Unlike the other better known Portuguese settlements in the region, Hugli was not associated with the career of a particular adventurer. In that sense its own history was not limited to the capacities, vision and fortunes of any single individual. It was undoubtedly the largest and the longest-lasting among the Portuguese settlements in Bengal. Though Hugli later metamorphosed into the metropolitan port where the Dutch and the English settled, it clearly originated as a Portuguese trading enclave. Located “sixty leagues inland from the sea” originally it was only a salt-market1 to which Portuguese traders came to conduct seasonal trade from temporary straw-and-thatch settlements which formed the norm of their mercantile activity in the western Gangetic delta in the middle of the 16th century.2 It seems to have gradually taken over from the earlier port of Satgaon, situated slightly upriver, which was the chief port of Bengal in this part of the delta - the Porto Pequeno of the Portuguese sources - till about 1565. In the course of the century the harbour of Satgaon began to silt up, so that in 1532 João de Barros found it “not...so convenient for the entrance and departure of ships.”3 By 1565, the larger ships had stopped going to the port and anchored downstream at Betor.4

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4 Samuel Purchas, ‘Extracts of Master Caesar Frederike his eighteen years Indian observations’ in Hakhuutus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrims, 20 vols., Glasgow, 1905, Vol. X, pp113-4.
fallout of these general developments.

**Origin and growth of Hugli**

Most of the Persian accounts pertaining to the origin of the Portuguese settlement at Hugli are ambiguous and generic in nature. We know definitely from Friar Manrique that it was founded on the basis of an imperial farman from Akbar. He clearly indicates that Akbar’s interest in these Portuguese merchants who came to Hugli every year from all over Asia, chiefly Goa, Malacca, Ceylon and China, stemmed from their reputation as formidable maritime merchants who commanded a very profitable trade. In fact, the Mughal shiqdar of that district had long since realized this and had for some time been trying to befriend them and persuade them to settle there. The vast scale of their trading activities, which were still conducted in a seasonal manner from temporary installations, can be gauged from the fact that they had given out money advances amounting to over two hundred thousand rupees to the local merchants in 1577, to acquire goods prior to their return the following season.\(^5\)

It was in this context that Akbar sent word, summoning the Portuguese merchants from Hugli to his court. The Portuguese deputation to Fatehpur Sikri was led by one Pedro Tavares, the recipient of the Crown voyage from Goa to Satgaon in 1578. Subsequently the emperor conferred a farman allowing the Portuguese to choose the site of the construction of their proposed settlement at Hugli and also granted them some

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\(^5\) Manrique, I, pp. 28-29.
adjoining lands to support their establishment. The Portuguese settlement at Hugli was, thus, formally founded around 1579-80 with imperial sanction, and the viceroy at Goa and the bishop at Cochin were immediately informed.

The early settlers at Hugli were, described as “highway robbers and men of loose lives,” who then actively encouraged others like themselves to come and settle there. The ‘captain’ of the settlement, presumably the same Pedro Tavares, “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 East.” In addition, the plentiful availability of foodstuffs in Bengal proved very attractive to casados (married settlers) from various parts of the Estado da Índia. They moved with their families in increasing numbers, year after year, to escape the food shortages that the Estado settlements often faced, “for famine is the scourge of [the Estado da] India.”

Secondly, Hugli also witnessed the immigration of local merchants and working elements in large numbers due to the economic opportunities it afforded. Hugli under the Portuguese grew into a prosperous and vibrant hub that attracted “Musulmans and Hindus of all tribes…in pursuit of a livelihood…[who] took up their

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6 Ibid, pp. 34-38, Manrique’s account is corroborated by the Akbar Nama in which Partab Tar Feringhi’s audience with the emperor is recorded under the 23rd regual year (1579), while he is noticed as the Portuguese governor of Hugli in the 25th regnal year, (1581), Abul Fazl, Akbar Nama, (tr.) H. Beveridge, 3 vols, New Delhi, 1979 (reprint), Vol. III, pp. 349-50, pp. 469.

