalua, a part of the Imperial dominions, on the right, and the island of Sondip, ... on the left, and reached the village of Sangram-gar. [From this point] if they wished to plunder Jessore, Hughli, and Bhusna, they moved up the Ganges; if they wanted to raid Bikrampur, Sonargaon and Dacca, they proceeded up the Brahmaputra.[76]

They plundered the towns and villages all along this watery belt, Jessore, Selimabad, Bakla, Hijli and Orissa being the chief hunting grounds.[77]

In their own words -

Our salary was the Imperial dominion! We considered

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[75]Bernier, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

[76]*Fathiya-i ibriyya, op.cit.*, pp. 406-407.

[77]Manrique, *op.cit*, Vol.I,p. 145, f.n. 19.

> the whole of Bengal as our jagir. All the twelve months of the year we made our collection [i.e. booty] without trouble. We had not to bother ourselves about *'amlas* and *amins*; nor had we to render accounts and balances to anybody. Passage over water was our [land] survey. We never slackened the enhancement of our rent, *viz.*, booty. For years we left no arrears of [this] revenue. We have with us papers of the division of the booty village by village for the last forty years."[78]

This booty was mostly in the form of the indigenous population that was captured and enslaved by them.

> They carried off the Hindus and Muslims, male and female, great and small, few and many, that they could seize, pierced the palms of their hands, passed thin canes through the holes, and threw them one above another under the deck of their ships."[79]

Bernier tells us that the aged among the captives, for whom these pirates had no use were set free for a price at the site where they had been captured itself. Thus, "it was usual to se young persons, who had saved themselves by timely flight, endeavouring today to redeem the parent who had been made captive yesterday.[80] The rest, "those who were not disabled by age,"[81] the pirates took back to their own

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[78] *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, 'The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon', *op.cit.*, p. 424.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 422.

[80] Bernier, *op.cit.*, pp. 175-176.

[81] *Ibid.*

settlements, where they employed them "in tillage and other hard tasks, according to their power."[82] The others were sold to the Portuguese of Goa, Ceylon, San Thome, Hugli and other places,[83] and to the Dutch, English and French merchants at the ports of the Deccan.[84]

In the Bengal region, there was a large slave market "in the vicinity of the island of *Galles*, near Cape *das Palmas*."[85] The *Fathiya-i ibriyya* talks of slave markets at Tamluk and Balasore.

> Sometimes they brought the captives for sale at a high price to Tamluk and the port of Baleswar [Balasore] which is part of the Imperial dominions and a dependency of the province of Orissa. The manner of the sale was this: - The wretches used to bring the prisoners in their ships, anchor at a short distance from the shore off Tamluk or Baleswar, and send a man ashore with the news. The local officers, fearing lest the pirates should commit any depredation or kidnapping there, stood on the shore with a number of followers, and sent a man with a sum of money to the pirates. If the terms were satisfactory the pirates took the money and sent the prisoners with the man.[86]

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[82] *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, 'The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon', *op.cit.*, p. 422.

[83] Bernier, *op.cit.*, pp. 175-176.

[84] *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, 'The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon,' *op.cit.*, p. 422.

[85] Bernier, *op.cit.*, p. 176.

[86] *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, 'The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon, *op.cit.*, p. 422.

Some of these enslaved Bengalis were employed in these prosperous Portuguese settlements, where they swelled the population of these enclaves and greatly outnumbered the Portuguese settlers themselves. In Hugli, for example, in 1632 there were only a little over three hundred whites and about sixty or seventy white women.[87] The rest of the population was composed of natives and slaves.[88] We can attempt a rough estimate of their numbers. About 2800 natives of the country and slaves survived the siege of 1632; of the numbers who died Father Cabral kept no account.[89] Thus, according to this estimate there seem to have been at least ten coloured people and slaves for every one white Portuguese in Hugli. The *Badshahnama*, however, gives a much larger figure for the numbers of slaves inhabiting Hugli. After the Mughal victory of 1632, "nearly 10,000 inhabitants of the neighbouring country who had been kept in confinement by these tyrants were set at liberty."[90]

Most of these slaves in the Portuguese enclaves were concubines of their white masters and employed as domestic servants in their households. They included "their black women, their clever cooks, their dancing-girls, their

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[87]Cbrl, 'The Fall of Hugli', *op.cit.*, pp. 399, 419.

[88]*Ibid.*, p. 399.

[89]*Ibid.*, pp. 418-419.

