CHAPTER II

MAPPING NEW TERRAIN: THE PORTUGUESE
ESTADO DA INDIA: THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

The earliest known reference to Bengal in the Portuguese documents is in a small geographical summary, that is an appendix to the diary of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama to Asia in 1498.¹ In this, Bengal is situated near Siam and Tenasserim and is classified as an Islamic kingdom with a Muslim king and a Muslim majority population. With reference to goods offered for trade, the author notes textiles of high value, both cotton and silk, an abundance of wheat and lots of silver.² The Portuguese knew, then, from the very beginning, that Bengal offered neither “Christians nor spices” that they had come to Asia in search of. Consequently, the Portuguese Crown did not evince much interest in the region during the early phase. The initial years were spent in conquering the main areas of spice production and the networks of Asian spice trade. Hence the Crown focused its primary attention on the pepper-producing Malabar coast and the spice islands in Indonesia. It was within the first decade of their coming to Asia that the Portuguese Estado da India was created, with the establishments of feitorias and fortalezas at key locations of spice trade, notably at Cochin, Goa, Diu, Hormuz, Malacca.

Thus during their initial endeavours in Asia, Bengal did not emerge as an area of immediate interest to the Portuguese Crown.


² Thomaz, ibid., p. 404.
In its efforts to acquire spices for the European market via the Cape route, the Portuguese Crown soon found that it had to get involved in intra-Asian trade. It was too expensive to pay in gold and silver for the pepper and spices, but that was all that the Asian producers and merchants were willing to accept from the Portuguese. They were completely disinterested in the European goods and curiosities and only found bullion acceptable in lieu of spices. So, as soon as the Estado officials realized that a variety of Asian goods were in demand in Malabar and the Moluccas, such as Gujarati textiles and Chinese silk and porcelain, they hurried to enter this intra-Asian trade. In keeping with their trademark characteristic of maritime operations, the Portuguese resorted to systematic violence to carve out a predominant position for themselves in this structure of trade. Buttressed by new feitorias and fortalezas, the Portuguese Estado da India snaked its way along the Asian coastline, till by 1515 it had more than 50 fortified settlements along the Indian Ocean littoral, from Sofala in East Africa up to Macao in China.

**The First Stirrings of Interest**

The growing involvement of the Portuguese in the intra-Asian trade inevitably led them to the critically important commercial regions touching upon the vast Bay of Bengal zone. As early as 1506, when the location of prospective fortresses in Asia was still being plotted out the Crown was advised by its personnel located in Asia to build a fortress in newly discovered Ceylon, as it was en route to the commercially promising regions of Malacca, Pegu, Sumatra and Choromandel. In this case, Ceylon was
found preferable to Quilon on the pepper-producing Malabar coast. In these early years much of their activity was exploratory in nature, when they were, above all, seeking new and additional sources of spices in Asia. While it is true, the Crown had not yet ventured into the Bay of Bengal, yet it had acquired considerable information about the region and the commercial possibilities it afforded. Such information emanated from the Bay of Bengal merchants who traded in the ports of the Estado, such as Malacca, and those of its allies, like Calicut. For example, D.Garcia de Noronha, a Portuguese fidalgo serving in Asia, in an agreement concluded with the Zamorin of Calicut, in 1513 (authorized by his uncle, the Governor-General Affonso de Albuquerque,) mentions Muslim merchants from Pegu, Tenasserim, Bengal, Choromandel and Ceylon coming to trade with Calicut. Moreover, in the same year, in a letter to the King, D. Manuel, Albuquerque himself wrote that the Bengali merchants came to trade at Cannanor and desired Portuguese ships and goods to come to their ports, while “the king of Pegu......wants to trade with you and with your people.” The report further mentions that Bengal had a variety of long pepper, different, no doubt, from the ‘pimenta redondo’ of the Malabar coast that had such a large demand in Europe, but whose marketability was also worth investigating.

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6 Mention of “long pepper” among the products of Bengal is made by Duarte Barbosa, escrivão at the factory at Cannanor from 1500 to 1516 or 1517. M L Dames(tr.), The Book of Duarte Barbosa 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, Vol. II, pp 135-148. It is also noted by João de Barros, Da Asia, Decade IV, Livro IX, Capítulo I.
Once drawn into this huge pan-Asian trading network, the Portuguese state was quick to realize that its scope was endless. It was in this context that the Crown began to take an interest in new regions and particularly in the areas surrounding the Bay of Bengal. Given the state of knowledge in their minds about these regions at this early date the Portuguese state officials probably hoped that that they could, at least, find goods here to be utilized in other areas to procure spices. They rapidly found that they could pick up cotton and silk textiles from Choromandel and Bengal, gold and precious stones from Pegu, and Bengali silver, and exchange these for spices in the Moluccas and Malabar. The primary reason for interest in Bengal was thus, to build up the rapidly expanding structure of intra-Asian trade, to ensure a smooth supply of spices for the Crown ships on the Cape route.

