CHAPTER VIII

BETWEEN GOD AND KING: THE PADRE AS INTERMEDIARY

The curious mix of elements that together comprised ‘the Portuguese’ in Bengal, can broadly be divided into two groups, the official agents of the Estado da Índia and the private elements, who generally maintained an independent existence. By and large, the private Portuguese settlers insisted on distancing themselves from the Estado structure, while the Estado, on its part, was keen to extend its yoke and influence over them. Towards the end of the 16th century, this tussle seemed to be going the way of the private Portuguese elements. On the other hand, the Estado increasingly realized the inadvisability of stretching its resources beyond its capacity, and deliberately withdrew from the region.

Another important dimension to the whole picture of Portuguese presence in Bengal was the contribution of the Christian missionaries who had a vital role to play in the process. Treated as an arm of the state by the Crown and the Estado, and welcomed as a man of God by the settlers, the Padre formed an intermediary of sorts between these two elements. No discussion about the Portuguese empire and the settler enclaves would be complete without the Church fathers, who followed closely on the heels of the Portuguese conquerors and settlers as they swarmed all over the Asian coastline, halting at different locations.
Dimensions of Empire: In search of Christians

The Church was an essential part of Portugal’s seaborne empire in Asia. C. R. Boxer, explaining the nature of the Portuguese colonial empire, describes it as a thalassocracy, that existed in a deeply religious age. It was, thus, a maritime and commercial empire, cast in a military and an ecclesiastical mold. What is suggested is that there was, thus, an essential interaction between the state and church which led to a linking together of the two in the whole visualization of the Portuguese colonial enterprise. As a Jesuit missionary wrote from Goa 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. 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 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.

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."  

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2 Cited in C.R.Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-seventeenth Century, Delhi, 1980, Preface.
4 Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, op. cit., Preface.
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 expressed through a series of papal bulls and briefs between 1452 and 1514 A.D. 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 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 assumptions of this grandiloquent title, the 16th century Portuguese historian, João 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." In contemporary understanding the Pope granted to the king not simply the right to spread Christianity abroad, but, along with it, the right to conquer the specified regions. 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 Trindade, wrote in his Conquista Espiritual do Oriente (Spiritual Conquest of the Orient) at Goa in

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6 Quoted in Boxer, Race Relations, op. cit., p. 3.
1638 (the title of this 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 and protected by the weapons.”

The right of the Padroado bestowed upon the Portuguese kings several responsibilities and rights which were authorized by the Papacy. It enjoined that the crown had to erect or permit the creation of all cathedrals, churches, monasteries, convents and hermitages within its sphere of patronage, in Africa, Asia and Brazil. Secondly, it was authorized 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. Thirdly, its function was to administer ecclesiastical jurisdictions and revenues and to veto papal Bulls and Briefs that were not first cleared through the Crown chancery.

The Portuguese king was, thus, effectively conferred considerable 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 in fact his agents in Asia who were responsible to the crown. 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, an instrument and accomplice of the Portuguese imperial enterprise.

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

\[8\] Ibid., pp. 78-79.
in Asia. In several areas where there were no fortified settlements as outposts of empire bearing the royal coat-of-arms, the king of Portugal was represented in those small churches 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.\(^9\)

The Catholic Church was, thus, seen as an arm of the Portuguese state in its overseas dominions. When we talk of the “Portuguese presence” in Bengal, therefore, we can not leave out the Church which embodied yet another face of ‘the Portuguese’ in the region.

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**The Catholic Church in Asia : Situating Bengal**

An assessment of the position of the Church in Bengal during the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) Centuries requires that the region be situated within the structure of the Church setup in Portuguese Asia itself. After the granting of the Padroado, it took a short while for an

\(^9\)Boxer, *Church Militant*, op. cit., p. 78.
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 along with him five Dominicans. 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 time.

In 1514, 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 lay within the diocese of Cochin till 1606, when the diocese of Mylapore was created. From 1606 till 1834, when the Vicariates Apostolic

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were created, Bengal, Arakan, and the whole of the Choromandel coast fell within the jurisdiction of Mylapore.\(^{11}\)

When exactly the Christian missionaries first entered Bengal is not known. In 1548, several clerics, ranging from senior Catholic leaders to ordinary church workers deliberated upon this matter and considering the logistics of sending missionaries to the region. In a letter written from Cochin that year, St. Francis Xavier advised that in lands so far away from and uncontrolled by the centres of authority, as Bengal, Pegu, China and Japan, it was important to send Church fathers who could be trusted. It was not necessary for them to be very knowledgeable as they had no special work but to preach regularly to the Portuguese, their women, their slaves and the free Christians, but they were expected to be very virtuous.\(^{12}\) About the same time, Brother Adão Francisco wrote to the members of the Society of Jesus in Coimbra of the great possibilities of making conversions in Pegu which he felt was “one of the best lands existing in the world...... if by chance a Father of the Society would be sent there he would succeed to make Christians of all those people.”\(^{13}\)