[90]Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Badshahnama*, extracts translated by H.M. Elliot & J. Dowson, *The History of India as told by its Own Historians*, London, 1877, Vol.VII, p. 35.

confectioners, their seamstresses, and so on." The others were sold in slave markets overseas. Thus, slaves formed one of the important commodities of export from Bengal in our period (see Section I, Table 1). At least one of the areas of export would have been south-east Asia, where there seems to have been a slave market in Sumatra. They were also "sent to different parts of India" and supplied to the galleys of the Magh raja of Arakan.[91]

Despite the demarcation in contemporary perception between the activities of the Portuguese pirates of the Chittagong area and the more straightforward merchants of western Bengal, there was also a close association between the two. Several important slave markets in the region were located at or near the Portuguese settlements - at Hugli, Balasor, Tamluk and the "island of *Galles* near Point Palmyras. The 'merchant' residents of these settlements were important buyers of these slaves - they were employed in their own households - and they were key figures in the whole slave trade from Bengal. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Portuguese settled at Hugli thus got implicated in the slaving activities of the Portuguese and Magh raiders in the east. The Hugli settlers were accused of carrying on "commerce [in slaves] openly with the

[91]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p. 316; Cabral, 'The Fall of Hugli', *op.cit.*, p. 395.

Portuguese of Dianga,"[92] of "supplying the Magh King ... with men for his galleys, with powder, saltpetre, and ammunitions," and of actually aiding the Magh King in his raid of the Murshidabad area in 1631.[93] These were among the more important causes for the Mughal attack on Hugli in 1632.[94]

It seems, according to the *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, that only the Portuguese pirates sold their prisoners thus in these marts. "But the Maghs employed all their captives in agriculture and other kinds of service."[95] This is corroborated with evidence from Manrique who found Christian slaves, who had been taken prisoner in the Mughal dominions, residing in the villages of Arakan.[96] Several slaves filled the galleys of the Magh raja, while others were employed to tend his elephants.[97] Manrique claimed that there were lands in the Kingdom of Arakan "left... half depopulated by the heavy losses he [the King of Arakan]

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[92]Manrique, *ibid.*, p. 316.

[93]Cabral, 'The Fall of Hugli', *op.cit.*, p. 395.

[94]Cf. the various reasons for Shah Jahan's seige of Hugli given in Campos, *op.cit.*, pp. 128-132. Basing himself on Manrique & Fr. Cabral, Campos gives a number of reasons for the seige, including the refusal of the Portuguese at Hugli to help Prince Khurram in his revolt against the Emperor Jahangir, their failure to send to Agra the customary embassy of felicitation on his accession, and their seizure of two servants of the Empress Mumtaz Mahal. We believe however, that the seige of 1632 was inspired really by the piracy and general lawlessness that was being created by the Portuguese in Bengal, on the eastern edge of the Mughal empire.

[95]*Fathiya-i ibriyya*, 'The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon', *op.cit.*, p. 422.

[96]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 139.

[97]*Ibid.*, p. 158.

incurred in various wars with the Mogars [Mughals], Asarams [Assamese], and Pegus," which were repopulated by the Portuguese pirates who brought "whole towns and villages over [from Bengal], so that in the course of time over eleven thousand families were settled down."[98] In fact, Manrique estimates that in the five years of his stay in Arakan (1629-35), the Portuguese and Magh slave-raiders brought to Dianga and Angaṛacale about 18,000 people from Bengal.[99] Thus, the *Fathiya-i ibriyya* laments -

> As they [the Portuguese and Maghs] for a long time continually practised piracy, their country prospered, and their number increased, while Bengal daily became more and more desolate, less and less able to resist and fight them. Not a householder was left on both sides of the rivers on their track from Dacca to Chatgaon."[100]

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The Church seems to have been fully aware and wholly supportive of this traffic in slaves conducted by its flock in the Bengal-Arakan region. The Friar Manrique willingly held fort for the Portuguese settled at Dianga when an

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[98] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 286.