By the second decade of the 16th century the Portuguese Crown veered to the idea to increase the official presence in the eastern seas, in general, either through armed fleets or by fortified settlements. This was also deemed necessary because the Muslim merchants had begun successfully circumventing the Portuguese blockade of spice trade in the western Indian Ocean, by getting supplies directly from Indonesia and going via the Maldives to the Red Sea. Consequently creating a strong presence in these hitherto ignored areas seemed necessary for the preservation of the crown's foremost priority. This was the monopoly trade in spices carried around the Cape of Good Hope generally referred to as, the carreira da India.

Thirdly, the Portuguese Estado da India was a unique thalassocratic empire, comprising a string of coastal fortresses which were primarily interconnected to

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7 Thomaz, De Ceuta a Timor, op. cit., pp. 407-408.
the Indian Ocean maritime network. Many of its most important fortresses, including Goa, Malacca and Hormuz, were mostly dependent for their basic supplies of food-stuffs on overseas sources. In this scenario, the reputation of Bengal and Pegu as food surplus areas flush with supplies made the Portuguese officialdom take a keen interest from the second decade of the 16th century. Early descriptions of the kingdom of Bengal and Pegu, presented to the Portuguese king, D.Manuel I (1495-1521), are singular in their testimony that these were lands of plenty and prosperity. Thus, in his description of Bengal João de Barros writes,

"the land of Bengal.....the greater part consists of fields washed by four notable rivers, and is cut into meadowlands, all is very fecund, not only with rice which is the main sustenance, but with many vegetables, greens and fruits...... Throughout this entire Kingdom they make great quantities of good sugar, that they carry in bundles for other parts. A good deal of long pepper is found there, and it is bountiful with all kinds of great and small livestock, and wild animals, and birds of the river bank of all kinds......"  

Similarly, describing Pegu, Fernão Lopes de Castanheda writes, "the land, as a rule, is well supplied with rice and fruit. It is a land of abundant provisions."  

It was this general abundance of this region that first made it the focus of the attention of the Portuguese state, trying to feed its string of fast-mushrooming fortresses, often surrounded by hostile or barren hinterlands. Even before they captured it,

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8 Barros, op. cit., translated and reproduced in R.B Smith, The First Age of the Portuguese Embassies, Navigations, Peregrinations to the Ancient Kingdoms of Cambay and Bengal (1500-1521), Bethesda, Maryland, 1969, pp. 126-130.

9 Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India pelos Portuguese, Livro V, Capitulo XI, translated and reproduced in R.B Smith, The First Age of the Portuguese Embassies, Navigations and Peregrinations to the kingdoms and islands of Southeast Asia (1509-1521), Bethesda, Maryland, 1968, pp. 94-95.
the Portuguese knew that

"Malacca is so poor in the fertility of its soil that they can hardly harvest any goods or foodstuffs. They come from other places that are Java and Bengal, Pegu, Suda [Sunda] and from Siam also come a number of things."

As early as 1511 or 1512, thus, Afonso de Albuquerque had begun send envoys to Pegu and Bengal to load rice for Malacca. Very soon the Portuguese officials realized that these were well established supply lines and a trade that the Bengalis and Peguans valued as much as did the Estado. Thus, the captain of Malacca, Ruy de Brito wrote to Afonso de Albuquerque in 1514, "They are a people [they of Pegu] who have great need of Malacca by reason of the rice and things of their land they send here....."

In the course of the 16th century, the rice of Pegu and Bengal became important to the Estado not only to supply fortresses like Malacca and Goa, but for other purposes also. Most of the crew on Portuguese ships, at least in the Bay of Bengal and Indonesian seas, were paid salaries in money as well as in quantities of rice, and had the right to carry their own goods for trade in designated spaces in the holds of the vessels. This rice was picked up in ports in the region where it was cheapest, like Pacem in Sumatra, and, perhaps, others in Bengal and Pegu. This region, thus, also became important for its ports of call, to pick up supplies for ships criss-crossing these seas on their way to other destinations.