\(^{13}\) Letter of Br. Adão Francisco to the members of the Society of Antonio Brandão, in Coimbra, Cochin, the end of the year 1547 or the beginning of 1548, Silva Rego, \textit{Documentação}......, \textit{ibid}, Vol. IV, Doc. 8. pp. 33-34.
The Bay of Bengal region emerged as a new zone which attracted missionaries by the middle of the 16th century. The first specific name mentioned in the sources of the history of the church is in "the relation of a Father of the Franciscan Order, called Bonfer, of French nationality," who was in Pegu in 1554 and "who remained there three years to try to adduce this people to the faith of Jesus Christ."\textsuperscript{14} There were several more, who ventured into the region on their own initiative, as is indicated by the proceedings of the First Provincial Council held in Goa in 1567. The Council noted that there were many clerics, some secular and some belonging to the religious orders, moving around "without purpose" (read, without authorization) all over Asia. They must have been numerous enough for the Council to issue three separate decrees seeking to bring them under its control. Thus, no priest was to be allowed to travel outside his See without a \textit{dimissoria} (letter of authorization) from the Prelate concerned, and in places like Bengal, Pegu, China and the Moluccas, which were outside the control of the \textit{Estado}, they would need this authorization from the Ordinary of that place.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{On behalf of His Majesty: the missionary in Bengal}

For the Crown and its Church, the missionaries in the field were their agents through whom they could promote their own interests in the region. In fact, the Provincial Council of 1567 also issued a decree according to which the priests in areas such as Cambay, Coromandel, and Bengal were to seek out and establish contact with the


Portuguese deserters in those areas and become the channel of their return to the official fold.  

The first missionaries in Bengal that we know by name were Jesuits, Fr. Anthony Vaz and Fr. Peter Dias, who came to Chittagong in 1576. In 1578, when Cochin was made into an Episcopal See suffragan to Goa and Bengal became dependent on Cochin, Fr. Julian Pereira, a secular priest, was sent to Satgaon. After the foundation of the settlement of Hugli in 1579-80, the Bishop of Cochin decided to assign the Bengal mission to the Augustinian order, and 5 priests were sent from Cochin to Hugli shortly after.

During the later years of the 16th century, several priests, both secular and of the religious orders, were being sent to Bengal, Arakan and Pegu. It is from their writings that the first details about the Portuguese settlements in the region filtered back to the Estado da India. In the context of the Padroado Real, the overseas clergy were frequently treated as state functionaries, both by the Crown as well as by the viceroy. In fact, within the Estado, official appointments were often combined with ecclesiastical ones. Several archbishops of Goa were also governors of the Estado da India.

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16 Ibid, Decree 9, p. 386.
18 Ibid.
20 Luis de Cacegas, Terceira parte da Historia de S. Domingos, Lisbon 1767, Bk. V, Chap. IX, translated by Fr. Hosten, Hosten Collection, Vidyajyoti Library, Delhi, Bengal XVI, XVII, ms. 16.
Missionaries were often asked to administer state funds, being more trustworthy than Estado officials. Early in the 17th century, money sent from Lisbon for the viceroy to get ships built and to purchase goods on the behalf of the Crown was stored in the Franciscan monastery at Goa rather than in the state treasury. In the second half of the 17th century, Jesuits were routinely being asked to administer the funds earmarked for local fortifications, since the captains of the fortresses themselves were being found guilty of fraud and embezzlement. In 1667 the Viceroy, Conde de São Vicente referred to the fact that in several places the Crown had given the Jesuits exclusive right to administer all such funds.

The missionaries also frequently functioned in the role of diplomats on behalf of the state. In 1604 after Filipe de Brito offered the settlement at Siriam to the Portuguese Crown, the viceroy proposed the establishment of a customshouse there. For this purpose a Dominican priest, Frey Francisco de Annunciação, was sent from Goa as the Estado's envoy to the court of the king of Arakan. He was well-received and permission to set up the alfandega was granted.

There are several references in Manrique to his being a diplomatic messenger bearing 'certain instructions' from the viceroy of Goa to various rulers in Asia. But, like a true diplomat, he never elaborates on the precise nature of his work in the context. Nonetheless, when he was assigned to the Bengal mission, he also functioned

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22 Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, op. cit., p. 47.

23 Cacegas, op. cit.
as the viceroy’s envoy to the court of the king of Arakan. 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. Instead, Manrique set out for Japan, carrying with him a message for the Governor of Manila, where he was to stop en route. 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’. Their reputation in this capacity was so well accepted and recognized that in 1644, when the foremost rivals of the Portuguese in Asia, the Dutch Company, attacked Goa, the crucial negotiations to restore peace were conducted on the Portuguese side by the Jesuits.