[100] *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, 'The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon', *op.cit.*, p. 422.

emergency arose in 1629 because he knew that their leaders "had gone off [in search of slaves] to attack the principality of Jassor and would not return for thirty to forty days."[101] The missionaries saw in these slave-raiding expeditions the opportunity to foster their own proselytizing activities. Thus, they viewed every Bengali captured by the Magh and Portuguese pirates as one more soul saved for God and eagerly converted him, seeing nothing unChristian in the fact that these were free men simultaneously being sold into slavery. Thus, Manrique matter-of-factly states that some eighteen thousand Bengali captives were brought to the ports of Dianga and Angaracale during the five years that he spent in the Kingdom of Arakan (1629-35), and proudly proclaims that he, along with a colleague, was able to baptize eleven thousand four hundred and seven persons from among them.[102] It is in this context that we should understand the vociferous protests of the missionaries at Hugli against the surrender to the Mughal army of the Christian slaves inhabiting the settlement in 1632[103] - they saw it as a reversal of the good work of conversion that they had achieved, while being conveniently blind to the sub-human state of slavery that these people had been reduced to in the process.

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[101]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p.92.

[102]*Ibid.*, p. 286.

[103]Cabral, 'The Fall of Hugli', *op.cit.*, p. 404.

This raiding of the Mughal domain and taking captive of any people with whom the Portuguese settled in Bengal came into contact was pronounced by the Provincial Council at Goa to be just, since the Mogors were not only invaders and tyrannical usurpers but also enemies of Christianity. For they desire to extirpate it [Christianity] wholly from the Orient, where there should be none but Mussuleymans..."[104] The order of the Church itself, thus, seems to have found a justification for this traffic in human beings, that was the mainstay of large numbers of its own people in Bengal, by carrying over to this region and period the spirit of the crusades. Individual missionaries in the field, meanwhile, were able to find even more basic reasons in the light of which, by enslaving the indigenous population, the Portuguese in Bengal were seen to be really rendering unto them their just deserts.

> The Bengalas are a very languid race and pusillanimous, given up, as most Asiatic peoples are to self interest. The Bengalas are, therefore, mean-spirited and cowardly, and *hence they easily accustom themselves to captivity and slavery* [emphasis added]. To be well and successfully served by them they should be treated rather with harshness than mildness; indeed this is so true that they have a very common saying, *Mare Tacur, na mare Cucur* [Hindi - *Mare Thakur; na mare, kukkur*], which means in our tongue, "He who chastises is Lord, he who does not is a cur." From

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[104]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 285.

this the curious Reader can form an opinion as to the nature of this people.[105]

As he can also of the prejudices and partialities of the overseas Church and its missionaries in the field, who in their incarnation as men of God were ultimately, more strongly, only men.[106]

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III. Soldiers

A large number of the Portuguese settled in Bengal were mercenaries employed by the various political powers in the region. The Portuguese presence in Asia was, in any case, largely militaristic in nature. Almost all the men who left Lisbon for Asia were soldiers in the service of the Portuguese Crown. In the settlements of the *Estado da India* the soldiers (*soldados*) were a different category and more numerous than the married settlers (*casados*).[107] Those among these single and footloose elements who left the fold

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[105] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[106] Our findings on the attitude of the Church towards slavery in Bengal fit in general, with C.R. Boxer's comments on the reaction of the Church towards the slave trade in Africa, where not only did it sanction this traffic in human beings, but actuallyindulged in it itself. The Church, in fact, "saw nothing incongruous or immoral in the fact tht the ecclesiastical establishments in Sao Tome, Congo, and Angola were maintained almost entirely from the profits of the slave - trade." C.R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415-1825*, Oxford, 1963, p. 9.

[107] See C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, op.cit.*, p. 296.

of the *Estado* and sought to make a future in Asia on their own, thus, flowed quite naturally into the mould of mercenaries. Their fighting skills were well-appreciated; their naval capability has already been taken note of; in the context of the state of political turmoil that our region was in in this period, the Portuguese soldiers and seamen were eagerly sought out by almost all the polities struggling with each other for supremacy.

It was also in their incarnation as soldiers that the Portuguese in the Bengal-Arakan region were able to carve out a presence for themselves. Their military prowess was well-recognised - we, thus, have references to their being in the employ of the whole pantheon of powers in the region, ranging from the smaller chieftains to the great Mughal. Thus, when Udayaditya, son of Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore, one of the Bara Bhuiyas of Bengal, was under attack by the Mughal forces and was about to be captured,

> from among the flying boats of Udayaditya one *piara*, four *ghurabs* and one *machua* which carried some Firingis, proved loyal to their master and cast anchor, thus obstructing the way of six imperial boats.[108]

Portuguese mercenary soldiers were part of the Mughal forces in Bengal too. The expedition that was sent to

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[108]Shitab Khan (Mirza Nathan), *Baharistan-i Ghaybi*, translated by M.I. Borah, 2 Vols, Gauhati, 1936, Vol.I, p. 129.