7 Manrique, pp. 37-38

8 Ibid, pp. 40-41.

9 ‘The Fall of Hugli,’ p. 393.
abode there."\textsuperscript{10} The non-Portuguese part of the population was very large and came to be composed of all hues of the spectrum, from "12 or 13 native [merchants] in possession of large capital" to "the many more .... who ate the rice of the Portuguese.... Their black women, their clever cooks, their dancing girls, their confectioners, their seamstresses and so on."\textsuperscript{11}

Hugli soon became the premier settlement of the Portuguese in Bengal as indicated by numerous contemporary accounts. While it is difficult to determine the exact strength of its population, yet we do get the sense that it was numerically much larger than any of the other settlements in the region. Fr. Fernão Guerreiro, writing in 1603-04 reckoned that Hugli had a population of 5000 of which 2500 were Portuguese, both pure and of mixed blood.\textsuperscript{12} Fr. Joseph de Castro, in a letter from Agra in 1638 said that there were 12,000 Christians at Hugli before the siege of 1632.\textsuperscript{13} Augustinian records place the figure at 7000 Christian residents of Hugli plus a large number of foreign merchants who were at the port at the time.\textsuperscript{14} The composite population of the town, taking into account the Indian mercantile elements and above all the huge assortment of artisans and working groups would have been much larger.

\textsuperscript{10} Khafi Khan, \textit{Muntakhabu-i Lubab}, (tr.) Elliot & Dowson, \textit{History of India as told by its own Historians}, London, 1877, Vol. VII, pp. 207-533, p. 211.

\textsuperscript{11} "The Fall of Hugli", pp. 397, 405.

\textsuperscript{12} Fr. Fernão Guerreiro, Annual Relation for 1602-03, tr. by H. Hosten, \textit{Catholic Herald of India}, 8.1.1919, p. 35; Fr. Fernão Guerreiro’s Annual Relation for 1604-05, Hosten Collection, Vidyajyoti Library, Delhi, ‘Bengal XVI, XVII’, ms. 9.


\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 40.
Of these we have some indication of the white Portuguese component of the population. Father Cabral estimates that in 1632 the captain of Hugli, Manoel de Azevedo, had available about 300 white Portuguese and about 6-700 able-bodied native Christian men to defend the city from the siege laid to it by the Mughal forces.\textsuperscript{15} Even if we presume that at least as many of the resident Portuguese had gone overseas to trade at the time, the white male population could not have been more than 6-700, which itself would be a liberal estimate. Hugli also had a fairly large number of white women. 60 or 70 of them were among the 3000 people who took refuge at Sagar island after the city fell, while there seem to have been many more who died. Thus, Fr. Cabral lamented that “most of the women were lost, many of them martrons of high rank.”\textsuperscript{16} At the outer limit, therefore, Hugli could have had a white population of about 900-1000 people.

The numbers of the non-white component of the population would be even more difficult to estimate. Clearly they would have been many more than the whites. Of the Christians among them we have some vague indication in the Jesuit letters from Bengal. In the relation sent by the Bishop and viceroy of the East Indies and printed in Rome in 1606, we are told that the Augustinian fathers had converted 854 persons at Hugli between 1601 & 1602 alone.\textsuperscript{17} At this rate the numbers of native converts would have been very large. No doubt these would have made up the largest part of the 4000 Christian men, women and children who were taken as prisoners to the Mughal court at Agra in 1633.\textsuperscript{18} Depending on whom we choose to believe between the Augustinians and


\textsuperscript{16} ‘The Fall of Hugli’, pp. 418-17.

\textsuperscript{17} Hosten Collection, Guerreiro, Bengal XVI, XVII, ms. 5, folios 29-30
the Jesuits, the local Christian population of Hugli before the siege of 1632 should have been somewhere between 6000 and 11,000 people. Of the non-Christians and slaves we have no idea as our sources did not keep account of them and supply no figures.