Most importantly, the missionaries were entrusted with the task of mobilizing an attitude of loyalty for the Portuguese Crown in its overseas possessions. In this context, the pulpit was used as an effective instrument of propaganda for securing the loyalty of the Portuguese diasporic elements and the local populace towards the state. Conversion was seen as much as 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:

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26 Ibid., p. 8.
28 Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, p. 49.
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.\textsuperscript{29}

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.\textsuperscript{30} In fact, it seems that one of the principal difficulties that the missionaries had to face was the apprehension of the Asian rulers that those of their subjects who converted to Christianity tended to identify their own interests more closely with the Europeans than with their own country.

This dichotomous attitude on the part of the local converts emerges in contemporary narrative. 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 connection 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.\textsuperscript{31}

The Portuguese settled there obviously did not share the missionary’s

\textsuperscript{29} Boxer, \textit{The Portuguese Seaborne Empire}, op. cit., p. 81.


concern with gathering all his Christian flock together to supervise their spiritual lives better. They preferred to maintain the favour of the ruling monarch to allow the smooth operation of their own trade. This made more business sense than to jeopardize all this for a group of people whom they felt little affinity for. Thus, the Father found himself alone in this enterprise -

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 an 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.  

The Crown’s dependence on the Church to bind the diverse populations of its overseas empire together as its loyal subjects should also be understood in the light of two other factors. First, 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.” In this situation, the presence of the church created a reservoir of supporters for the Portuguese crown. Secondly, the missionaries usually stayed a lifetime in Asia, thus providing a structure of continuing influence amongst the adherents and their support personnel. In contrast the viceroys and governors who normally had a short-lived term of three years each, failed to establish a long term impact as individuals.

32 Ibid.
33 Boxer, The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, op. cit., p. 53.
34 Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, op. cit., p. 19.
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. They were sometimes 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 “pacification.”

The situation was similar in Portuguese India, particularly in a region like Bengal, where the hold of the Estado was always precarious. Consequently the missionary fulfilled the function of being the representative of the state. He was often used to extend the frontier in the Spanish and Portuguese overseas empire. In the case of Bengal, it is significant that he arrived there only after the Portuguese Crown’s interest in empire-building in that area had reached an ebb. Thus, he played an important role, as for all practical purposes he was the Estado’s agent in the area, the diplomatic envoy to other courts, and the only link with settlers in regions outside the Estado’s formal control.

This is clearly captured 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

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35 Boxer, Church Militant, op. cit., p. 72.
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 least four more fathers to Bengal. The viceroy had evidently been greatly impressed by the optimistic account he had received from Filipe de Brito 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".

De Brito further highlighted 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 Aracão, Pegu and Martavão."36

The Church being needed by the State as a frontier institution is implicit in this stance of the viceroy. More frequently, however, the missionary in the field may have been sent there as the long-reaching arm of the Inquisition. The Inquisition was probably the most

secret dimension of the Portuguese empire, and the personnel involved would have been most tight-lipped about their missions. Occasionally, however, they hinted towards this aspect of their responsibilities in a rare moment of indiscretion. Thus, the Jesuit Father Andrew de Nabais let it out when he wrote to Father Sebastião Gonsalvez, at Goa, in 1602 “from this Porto Pequeno [Hugli], whither we came on business connected with the Inquisition, Father Superior and I.”

Perhaps this would explain the initial suspicion and hostility that the Fathers often encountered among the settlers, and their own sense of frustration in the region.

Unwanted or godsend? The Padre and the homizjados

The Christian missionaries sent out to the Bengal mission began their tenures on a note of optimism. This is well-captured in the letter of the Jesuit Father John Andrew Boves, who wrote of the hope of great achievement that he carried with him as he embarked from San Tome for Bengal in 1599:

“And since from Bengala....they write of great fruits and marvels done by two Fathers who went there last year, it pleased obedience that I too should leave the Fishery Coast and go thither with another Father, in order to help in reaping the already ripe sheaves.....Those who come from there tell about this Mission......and they all say that wonderful fruit will surely accrue from it.”

The Father looked forward to the promise of large numbers of converts,

“.....not only among the gentios to whom the door is open wide for hearing the Holy Gospel, but also among the Portuguese settled there, a good number of

37 'Letter of Fr. Andrew de Nabais, S. J., to Fr. Sebastian Gonsalvez, S. J., of the Professed House, Goa, Porto Pequeno, or Hugli, 25.1.1602', in the Hosten Collection, Bengal XVI, XVII.

whom are forgetful of their salvation, because they have no man to break to them God’s word, and already they assert that this year, since which the Fathers are there, Bengala looks otherwise than it did before...  