suppress a rebellion in Kuntaghat in the Kuch country included "one hundred and forty Firingis" who were "expert matchlockmen."[109] Once again, the imperial forces in Bengal in confrontation with Prince Khurram in rebellion against the Emperor Jahangir included Portuguese soldiers -

> "... Ibrahim Khan [the Governor of Bengal], sent Mir Shams [against Prince Khurram's forces] with a fleet of three hundred swift war-boats and also a large number of *Jaliya* boats of the Firingis under the command of Manmil in Mir Shams' company...."[110]

More significantly, the contemporary accounts often convey the impresion that the Portuguese mercenary soldiers formed the all-important part of the forces of the ruler in whose employ they might be, that made a crucial difference in a battle, and even in the balance of power in the region. Thus,

> The King of *Rakan* [Arakan], who lived in perpetual dread of the *Mogol*, kept these foreigners as a species of advanced guard, for the protection of his frontier, permitting them to occupy a seaport called *Chatigon*, and making them grants of land.[111]

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[109] *Ibid.*, Vol.II, p. 643.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 692.

[111] Bernier, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

The effectiveness of this advance-guard was proven when the King of Arakan was able to repulse two attacks of the Mughals on Chittagong. Credit for his success was given to the Portuguese soldiers in his employ -

> Had it not, indeed, been for the seven hundred and fifty Portuguese whom the Magh ruler had in his pay the Mogors would on both occasions have seized Chatigan.[112]

Perhaps it was a realization of this and the location of the strength of the Arakanese king in his Firingi contingent that led Shaista Khan to woo these Portuguese soldiers over to the Mughal side before launching his attack on Chittagong. And perhaps it was not an unrelated fact that for the first time after several attempts to capture Chittagong from the king of Arakan the Mughals were successful in doing so in 1666.[113]

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[112]Manrique, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 285.

[113]For the role of the Portuguese soldiers in the Mughal conquest of Chittagong in 1666, see *Fathiya-i ibriyya*, 'The Conquest of Chittagong', *op.cit.*

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

It would be rather presumptuous to claim to have come to a conclusion at this stage in one's research. This dissertation is really an *introduction* to a study of the Portuguese as the first in a series of Europeans to venture into Asia in early modern times. It is as European pioneers in Asia that the Portuguese have really attracted the notice of historians. Seen as effecting a breach in the structure of the Asian trading system that preceded them, the Portuguese have been understood to have laid the foundations of a new structure that the Dutch and English trading companies were subsequently able to build on. In the commercial history of the Indian Ocean, the 16th century, labelled the 'Iberian century', is seen to belong to the Portuguese.

We have attempted to understand the Portuguese presence in Bengal in the 16th and 17th centuries. We have tried to unravel the makeup of 'the Portuguese' in the region and to understand the complex relationship between its many strands, that sheds light on the nature of the Portuguese enterprise in Asia in general terms. We find that in more ways than one, they were an important new element in the region. They had a significant participation in its trade, at a local, regional and long-distance level.

They were a naval-militaristic force to be reckoned with, and were among the contenders for political power. They were notorious for their acts of piracy and for a flourishing traffic in human beings.

Nevertheless, the importance of the Portuguese in Bengal in the 16th and 17th centuries should not be overplayed. In none of their claims to fame were they the exclusive - or even the dominant - operators on the scene. They did not take over the entire trade of Bengal to the exclusion of the other merchants - they wre merely yet another participant; an important participant, no doubt, but ultimately only one more. As a political power, they were again just another contender among the many on the political scene in 16th century Bengal, and not even the most successful one at that. As raiders and slave-traders, they were in league with the Maghs, and ultimately it was the Maghs who were perceived as the main operators, the Portuguese being in the position of an accomplice element in their employ. Thus, the 16th century was not the "Iberian century" as far as Bengal is concerned; nevertheless, the Portuguese, in their position as one among the several, formed a significant element, without which no history of medieval Bengal can be regarded as complete.