A city of riches

The Portuguese merchants operated an enormous and wide-spread trade throughout the Bay of Bengal and beyond, from their settlement at Hugli. They imported into Bengal large amounts and a great variety of "worked silks" including brocades, velvets, damasks, taffetas etc. from China. They also brought in Chinese porcelain, tables, chests, writing desks, curios, and pearls and jewels, for all of which they found large markets. From Solor and Timor they imported red and white sandlewood and from the Maldivian islands and Tuticorin, cowries, shankhs and other sea-shells. Possibly the most lucrative part of their trade, however, was in the commodities forbidden to private trade in Asian waters by the Portuguese crown - cloves, nutmeg and mace from the Molucca islands and Banda, camphor from Borneo, cinnamon from Ceylon and pepper from Malabar.¹⁹ They also commanded a very profitable salt trade with Hijli, just down the coast in neighbouring Orissa. The vast scale and turnover of this trade can be judged from the fact that on this they paid annual customs duties amounting to 100,000 tangas [tankas] to the Mughal empire."²⁰

¹⁸ 'A week at the Bandel Convent', pp. 44-45
¹⁹ Manrique, I, pp. 29-32.
²⁰ 'The Fall of Hugli', p. 392.
From Hugli the Portuguese exported cotton and silk goods, stuffed quilts, bed hangings and pavilions, sugar, ghi, rice, indigo, long pepper, salt petre, wax and lac. Perhaps the largest and most important aspect of this trade was the export of rice and foodstuffs (the mantimentos of the Portuguese records) to key fortresses of the Estado da India, including Goa and Malacca. So necessary was this trade for the very survival of these cities that were heavily dependent on it for their basic provisions that in the 1580s the Estado da India had a special fleet patrolling the seas around Cape Comorin and Ceylon “for the protection of the ships coming from Bengal and the coast of Choromandel.”

In 1589, the king of Portugal ordered the viceroy to ensure that this armada was better equipped with guns to effectively ward off pirating vessels. The king also considered building a fort at Cape Galle “as this is the point that all ships coming from Bengal and from the southern regions call at.”

In 1605 the residents of the city of Goa further reminded the king that this protective armada was a matter of the highest priority and that this city could not afford to let “happen to them what has taken place last year when 2 Dutch ships took 4 or 5 ships loaded with wares from Bengal for this state....”

Malacca was equally dependent on Bengal and Pegu for its basic foodstuff requirement. Hence, the Portuguese who occupied important positions realized it was vital to maintain these supply lines. Thus, through all the political disturbances in Bengal, Arakan and Pegu and the hostility towards the Portuguese settlements displayed

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22 Letter of the King to the Viceroy, 7.3.1589, APO, Fasciculo 3, Document 63, pp. 215-218.

23 Letter of the City of Goa to the King, 1605, APO, Fasciculo 1, Part 2, Doc. 13, pp. 140-160
by their rulers early in the 17th century, the Estado da India always insisted in maintaining, in general, cordial relations with “all the... kingdoms on the coast of Bengal from where originates the foodstuff for the fortress of Malacca.” This trade was a matter of such high priority in official circles that even when their shipping was overstretched in Asia, the Portuguese establishment always managed to find junks “to be sent to Bengal... in order to acquire the foodstuffs to comply with the demand [of Malacca].” In 1632, the viceroy, Conde de Linhares finalized a contract with a Portuguese merchant, Bartholomeu Lucena of Hugli. According to its terms the viceroy was to pay 20,000 xerafins and provide an empty ship with a capacity of 1000 khandis, while Lucena was to supply Malacca within 3 years, with 600 pairs of captive sailors and 500 quintals of rice, 100 picos of gunpowder and 100 picos of iron every year. Before it could be signed the Mughal forces besieged Hugli and Lucena decided not to follow up the implementation of the contract and quit Bengal. On the king’s advice the viceroy offered him many more concessions to sign the contract, realizing the implication for Malacca which would be stranded without supplies.

The trade circuit between Bengal and Cochin was another large and important component of the trade from Hugli, in which the casados of Cochin participated with as much enthusiasm as the Portuguese merchants of Hugli.

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24 Letter of the King to the Viceroy, Lisbon, 7.2.1602, Livros das Monçães do Reino, Goa Archives, M.R. 7, folios 110-115.


item of trade was Malabar pepper in exchange for Bengal textiles, sugar and rice. Though this trade was in principle illegal, it was highly profitable. From Hugli the pepper was shipped to the Red Sea by Gujarati merchants, thus circumventing the blockade of the direct linkages of the ports of the Red Sea with the Malabar coast. By some estimates the trade from Bengal to Cochin was the most lucrative branch of the Portuguese trade from Hugli.