There emerges a somewhat different picture of the priests’ sense of purpose and achievement from their letters to each other. Very soon after their arrival in the region they were greatly disillusioned, admitting to each other that “there is so little here to keep us busy.” In terms of their primary vocation as men of God, they soon found that there was not much work for them in Bengal as preachers. This was because, first, the Portuguese settled there “want to live with the liberty of Bengala......and we are here for nothing else but to be grumbled at.” Given that many of the Portuguese settled in these regions had fled the territories of the Estado because they were not good enough Christians by the exacting standards of the Inquisition, they viewed the missionaries with suspicion. “With [these] Portuguese we have nothing to do: for......they say that we pry too narrowly into matters of conscience and that they do not want such scrupulous Fathers.......”  

In any case, the missionaries found that there were not too many Portuguese at these settlements in the first place who needed priests to cater to their spiritual needs. The numbers counted by them are absurdly small and in sharp contrast to those mentioned in other accounts, whether estimating the numbers who had deserted the

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39 Ibid.
40 Fr. Andrew de Nabais, Hugli, 25.1.1602.
42 Fr. Andrew de Nabais, Hugli, 25.1.1602, op. cit.
Estado for Bengal, or those swelling the bands roaming the region seeking adventure. Perhaps the explanation lies in the priests only counting those who actually attended church. At their premier settlement in Chittagong in 1602, for example, Fr. Andrew de Nabais counted only "15 Portuguese and some topazes, some of them unmarried."

Naturally the priest posted here was grossly underworked and unhappy — "And so Fr. Andrew Boves takes care of those [few] parishioners......and three or four adults who were converted this year......It is sure that the Father has talent for bigger and more glorious things ; and so though he does that with the perfection he can, he is dissatisfied, like all the rest, and they will tell you so in their letters." 43

The missionaries also found that there was not much scope to make any substantial conversion among the indigenous people either, as "the people of this country [are] for the most part Moors, wherefore little fruit can be obtained from them......" 44 "Fewer are gentios and the gentios are of even a worse sort than the Moors, and more addicted than they to their idolatries and superstitions......" 45

Thus, the Fathers complained to their Superiors describing the very meagre work that they had in Bengal. It was the same picture for residence after residence. In Chandecan, "Fr. Domingos de Sousa keeps himself busy with the servants of the house and with commending himself to God......" At Chittagong, it was reported that Fr. Francis Fernandez "commends himself to God, takes care of the garden, where he walks about the greater part of the time....and at times he goes to preach at Dianga, lest he

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43 Ibid.

44 Fr. John Andrew Boves, Chittagong, 18.1.1602, op. cit.

45 Fr. Andrew de Nabais, op. cit.
should appear......to be eating his bread in laziness...... Since there was not much human flock to tend to, the diligent priest kept himself occupied by tending to the garden!

Initially, many priests were resentful of being kept in Bengal as guardians and promoters of the Estado’s plans in the region. Many felt that for the amount of missionary work that there was, there were too many clerics present in the region. “It seems that Fathers...are not required in these parts, because......the whole of Bengal is full of Clerics and Religious, more than 20 of them.” They were quite clear that good talent was being wasted in the region, as was noted by Fr. Boves in 1602 – “it seems paradoxical that the gravest Fathers, men who can render service......by their learning, counsel and prudence, should be sent to Missions where they are quite inactive, as in Bengal, Mogor and Binsaga, when the Colleges are clamouring for want of subjects, as is the case in the Colleges of India.”

The Fathers complained that they had written several times about the dismal prospects in Bengal to their Superiors but to no avail. These Superiors either claimed that they did not receive the letters or that they did not believe their contents. In 1601, four fathers finally gathered together at Chittagong “and decided unanimously to send someone to India......to explain matters to the Superiors by word of mouth and so disengage their responsibility for not putting matters before them.”

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46 Ibid.
47 Fr. Andrew Boves, op. cit.
48 Ibid.
49 Fr. Andrew de Nabais, op. cit.
Apparently they were unable to evoke much response and were so frustrated that they even wrote directly to the General of the Society of Jesus in Rome, bypassing their Superiors. Thus, the same Fr, John Andrew Boves, who had left from San Tome for Bengal in 1599, full of hope, wrote from Chittagong in 1602 -

"And, first, I say that, as the higher superiors begin these Missions, and as, in addition to the great service to the Lord which they expect, there also results for them some reputation in the Company, it is possible that they write much more than what really happens; and so, though many serious difficulties and inconveniences arise afterwards, they are obliged to go ahead where they should let things drop, because they have already given Your Paternity great hopes etc."\(^{50}\)

Furthermore, several of the missionaries who were sent to the settlements in Bengal, Arakan and Pegu were quite shocked at the lawlessness of the Portuguese settled in these regions and chastised them for their unChristian ways.