After 1632, references to the Portuguese comercial activity in Bengal simply peter out. By 1666, their more

notorious piracy, raids and slave-trade had likewise been dealt with with a firm hand. Many of the "Feringi pirates of Chatgaon" had been resettled towards the west of Bengal, away from the undesirable influence of the unscrupulous Maghs and their raja. By the last quarter of the 17th century there were still numerous Portuguese and mesticos resident in the region - "... there are noe lesse than twenty thousand Frangues of all Sorts in the Kingdom of Bengala, and above half of them inhabit near Hugli River"[1]; by now, however, their commercial importance had waned, while the wilder aspects of their presence had been tamed. In 1676,

> The Portuguez, though numerous in Hugly, yett are reduced to a very low and meane Condition, their trade not worth mentioning, their Subsistance being to be entertained in the Mogulls pay as Souldiers.
>
> They knit Stockins of Silke and Cotton; they bake bread for the English and Dutch Fctories and particularly dwellinge houses, and for their Ships and Vessels; they make many Sorts of Sweetmeats, vizt. Mangoe, Orange, Lemon, Ginger, Mirabolins, Ringo Roots [dringo roots] &c. Severall Sorts of Achar, as Mangoe, Bamboo, Lemon, &c. very good and Cheape. Many of the men Use the Sea in English or Moors Ships and Vessels, Soe that these people live very happily, better then in most places in Asia, all Sorts of provisions beinge here very Cheape.... this Kingdome is soe well inhabited Epecially by Foraigners, which maketh Bernyer's [Bernier's] Opinion of it to be to the

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[1] Walter Clavell, 'The Accompt of the Trade of Hugly' in Streynsham Master, *The Diaries of Streynsham Master, 1675-1680*, edited by R.C. Temple, 2 Vols., London, 1911, Vol. II, p. 322.

purpose - That the Kingdome of Bengala hath many dores into it, and but one out of it, which is very true."[2]

What lingered on of the Portuguese in Bengal was this whole Indo-Portuguese community settled in the region that grew in its ambit with a large amount of interaction on the cultural plane. More tangibly, there stands Bandel Convent, which, being one common meeting point for the King, the *fidalgo*, and the *arrenegado*, epitomised the curious mix of elements that constituted the Portuguese presence in Bengal (as in Asia, as a whole). Portugal's claim to a place in Asian history rests ultimately on its role in "transfer[ring] the ways of the West to the East."[3] And conversely, being the first carriers of information and impressions of the East to the West, which were available for a long period of time, in the early modern world, in the Portuguese language.

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[2] *Ibid.*

[3] B.W. Diffie & G.D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580* (Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion, Vol. I), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 435.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

A word about the sources. I have examined a broad spectrum of the accounts of travellers who visited Bengal at some point of time in the 16th and 17th centuries. These can be classified into Portuguese and non-Portuguese writings. Among the former, in chronological order, are the accounts of Duarte Barbosa (1500-1517/18) an anonymous account of a Portuguese expedition up the Ganges to the capital of the Sultanate of Bengal at Gaur in 1521 (translated by G. Bouchon & L.F. Thomaz, Paris, 1988), João de Barros (1520-1570), and the friar Manrique (1629-1643). The latter include a host of writings - Varthema (c. 1505), Caesar Frederike (1563), Ralph Fitch (1583-1591), Linschoten (1583-1589), Pyrard de Laval (c. 1607), Thomas Roe (1615-1619), Pelsart (1629), Bernier (1656-1668), Thomas Bowrey (1669-1679), Streynsham Master (1676-1677) and William Hedges (1681-1687). These narratives thus cover the entire period under survey. For information on the economy of Bengal and its trade they have been supplemented by English Factory Records between 1600 and 1680-81.

I have also examined the collection of writings of Father H. Hosten, a Jesuit writing in the beginning of the 20th century. Father Hosten is a well-known authority on the history of the Church in India. The collection is in two parts. The first part consist of 43 compiled volumes of his published works, mostly articles which originally appeared in various issues of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, the *Catholic Herald of India*, the *Catholic Review*, etc. in the beginning of this century. The second part consists of several boxes of his papers & unpublished works. For our interest the collection has the translations of several Jesuit letters of the Bengal

mission. It also has field reports written by Father Hosten with translations of inscriptions on tomb stones and in churches built by the Portuguese in Bengal.

As far as indigenous perceptions are concerned, I have relied on the translations of contemporaneous Persian sources that touch upon Bengal and the Portuguese association with the region. Once again, they span our entire period, spilling out on both sides into the 15th and 18th centuries.

It may seem surprising that I have ventured into research on the Portuguese without ultilizing the vast store of source material in Portuguese language, both published and available in the Goa archives. The excuse of the handicap of language is an excusable one for a serious researcher; I can only submit that I have spent the last two years learning the language. I am only too aware of the very tentative nature of many of the suggestions that I have made. It may be noted that I have refrained from drawing conclusions; as a longer project I hope to put my hypotheses to test in the light of Portuguese source material.

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