All in all, Hugli was widely reputed to have been a rich and prosperous settlement. Father Cabral noted in 1632, “the Bandel was exceedingly rich.” It was these “immense riches, riches far exceeding anything...[one] could imagine” that Martim Afonso de Melo, the Portuguese resident of Hugli who betrayed the town to the Mughal armies in 1632 pointed out to the Mughal administration. Thus, he elaborated, the casa de Misericordia was the depository of more than 14 lakh tangas [tankas] which was the money of the residents who had died at Hugli. There were also very rich individual merchants, both Portuguese and 12 or 13 native merchants, “in possession of large capital.” During the siege laid to Hugli town by the Mughal forces, the Portuguese paid out 100,000 tankas, with the promise of 200,000 more, to bring an end to

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30 The Fall of Hugli, p. 418.

31 Ibid, p. 397.
the hostilities. And in the account of the losses, one Portuguese ship that went down was loaded with over 300,000 tankas of private property that the Mughals recovered. Among those who survived was a rich Portuguese lady who was among the refugees at Sagor island, who left large amounts of money to the Jesuit fathers of Bengal, as well as to several other good works, and to the Rector of Hugli to create a college in Bengal. Some of this was used by the Jesuits to repair the damages caused the siege.

The local merchants seem to have shared a close and profitable relationship with the Portuguese of Hugli. Significantly, their supporters included highly-placed and influential officials in the Mughal administration. Thus, while the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, loftily commanded his governor of Bengal, Qasim Khan, "to march upon the Bandel of Hugli and put it to fire and sword", the governor showed himself to be very reluctant and hesitated and postponed the attack several times for as long as he could. The Portuguese were in the meantime, forewarned of the impending attack by "a Moorish captain", nephew of Muqarrab Khan, then the governor of Surat and one of the high-ranking officials of the Mughal court, and by "some friendly Moors". In the negotiations before the attack was finally launched there were merchants, both Muslim and Hindu, "who had for many years been trading at Hugli," and who were

32 Ibid, p. 140.
33 Ibid, p. 415.
35 'The Fall of Hugli', p. 396.
willing to “prove.... by .... authoritative evidence” that the Portuguese were not guilty of any of the misbehaviour and lawlessness that the Mughal administration was accusing them of.\textsuperscript{37}

After the fall of Hugli, Shah Jahan ordered the execution of the 4 priests who were among the prisoners taken to his court at Agra. The order was stayed on the intervention of Asaf Khan and “some Lords of his Council”, who pointed to the likely retaliation by the Portuguese state at Goa and the loss of life and trade that it could cause all along the coast. In the interim, “some merchants who were in correspondence with the City of Goa” negotiated with the emperor to secure their freedom. Finally, several of the prisoners did escape from Agra with the assistance of the local Muslim merchants, who even advanced them three thousand rupees in return for a letter of exchange drawn on the Portuguese captains in Bengal.\textsuperscript{38} Clearly, even after the capture of their premier settlement in the region, the Portuguese had enough supporters and allies who facilitated their return to Bengal.

By and large the Portuguese at Hugli had enjoyed a good relationship with the Mughal emperors from Akbar to Shah Jahan. In his farman of 1579, Akbar had granted them lands adjoining the site chosen by them to build their settlement, which were ratified by the later Mughal emperors. Thus, Jahangir “always favoured them, granting them not only many exemptions and privileges but many fertile lands situated

\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid, p. 400.]
\item[Manrique, \textit{CHI}, 12.6.1918, p. 455.]
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near the Ganges." In 1628, when Manrique visited Hugli, he noted that between the town, which was situated 60 leagues upriver, and the sea there were "many villages and settlements on either bank, some of them the private property of the Portuguese of Ugulim." It has been suggested that this was the origin of the famous 777 bighas of land that Shah Jahan granted to the Augustinian convent at Hugli in 1633, when he allowed the return of the Portuguese to their settlement. Perhaps his farman was merely confirmatory of the earlier grant made by Akbar and reiterated by Jahangir.