"The greater number [of Portuguese in Bengal] think only of making money, and rob as many as they can, and at times, many times, they kill them to rob them."\(^{51}\)

They were especially critical of the slave raids and slave trade that they conducted from their settlements -

"and as for kidnapping gentios to sell them, what I have learned about this makes me believe that there are not in India four Bengallas who have been rightfully seized [enslaved], because a Portuguese who now leads a more regular life told me that six or seven years ago, when he lived like the rest, he and his companions kidnapped in a single monsoon 800 people whom they sold to the ships; and it is very rare here that a father or mother sell a child: for I have inquired a good deal into that. Such are the [Portuguese] men of Bengalla."\(^{52}\)

\(^{50}\) Fr. Andrew Boves, \textit{op. cit.}

\(^{51}\) Fr. Andrew de Nabais, \textit{op. cit.}

\(^{52}\) \textit{Ibid.}
In the course of time the missionaries seem to have revised their attitude. Frustrated as they often found themselves in the role that the state had cast them in, they soon discovered that there was a strand among the *homiziados*, in general, who did not shun them. On the contrary, they sought them out and offered them financial patronage that was more than welcome in these far-flung lands.

Given that the missionaries had very little to do and that the slave raids continued to take place despite their disapproval, the opportunity to convert these thousands of captives proved too tempting to pass by. Thus, it was not long before they came to accept the lifestyle of the Portuguese in these regions and to take advantage of the opportunities that they presented to them. It was, thus, a far cry between the attitude adopted by the Jesuit Fathers in 1602 and the position of Fr. Manrique, who willingly held fort at Dianga in 1629 while the Portuguese inhabitants “had gone off [in search of slaves] to attack the principality of Jassor and would not return for thirty or forty days.”

He tells us that in the 5 years that he spent in the kingdom of Arakan (1629-35), about 18,000 Bengali captives were brought to the ports of Dianga and Angaracale, of which he, along with 2 colleagues proudly claimed to have baptized 11,407 persons. The same acceptance can be read in the tenor of Fr. John Cabral and other Jesuit Fathers at Hugli in 1632. These priests steadfastly supported the Portuguese community which was under attack by the Mughal forces due to their long standing involvement in this traffic in slaves.

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53 Manrique, I, p. 92.
The conversion of these huge numbers of captives seemed to give the missionaries in Bengal the greatest sense of achievement, as in terms of sheer numbers it was undoubtedly a great success story of proselytization. Individual missionaries in the field found a justification for these activities in labeling the Bengali people a mean and cowardly lot who deserved as much. Manrique was amazingly forthright in his justification of slavery on grounds of race. He wrote - "The Bengalas are a very languid race and pusillanimous, given up, as most Asian peoples are, to self interest. The Bengalas are therefore mean spirited and cowardly and hence they easily accustom themselves to captivity and slavery. To be well and successfully served by them they should be treated rather with harshness than mildness."  

Similarly, the Church authorities justified this conversion of slaves in the general crusading spirit that inspired their activities in Asia - "This raiding was pronounced by the Provincial Council at Goa to be just, since the Mogors were not only raiders and tyrannical usurpers but also enemies of Christianity. For they desired to extirpate it wholly from the Orient, where there should be none but Mussulymans......So the Portuguese from the Magh country consistently make war on these people, entering their territory in their fleets, with occasionally a few Magh Gelias following in their wake."  

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56 We are told of inconceivably large numbers of conversions - at one place, 16,090 slaves along with 5111 free citizens of Arakan (Manrique, I, p. 287), and at another, 62,606 persons ('Relation sent by the Bishop and Viceroy of the East Indies in 1606', (tr.) Hosten, in 'Jesuit Letters and Allied Papers on Bengal, Arakan and Pegu, 1598-1610', Hosten Collection, Bengal XVI,XVII, No. 5). While the numbers indicated are unlikely to be literally true, perhaps the missionaries meant to convey a sense of great achievement, after what had literally been a complete famine of souls.  

57 Manrique, I, p. 64.
In the long run, despite their own early reservations about the inclinations of the Portuguese settled in the region, the Church fathers developed a close relationship with the settler community. Fr. Paulo da Trindade relates how the Franciscans were specially requested for and then welcomed with great show of happiness by Manoel de Matos and his associates at Chittagong. 59 Similarly, Fr. Manrique too describes how the settlers at Arakan "made such excessive demonstrations in my honour that I felt overpowered." 60

The religious feeling inspiring these welcomes and their spiritual content may not have been as much as the clerics desired. What the Portuguese hoped to gain from them, usually, was political mileage out of association with the missionary. By asking for and patronizing Church fathers, homizados like Manoel de Matos and Filipe de Brito found themselves elevated to a position above the rest of the adventurers that they tried to command. With the approval of the respectable padre, they automatically received endorsement to their claims as leaders of their bands or as heads of their settlements.