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In the course of the 16th century, the trade of Pegu and Bengal became one that the Estado was keen to develop and preserve, due to the vast profits it generated. We have in the 1580's a series of letters from the cities of Goa and Cochin to the king, and from the king to the viceroy in India. The main subject of these letters was to highlight the importance of providing escort of armed fleets for ships bound for Goa coming from Bengal and the south. These ships were loaded with foodstuffs and were especially susceptible to attacks by ships from Dachem and other Moorish enemies. \(^\text{14}\) “For the security of the navigation to the south”, the king even considered fortifying the Cape of Galle in Ceylon, “where all ships coming from Bengal and the southern regions call”, at a time when he was, as a rule, not building any fortresses in Asia. \(^\text{15}\) The Portuguese king repeatedly urged the viceroy to maintain good relations with the king of Pegu, because of Malacca’s dependence upon Pegu for foodstuffs. Out of these foodstuffs in turn, the captains of Malacca supplied the fortresses of the spice islands of the Moluccas and Amboina. \(^\text{16}\) The importance of Malacca and the southern regions to the Estado da India, was clearly reflected in the correspondence of the city of Goa to the king in 1603: “Malacca....is the gate of the whole south” and “without the south there is no India”. \(^\text{17}\)

\(^{14}\) Carta que a cidade (de Goa) escreveo o anno de 605 (1605), published in J H da Cunha Rivara, Archivo Portuez-Oriental, New Delhi, 1992 (reprint), Fasciculo 1, Parte 2, Document 13, pp. 140-160; Letter of the King to the Viceroy, Lisboa, 8.3.1589, in APO, Fasciculo 3, Document 64, pp. 218-223.

\(^{15}\) Letter of the King to the Viceroy, Lisboa, 7.3.1589, in APO, Fasciculo 3, Document 63, pp. 215-218.

\(^{16}\) Letter of the King to the Viceroy, Lisbon, 26.2.1595, in APO, Fasciculo 3, Document 168, pp. 501-505, and, Carta, que a Cicade de Goa escreveo a Sua Magestade, o anno de 99 (1599) in APO, Fasciculo 1, Parte 2, pp. 61-74.

\(^{17}\) Carta que a cidade de Goa escreveo a Sua Magestade, o anno de 1603, in APO, Fasciculo 1, Parte 2, Document 9, pp. 110-125.
As the bread-basket of this crucial region Bengal and Pegu, thus, always remained areas with which the Crown and the Estado were keen to maintain contact.

Another reason for the growing official interest in this region from the 16th century was its flourishing ship-building industry, whose favourable reputation reached the ears of the Portuguese at Cochin and at Malacca. Tomé Pires, who wrote his Suma Oriental between 1512 and 1515, specifically mentions that "junks are made in this port [of Rangoon] because of the amount of good wood there." 18 Duarte Barbosa, the escrivão at the factory at Cananor between 1500 and 1517 wrote that the merchants of Malacca got their trading ships from Pegu. At times they went to Pegu to purchase the junks that were built there, and sometimes the Pegu merchants who came to Malacca sold their ships along with the merchandise that they were carrying. 19 Keeping in mind the intense maritime activity that the Portuguese had necessarily to undertake in their vast, pan-Asian, sea-borne empire, not to speak of the great fleet that sailed from Lisbon to Goa and back each year, they would have been interested in establishing contact with this region at the earliest.

The Portuguese were quick to take advantage of these established practices. Pero Paes, amongst the first Portuguese to be sent by the captain of Malacca to Pegu to load rice for that fortress in 1513, was also instructed to purchase a junk from Pegu for the proposed voyage to China the following year. 20 Pero Paes, himself, decided

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19 Cited in Thomaz., op. cit., p. 299.

20 Letter of the Ruy de Brito to Afonso de Albuquerque, Malacca, 6.1.1514, op. cit.
to take advantage of the facilities available and utilized the time that he was anchored in Martaban to conduct extensive repairs on the ship that he was traveling in itself. From the details of the repairs undertaken and the large numbers of skilled workers readily available in the port, who were employed in this task, it seems to have been a large and well-organized industry.21

The facilities of the shipbuilding industry of Bengal and Pegu seem to have been utilized by Muslim traders across the Indian Ocean. Caesar Fredericke, a Venetian traveller to these parts in 1586, tells us that in the island of Sundip (off the coast of Bengal), "so plentiful were the materials for ship-building, that the Sultan of Constantinople (the Turkish monarch) found it cheaper to have his vessels built at Sundip than at Alexandria."22 The Portuguese Crown soon concluded that in its battle with the Moorish traders of the Indian Ocean, one way of getting an upper hand was to cut them off from the ship-building and repairing facilities of Bengal and Pegu. In the anonymous 'Brief Account of the Kingdom of Pegu', written between 1600 and 1605, the author reminisces of