Hugli also enjoyed other special privileges under the Mughals. Thus, "they were in possession of a document confirmed by King Jahangir and Sultan Parviz, his son to the effect that the Bandel would never be held responsible, as a body, for the misdemeanors of particular individuals." The Portuguese had also rendered valuable mercenary service to the Mughal armies in Bengal. In Jahangir's reign, one Miguel Rodriguez, who was the captain of Hugli in 1632, commanded a band of Portuguese mercenaries who had such an impressive reputation in the region that they were on the payroll of the Mughal emperor. They were used by Prince Parvez in his campaign against the rebel Prince Khurram against whom he was sent by Emperor Jahangir to Bengal. The Portuguese contingent appears to have contributed in an important way to the defeat of the rebel prince by the imperial forces, and Prince Parvez thanked them personally for his victory. Significantly, Prince Khurram too had tried to persuade them to join his forces

39 'The Fall of Hugli', p.394.
40 Manrique, I, p.25.
41 Fr. Hosten, see Manrique, I, p.37, f.n. 35 & 'A week at Bandel Convent', p. 47-48.
42 'The Fall of Hugli', p. 400.
before the battle, but they had turned down the offer.

Traffic in slaves: The Fall of Hugli

By far the most notorious of all the activities of the Portuguese of Hugli, however, was the slave trade that they engaged in on a large scale. Most of our sources clearly indicate that it was the Maghs, along with the Portuguese of Chittagong, who were conducting these slave raids in deltaic Bengal. In this regard they make a clear distinction between the Portuguese scattered in the numerous settlements in the eastern delta and coastal Arakan and those of Hugli. This impression was well indicated in the typical reaction of two Bengalis when they came across Friar Manrique and his companions in Orissa, looking for assistance to reach Banja in Hijli district. When Manrique approached them 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....On hearing this account....they were fully reassured..."\(^\text{[43]}\)

The Portuguese of Hugli, however, became tainted by association as they participated in slave trade with their eastern brethren. Bernier gave a graphic description of the involvement of the inhabitants of Hugli in this trade. "Even the Portuguese of Ogouli, in Bengale, purchased without scruple these wretched captives, and the horrid traffic was transacted in the vicinity of the island of Galles, near Cape das

\(^{43}\text{Manrique, 1, pp 405-6.}\)
Palmas. The pirates, by a mutual understanding, waited for the arrival of the Portuguese, who bought whole cargoes at a cheap rate. Hugli developed into a regular slave market in the early 17th century.

Notwithstanding the very high profit margins in slave trade, its notoriety and nuisance value was so considerate that it ultimately caught up with all the groups involved in it. Even the Dutch were forced to abandon their factory in Arakan in 1647, though the trade continued on the side. Finally, their desire not to endanger their growing trade in Bengal led them to virtually abandon their regular purchase of slaves from the 1660s. The Portuguese, in the meantime, bore the burnt of the wrath of the Bengali and Arakanese authorities since they were the kingpins of the whole trade. Most of their settlements in the eastern delta were eliminated in the early 17th century and they dispersed into a scattered presence in the region. Many found their way to Hugli, almost the last Portuguese settlement in Bengal by 1620, and it was not long before Hugli too was threatened by this association. The Estado da India had, in fact, long recognized the danger posed to its own commerce with Bengal, Arakan and Pegu due to the slave trade of the Portuguese adventurers in the region. The Estado had tried to restrict and regulate this slave trade through the Christian missionaries in the field, but with very limited success.

By 1631, the Mughal administration had irrefutable evidence that when

\[\text{\textsuperscript{44} Bernier, op. cit., p.175.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{45} Arasratnam, op. cit., p.202.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{46} APO, Fasciculo 4, Decreto 3, p.186.}\]
the galleons of the Maghs and Portuguese of the eastern delta came to ravage Mughal territories in Bengal, "they were abetted by some of the Hugli galleons." In 1632 the viceroy of the *Estado da India*, in fact, directly entered into contract with Portuguese merchants at Hugli for regular supplies of slaves to Malacca. It was this trade that ultimately proved to be their undoing. Whatever may have been the privileged status of Hugli; yet, "none of them could show the smallest scrap of a document in support of what he [the Mughal subedar of Bengal] termed a crime, the purchase of slaves." Thus Hugli, which was by all standards a large, rich and vibrant commercial hub, commanding a far flung and valuable trade, with powerful friends in high places, had also acquired the stigma of being a mart for slave trade of considerable magnitude. Consequently it found itself attacked and besieged by the Mughal forces in 1632. Even the viceroy of the *Estado da India* had no choice but to wash his hands of Hugli: He wrote to Shah Jahan that "he had nothing to do with them," indicating that Hugli was outside the purview of the *Estado*. The viceroy and the *Estado* establishment, which had been involved partly in promoting slave trade, left Hugli to its fate.