In fact, in the absence of any political authority that they were willing to submit to, where the only power that they all respected was that of the sword, disputes between groups of rival Portuguese in the region often ended in a bloodbath. In such a situation, the padre was eagerly welcomed as a well-recognized and neutral party, to intervene and effect a peaceful settlement. The Jesuit fathers at the residence at


60 Trindade, Parte III, Chap. 71, pp. 331-5.
Chittagong, for example, played a key role in “certain reconciliations which were made between two groups of Portuguese composed of the most influential and powerful people settled in this Bengala. For a year there had been among them great quarrel and scandals. The Fathers intervened, and, assembling them all embraced and ate together to the great consolation of all parties; for...it averted many murders and misfortunes which were bound to happen.”

The coming of the missionaries also gave the Portuguese greater legitimacy vis-à-vis the surrounding local population and indigenous rulers. As the captain of the Portuguese settled in the city of Arakan told Fr. Manrique, “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 Portuguese settlers also saw the Church fathers as a most palatable means to establish a chain of communication with the Estado da India. Most of them had come to realize that it was useful to keep this link alive. Thus, while the homiziados may or may not have sought out the missionaries for the religious services that they provided, they were quick to cash in on their strong appeal as respectable men of God. These private elements were quick to pick up useful tips from the Estado that they otherwise eschewed. They were soon sending the Christian missionary as the representative of their interests, both to the courts of neighbouring rulers as well as back to the Estado da India.

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61 Fr. Fernão Guerreiro’s Annual Relation of 1600 & 1601 on Bengal & Pegu’, tr. by Hosten, Hosten Collection, ‘Bengal XVI, XVII’, ms. 3. Chap. XIX.

itself. Thus, the same Fathers who came to the Portuguese settlements in Bengal as state envoys often found themselves speaking on behalf of the settlers before several kings in the region. Fr. Frey Fransisco de Annunciação, for example, came to Siriaim in 1604 to investigate the possibilities of putting up a customhouse for the Estado da India. He travelled back to Goa the same year, this time on the request of Filipe de Brito, to ask for more military assistance from the Estado. Over the next five years the priest went on diplomatic missions on his behalf to the courts of the kings of Arakan, Tangu and Siam.63 Thus, Fr. de Annunciao was strongly instrumental in prompting the spread of Filipe de Brito’s influence in the region. The growth of the power of Filipe de Brito vis-à-vis the king of Arakan was buttressed by the recognition of his independent little kingdom at Siriam by several neighbouring rulers, and was largely the achievement of this missionary.

The Christian missionaries in Bengal were, by and large, most visible as political envoys of the Portuguese settlers. They occupied themselves by negotiating on their behalf military assistance in anticipation of a skirmish or a peace treaty after one, much more than by administering the sacraments. After the naval encounter in January 1605, the Jesuit Father Natal Salerno went to Arakan for Filipe de Brito to negotiate the terms of peace with the king. Fully aware of the uncertainty of the peace, however, de Brito speedily dispatched him to Malacca to secure from the viceroy more military assistance for Siriam. Again, after the Portuguese abandonment of their settlement at Sundiva and following the death of their leader, Domingos Carvalho, it was the Jesuit Fr.

63 Caetogas, op. cit.
John Andrew Boves who negotiated the release of captives with the raja of Jessore, Pratapaditya. Through their close association with these Portuguese the clerics came to identify so completely with their interests that they put up a most vehement defence for them. Manrique, defending the settlers at Dianga before the king of Arakan declared, "If you find that 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."  

The homiziados in Bengal, thus, won the church fathers over to their side without straining too hard to be devout Christians, or paying anything more than lip-service to the authority of the Estado da India. Perhaps additional was the considerable financial largesse that these Portuguese elements provided to the church and the priests. The fathers who were located far away in the field complained of severe shortage of money. The crown, on its part, with its more secular imperial preoccupations was seldom able to meet its financial commitment to the Church as was understood by the terms of the Padroado. The priests, thus, often found themselves left to their own devices, and the patronage that they received in this situation was greatly appreciated. This was especially so in the 16th century when the priests and brothers were strictly forbidden to trade by the canons of the church and state. Some amount of commercial involvement did take place, nevertheless, as is indicated by the synods being obliged to repeatedly remind them of this prohibition. Though the fathers would probably have observed much caution in this

64 Guerreiro, Tr. Hosten, Hosten collection, Bengal XVI, XVII, op. cit., ms.9, Bk. III, Chap. III.
65 Manrique, I, p. 147.
matter, nonetheless, indirect references to their trade inadvertently occurred in their correspondence with each other. At Chandecan in 1602, two Jesuit fathers complained that “they [could] hardly maintain themselves......almost the whole of the last year......[they] had been without drinking wine......And, to improve matters, during the journey that the Father [Domingos de Sousa] made to India, he started bringing three pieces of velvet....and others of damask and taffeties.....I had many more particulars but they are not for letters.”

In spite of the ban on trade by the ecclesiastics, it certainly continued to take place. The king of Portugal himself had to issue a decree in 1609, followed by another in 1612, prohibiting this practice with the threat of severe punishment to violators. Thus, the king proclaimed that any person who would

“maintain any dealing involving money or goods belonging to religious or ecclesiastics [would do so] under the pain of punishment that......they would lose all their wealth and wares, as well as the same goods and money that were involved in the trade of the above-mentioned religious and ecclesiastical persons [would be confiscated], half for my treasury and the other half for the persons who accused them [revealed their activities], besides ten years of banishment to [serve in the garrison of] the fortress of Sírião.

Viewed against such a background, the giving of alms to the priests acquired special significance. Even small amounts did not go un-noticed and received mention. The Portuguese in Bengal understood this very well and astute men, like Filipe de Brito, went out of their way to cultivate favour among the missionaries. He was

67 Fr. Andrew de Nabais, *op. cit.*

constantly eager to call them to his fledging settlement, for which he had big plans. They
were also prominent recipients of his munificence; he regularly sent funds to the Jesuits
for their residence at Nagapatnam and to build a college at Quilon. After the Jesuit
priests arrived at Siriam and set up residence there in 1604, they were almost fully funded
by Filipe de Brito. He gave them money to build their house and “very large arable
lands” yielding enough revenue to maintain the Fathers who were to stay there, and
maintain a fine fruit garden. Perhaps it is not entirely unrelated that Filipe de Brito had
the singular most successful career of the thousands of Portuguese homiziados scattered
around Bengal, Arakan and Pegu. He bridged the gulf with the Estado da India without
giving up his own independence, and presided over a virtual little kingdom centered on
Siriam, recognized by the local populace and the neighbouring rulers as a prominent
power center in the region.

There were several other well-to-do Portuguese who were leaders in their
own little settlements and who sought the legitimacy and respectability that association
with the missionaries would give them. Perhaps this may not have been on the scale of
Filipe de Brito, but they too gave the missionaries much financial support. We have
reference to one Diogo Nunes de Villalobos who sponsored the building of a church at
his own settlement of Sripur around the year 1600. He extended this patronage in order
to call the fathers to Sripur from their residence at the neighbouring port of Chittagong.

“And this Diogo Nunes is the one who at the Porto Grande maintains Fr. Francisco

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70 ‘Letter of Fr. Andrew Boves, S.J., to the General of the Society of Jesus in Rome’, Cochin, 30.11.1605, Hosten Collection, Bengal XVI, XVII.
Fernandez and his companion with the alms he [gives]....them.....”71

The church fathers also received patronage from the local rulers; “this because many Portuguese came to their lands to buy and sell.”72 Portuguese trade and firepower was obviously valued enough by these potentates for them to extend patronage to their missionaries as well; “because they knew the Christians would not stay without their priests.”73 The missionaries understood that such benevolence came with strings attached. As Friar Manrique remarked, “they [the benefactor monarchs] hope owing to the presence of the Brethren that their country will readily attract Christian merchants.”74 This patronage was mostly in the form of grant of revenue-free lands and, sometimes, the promise to undertake the financial commitment of building a church.75

Once the missionaries arrived in the region, they were reported to have been summoned to their kingdoms by the local rajas. Thus, Raja Pratapaditya of the small kingdom of Chandecan was “the first who called them and who gave them revenue in his lands for their support......He is extremely fond of the Fathers and has a high opinion of them; he likes to grant them whatever they ask.” On the opening of their church at Chandecan in 1600, he is reported to have visited it “accompanied by all the grandees of

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71 ‘Fr. Fernão Guerreiro’s Annual Relation of 1600 & 1601 on Bengal and Pegu’, tr. By Fr. Hosten, Hosten Collection, Bengal XVI, XVII, ms. 3, Chap. XIX.


73 Manrique, I, p. 40.

74 Ibid, p. 47.

the court, and he was extremely pleased to see it and he repeated a promise he had made about building for the Fathers a very fine Church of stone and mortar....."76

Similarly, when the king of Arakan returned to his capital after his victory over the kingdom of Pegu, the fathers from Chittagong paid him a visit. "At the close of the interview he said that he would be glad to have some Fathers at Chatigam, and also at Arracam, where he resides, and that he would arrange for their maintenance and make them an allowance which he would double the next year."77 In 1604, the fathers at both Chittagong and Chandecan (which had been conquered by the king of Arakan by then) commented that the rent that the king of Arakan gave them was their main source of funding, "for if they had not that they would have nothing."78

These grants and donations, however, were not sufficient to finance the missionaries in the region of Bengal and Arakan. The fathers complained that all sources of their funds would dry up in the long term. The padroado finances sent by the king of Portugal in the form of quarterly grants were notoriously unreliable, mostly "left unpaid owing to the dishonesty of ministers."79 The money offered by the regional monarchs was conditional upon the presence of the missionaries actually increasing the volume and the value of Portuguese trade to these kingdoms. "But when they find that they are not receiving the benefits they expected, being unwilling to expend money without any

76 Guerreiro, Annual Relation of 1600 & 1601, (tr.) Hosten, op. cit.
77 Guerreiro, tr. Payne, op. cit., p. 189.
78 Fr. Andrew de Nabais, Highli, 25.1.1604, op. cit.
79 Manrique, I, p. 48.
return, they seek an opportunity for expelling them [the fathers].”