Hugli had shared an uncertain relationship with the Portuguese authorities at Goa almost from the beginning. It was founded through private initiative but was claimed by Goa almost immediately and was counted amongst the key outposts of the *Estado da India* in the Bay of Bengal. The importance of Hugli and its trade

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47 "The Fall of Hugli", p. 400.


49 "The Fall of Hugli", p. 400.

50 Manrique, *CHI*, 22.5.1918, p. 395.
almost on the same lines as Goa and Malacca, or at least similar to Macao, made it figure fairly prominently in the scheme of thinking of the Portuguese authorities in Asia. In addition, the Estado da India preferred to equip its shipping and its shipbuilding requirements for the return voyage to Lisbon in Bengal, in view of the superior stitching skills available in the region. The king instructed the viceroy, in no uncertain terms, that even when shipbuilding contracts were given out at Cochin or Bassein they must include the clause that “the stitching would be done completely in Bengal and not in any other area because it is the best in India.”51 Consequently, the Portuguese authorities tried that “in the ports of Bengal... be maintained a normal trade with this Estado” while fully recognizing that the Portuguese settled there were largely outside its control. Most of them “had created families outside the Portuguese law and maintained a lifestyle proper to the region.”52

At the end of the 16th century Hugli lay in a twilight zone, oscillating between its status of being partly official but by and large maintaining a independent identity. The Estado continued to appoint its own representative to the post of the ouvidor (magistrate) of porto pequeno (Satgaon/Hugli).53 It recognized the right of the settlers, however, to elect from amongst themselves candidates to offices that were considered important state appointments in other Estado outposts. These included the juiz dos orfãos (judge of the orphans), the procurador dos ausentes (administrator of the property of

51 Letter of the King to the Viceroy, Lisbon, 25.2.1615, APO, Fasciculo 6, Document 369, pp. 1074-76.
absent persons) and the *escrivão* (scrivener) of Hugli. Whatever may have been the official perception concerning the status of Hugli, however, it was commonly understood that the settlement was clearly an autonomous haven for the Portuguese based at Cochin, Malacca or Goa who kept deserting the *Estado* till the very end of the 16th century. In fact, in the royal correspondence of the time, the king and the viceroy were constantly devising methods to prevent such an exodus of manpower. They were also looking for channels to communicate to the deserters the royal pardon granted to them and to pave the way for their return to the official fold. In all these plans to extend state control over the settlers in Bengal, Hugli figured prominently. In 1599 the *Estado* sought to reinforce its control: "hence the lord Viceroy is seasonally trying to reduce all the bandels in which the Portuguese are scattered [in the region] and to make only 2, viz, this great port of Dianga or Citigā and the smaller port which they call Gulim." The Portuguese settlers at Hugli, like the rest of their brethren in their region, maintained a relationship of convenience with the *Estado da India*. After the fall of the settlement in 1632, the survivors who had taken refuge on Sagor Island decided to make a new beginning. In this, as in all new and shaky enterprises in the region, they

56 Alvara of the Viceroy, Goa, 1593, *APO*, Fasciculo 3, Doc. 133, pp. 408-9; Letter of the King to the Viceroy, Lisbon, 5.2.1597, Doc. 239, pp. 668-679, Letter of the King to the Viceroy, Lisbon 17.1.1618, Fasciculo 6, Doc. 440, p.1131; Fasciculo 6, Supplements 1 & 2, Doc. 893, dated 17.6.1597, pp.720-22; Letter of the King to the Viceroy, 12.2.1603, Goa Archives, M.R 7, folios 164-164v; Letter of the King to the Viceroy, 6.1.1602, M.R 8, folios 47-51.
found it useful to invoke authorization in the name of the king of Portugal. “Accordingly, it was decided to convert the pagoda [on Sagor Island] into a strong fortress for His Majesty” (emphasis added).\(^5\) In the meantime, they sought help from all quarters that they were at all likely to get it. The Church fathers were sent as envoys both to the viceroy at Goa as well as to the neighbouring king of Arakan. The latter was first to respond. He sent 27 galleons manned by Portuguese sailors in his employ, commanded by one Manoel Palmeiro. They were an untamed set of marauders who came eagerly to Sagor Island, ever on the lookout for the opportunity to grab the loot that was the inevitable fall-out of any war. They seized “an enormous booty” from some Muslim vessels that they encountered on the way and arrived, expecting to find an on-going struggle. Finding that the Portuguese loss of Hugli was final, true to the spirit of their presence in the region, they moved on, looking for new opportunities for plunder. As Fr. Cabral commented, “seeing that the past was beyond cure, as true Christians and Portuguese they offered their services for the future.”\(^5\) A few remained behind, but most of them sailed upriver “with the intention of privateering on Moorish vessels.”\(^5\)