Even rich Portuguese benefactors, like Filipe de Brito, often spoke of more sponsorship than they could actually afford. He presented himself in a prosperous and benevolent light in order to call the fathers over to his side. In reality, however,

“though he wrote over there [to Goa] about founding a college, the whole thing was an invention of his......He is a man who owes Fr. Francisco Fernandez eight tangas [tankas]......His coffers, they say, contain more air than money.”

By the mid-seventeenth century, therefore, it was a well-accepted fact that the overseas missions were actively engaged in trade to support themselves. While there were those among the clergy who still had reservations and objections to these men of God serving Mammon. They viewed the trading padre cast in too worldly a mould for comfort. The reality was well-expressed by a 17th century traveller to Asia –

“......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.”

Mercantile activity by the missionary in the field was ultimately sanctioned both by the Papacy as well as the Portuguese crown, for practical reasons. Instances of members of the clergy trading in Asia are, therefore, numerous. A Dominican friar claimed in 1658 that he had personally made more than 40,000 pardãos in the sandalwood trade in the Lesser Sunda islands. On his journey from Pipli to Goa

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81 Letter of Fr. Andrew de Nabais, Hugli, 25.1.1602, op. cit.

82 Peter Mundy, quoted in Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, op. cit, p. 49.

83 Boxer, *ibid*, p. 46.
in 1637, Father Manrique carried with him a large amount of merchandise belonging to two local merchants, that he was to make over to Makan Das, a Hindu trader en route.84 A ship which made the journey from Goa to Macao in 1658, was owned one-third by the Jesuit Province of Japan, one-third by the Jesuit Vice-Province of China, and the remaining third by the fidalgo Simão de Sousa de Tavora, former captain of Salsete.85 The Church militant was, of necessity, also the Church mercantile.86 It traded variously, independently, in alliance with indigenous Asian merchants, and in conjunction with Portuguese individuals in Asia.

By and large, the hold of the Portuguese Crown over the clergy posted in areas outside the empire was very lax, especially in view of the inadequate financial support that it could provide to these religious men. Thus, though the king may have intended to send the padres to reclaim the homiziados for the Estado, effectively they gradually lost the padres themselves to the wilderness that was Bengal. Barely fifty years after sending handpicked clergymen to the Bengal mission, the Crown found that the missionary in the field acted, on occasion, on behalf of the Estado, but more often as an ally of the Portuguese freebooters. But more often than not, the missionary was his own person who functioned on his own behalf. In 1665, the Portuguese settled at Hugli were petitioning the viceroy for protection against the corruption of the missionaries. They complained that this had created

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84 Manrique, I, p. 445.
85 Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, p. 48.
86 Both terms are from Boxer, The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion, op. cit.
“a situation in which the....Christians, in general, feel lost, appealing to God and to Your Excellency for a remedy. And they suffer larger exploitation at the hands of the parish priests who are posted in those areas, who take from them, on the occasion of their deaths, the properties that they wish, without giving any justification. And they ask, for issuing one document, 150 to 200 xerafins, and for each mass 1 1/2 to 2 pardaos, if the Christians resist such excesses, the priests intimidate them with excommunication...”

By the mid-17th century, the overall interest of the Portuguese crown towards the Bay of Bengal had waned considerably. The Portuguese personnel, including the missionaries, scattered around the region, however, were still interested in maintaining links with the Estado da India. In a curious turn of tables, now they used all sorts of arguments to get some state sponsorship, funding and protection for their settlements and enterprises. No matter how little allegiance these freebooters and missionaries expressed to the king, he was not expected to disregard his responsibility towards them, since as good Christians, they were his loyal subjects. Thus, in 1647, the Crown was urged to continue to support these regions with, at least, a protective armada. They pointed out that the king could “take possession of a larger empire than the one of Alexander” by virtue of “the conversion of such a large number of souls.....they convert themselves and become faithful subjects to Your Highness.....many nations such a Siam, Brama, Pegu, and Bengal and other kingdoms.”

The king was, thus, desperately reminded of his Padroado rights which, insistently at least still remained on paper. In the absence of any other, perhaps this would prove to be an effective weapon to stop the onslaught of the Dutch and the English in the Bay of Bengal.

87 AFO, Fasciculo 6, Doc. 591, pp. 1278-1280.