**Rising from the ashes: The restoration of Hugli**

Yet, like the legendary phoenix, the Portuguese of Hugli rose from the debris of the siege of 1632 and returned to their settlement the very next year. We have a copy of Shah Jahan’s farman of 1633, which is preserved in its Portuguese version, which restored the land of Hugli to the Portuguese and conferred upon them the

\(^5\) 'The Fall of Hugli', p. 419.

\(^5\) Ibid, p. 420.
autonomy that they had enjoyed since the time of Akbar.  

Through the various clauses of the grant, special encouragement was given in order to repopulate the settlement. The Portuguese were assured the cooperation of the Mughal administration to ensure a steady supply of foodstuffs for Hugli. Thus, “no taxes shall be laid on any eatables coming from this Bandel” and “in time of scarcity, no ships shall be allowed to take in rice for exportation.”

Shah Jahan further demonstrated that he was committed not merely to restoring Hugli but to maintaining its Portuguese character. Thus, he specifically promised the white casados that they would be allowed duty-free trade if they decided to return and settle down, and the freedom to leave, along with their families, anytime they liked.

Further, the Portuguese were granted religious freedom within Hugli. They were assured that no Moor would be allowed to enter their Church and disturb the Mass, and that runaway slave converts would not be detained and converted back to Islam. Their rudimentary legal autonomy was also restored, including judicial independence in all cases except those punishable with death. They were also given the much-coveted right to administer the properties of deceased persons, covering both the residents of Hugli, as well as any Portuguese or Dutch ships that might be in Hugli harbour when their owners happened to die. The Mughal emperor assured the Portuguese

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62 Ibid, clauses 12 & 15.

63 Ibid, clauses 1 & 7.
that "the Sercar shall not interfere in [these]...matter[s]." 64

In addition, the trading privileges and concessions that the Portuguese at Hugli had enjoyed and prospered under were restored. They were to be allowed to trade freely "in any harbour of Bengala, and...no change.... [was to] be made in the custom-dues." In fact, Shah Jahan even promised what he, in all probability, could not deliver — "that the Dutch ships shall not be allowed to seize the Portuguese ships coming to Bengala."65 Essentially the farman conveys the desire of the Mughal authorities to ensure the return of the Portuguese to Hugli.

It is difficult to explain this sudden and sharp turnaround in the Mughal emperor's mind in his attitude towards the Portuguese of Hugli. The most plausible explanation would be the value attached to the Portuguese trade at Hugli to the Bengal subah and to the Mughals. Perhaps influential persons like Asaf Khan prevailed on Shah Jahan to rethink his position towards the Portuguese. In this context the letter of the viceroy of Goa to the king of Portugal in 1636, sums up their position in Bengal and makes special mention of the good relations that the Estado da India had with Asaf Khan, then also the Mughal governor of Bengal.66 Perhaps the emperor was also convinced of the importance of repairing relations in order not to jeopardize the rapidly growing trade with the other European companies at other locations in the empire. In any case, by 1633 the Portuguese were back at Hugli and well-established enough for the Englishman,

64 Ibid, clauses 2, 3 & 4.
John Poule, to advise the English East India Company that it was difficult to set up a factory at Hugli, or Pipli, as the Portuguese were too powerful there.\textsuperscript{67}

Shah Jahan, however, appeared to have been wary of allowing Hugli to return to its former situation of an unchecked and unsupervised foreign enclave, with a propensity to create law and order problems on the eastern edge of his empire. The grant authorizing their return was, thus, made in the name of the Augustinian Church of the Bandel of Hugli, perhaps with the intention of putting the onus of disciplining the notoriously lawless settlers on an institution that they were most likely to listen to. In addition, both the \textit{Estado da India} and the Mughal administration seem to have exercised some control over the new settlement. In 1637, we find mention of one Tomé Vaz Garrido as captain of the two lands and \textit{bandeis} of Argelim and Banja, by virtue of being recognized as such both by the nawab of Dacca and the king of Portugal.\textsuperscript{68} Of these two prospective masters, the Portuguese of Hugli seem to have preferred the latter, no doubt because of the distance separating them. The \textit{Estado} maintained its stake in the new settlement by exercising its prerogative to make appointments from time to time. In 1644 the Crown appointed Jacinto Botelho do Couto as captain of Hugli whose appointment was renewed in 1653. Further, in 1640, Simão Gomes Pinhão was appointed public legal scrivener of the records of Hugli and Banja.\textsuperscript{69}

The Augustinian sources testify that between 1640 and 1669 Hugli


\textsuperscript{68} 'Copia da carta que da Bengala escreveu hum Thome Vaz Garrido (1637), ANTT, L. M. 40, folios 349-51, cited in J. Flores, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 386-7.

\textsuperscript{69} J. Flores, \textit{ibid}, pp. 387-8.
virtually recovered to attain its earlier level of prosperity. It certainly seems to have become as populous as in former times. In 1665, we hear that it had 6000 Portuguese and native Christians, while in 1669 Bernier recorded that there were 8-9000 Christians at Hugli. They seem to have been involved in as flourishing a trade as before and to have acquired substantial wealth. In 1660, the Italian traveler Niccolò Manucci commented on the rich Portuguese traders of Hugli. They included substantial merchants like João Gomes de Soto, who had the Bandel Church at Hugli rebuilt at his own expense, and who not only traded on his own but also had close relations with the English East India Company. In 1675, we hear of Nicola a Paiva of Hugli who was rich enough to farm the customs of the the Nawab of Dacca. In 1688, he was the rich benefactor mentioned in several Jesuit letters, who had left 20,000 xerafins for the maintenance of 3 Jesuits fathers at Hugli.

It is however quite clear that the political and commercial situation of the restored settlement of Hugli had changed in an important way that impacted its fortunes. Bengal had been firmly under the control of the Mughals since the 1590s. The new emperor Shah Jahan had demonstrated that he was not going to tolerate any lawless behaviour in the guise of any privileges that may have been sanctioned by previous

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75 Cited in Hosten, 'A Week at Bandel Convent', p.46.
emperors. Moreover, growing competition from the Dutch Company had also become an important reality as is evident in some of the clauses of the farman of 1633. The Dutch had set up factories in Orissa in 1633 and one at Hugli itself in 1635. Similarly, the growing English trade to the eastern seaboard in Coromandel and Bengal had also to be contended with.

In many ways the Portuguese of Hugli proved to be remarkably resilient. Like João Gomes de Soto, they adapted well to the changed situation. They struck alliances with their new competitors, thus making the most of new opportunities, and continued to make good money. The Dutch, and the English too, often piggybacked their way into the commerce of the region on the experienced shoulders of the Portuguese of Hugli. This is most clearly visible in the very location of their own factories in Bengal, all of which were set up within a stone’s throw of the Portuguese settlement at Hugli. Thomas Bowrey commented on this in 1676, “I judge, and am well satisfied in it, that there are noe lesse than 20,000 Fraunges of all sorts in the Kingdom of Bengala, and above half of them inhabit near Hughly River.”76 In the late 17th & 18th centuries, as the shadow of Dutch and English dominance caste itself over the region, the Portuguese stayed on as “traders among traders”. Their concentrated presence at Hugli got gradually dispersed as they moved to other profitable activities and employment in the new colonial port towns. Thus, as the glory of their premier settler enclaves, like Hugli and Chittagong, were slowly eclipsed, the Portuguese traders and shippers still continued to retain their presence in the networks of trade that they had opened up more than a

century ago. They adapted and survived by further settling down in the trading enclaves of the Europeans as traders, militia men and shippers, who now knew no homeland other than the Euro-Asian towns which had come into existence throughout maritime Asia. The Portuguese were the founders of these Europeanized ‘homelands’ located away from Europe, within the coastal folds of the Bay of Bengal.