"the times Viceroy of India had sought the friendship of the king [of Pegu] for the purpose of preventing the Soldan of Babylonia, and then the Turk, from availing themselves of that country's abundance of wood and other things required for the building of fleets. Mathias de Albuquerque [viceroy of India from 1591-1597] took such trouble in this respect that at great cost to the Indian establishment he sent João Cayado de Gamboa with a fleet to burn all the galleys which he was informed were being built in Pegu to the order of the Turk....."23

In the long standing battle with the Muslims in the Indian Ocean, even the king of

21 Thomaz, op. cit., p. 317-318.
Portugal realized the strategic importance of preventing them from carrying wood out of these kingdoms. Thus, the king wrote to the viceroy in 1598, telling him to do whatever he could in this matter.  

The Portuguese officialdom thus began to take an active interest in Bengal and Pegu by 1511, not long after Malacca was captured. Pegu was famous for its gold, precious stones, handcrafted goods in gold, silver, iron, wood, and porcelain, while Bengal had fine cotton and silk textiles and much precious metals. There was much demand around Asia for all these goods, and it was worth investigating if they could be sold in Europe as well. They both had abundant foodstuffs, needed by key fortresses like Malacca. Moreover Bengal was the largest producer in Asia of salt-petre, the main ingredient of gunpowder, which was a vital instrument and component of Portuguese firepower in the Indian Ocean region. And almost as important, these kingdoms had more “gentile” than “moor” population, of a gentle and peaceful nature, that were perceived as conducive to conversion to Christianity.

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26 Letter of the King to the Viceroy, Lisbon, 12.1.1591, in APO, Fasciculo 3, Document 76, pp. 242-274.
27 Castanheda, op. cit.
Janus at the gates of the Bay: royal emissary or gold-digger?
The First Contacts, A.D. 1510-1521

From about 1511-1512 Afonso de Albuquerque began sending the first royal emissaries to the kingdoms of Bengal, Arakan and Pegu, with the intention of establishing close commercial links. The first Portuguese, to go to Pegu, according to the testimony of Antonio Galvão, was Ruy Nunes da Cunha, a cavaleiro (gentleman) sent by Albuquerque with letters and embassy to the king of Pegu. 28 Gaspar Correia makes the interesting suggestion that local kings along the Choromandel and Bengal coastlines preferred to receive Portuguese traders in their private capacity rather than as Crown merchants, as the former offered the same prospects of trade and were easier to control. 29 Albuquerque understood this hesitation of the Asian rulers to welcome royal Portuguese ships into their ports, as along with the offer of trade they carried considerable political and military baggage. A Crown ship in these Asian ports meant the beginnings of a foreign politico-militaristic presence there that many of them were not comfortable with, given the warring reputation of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean. Yet, with his firm commitment to state control over all Portuguese activity in Asia, sending out Portuguese personnel in their private capacity was not an option that the Governor-general could exercise.

A compromise was struck, so that while exploring the commercial potential of various unfamiliar areas in Asia, Albuquerque often sent royal emissaries aboard local merchant vessels. This also saved the Estado the expense of sending a

Crown ship to a new region, whose commercial and political potential was still unknown. Afonso de Albuquerque mentioned this to D.Manuel in 1513, when he wrote, “The King of the Islands” (?) asks for your help and wishes to become one of your vassals and I am not in a position to go there, neither to send an ambassador as I have few people and few ships....” 30 Thus, Ruy Nunes da Cunha travelled to Pegu “in a junk of the land”. 31 “This was the first Portuguese who journeyed to that Kingdom and provided information of that land.” 32

The da Cunha embassy was followed by 2 voyages to Pegu made by Pero Paes in 1513 and 1514, who was sent by the captain of Malacca “to load a junk with rice for this fortress” and “likewise do your trading [on behalf of the King, D.Manuel].” 33 Again, these voyages did not take place in Crown ships, but were organized according to the prevailing Malay custom. The voyage of 1512 took place in a junk that was equipped by the Portuguese Crown and Nina Chatu, a leading Tamil merchant of Malacca, in equal partnership. These ships were manned by Malay captains and mixed Portuguese (minority) and Asian (majority) crews, who were paid by the allocation of specified sections in the holds of the ships in which they were free to load their own cargoes. Further, additional cargo space, not utilized by the Crown or its partner’s goods of trade, were rented to other merchants. Thus, despite the strict centralization and control


32 Ibid.

33 Letter of Ruy de Brito to Afonso de Albuquerque, Malacca, 6.1.1514, op. cit., p. 21; Letter of Jorge de Albuquerque to D.Manuel, Malacca, 8.1.1515, translated and reproduced in R.B.Smith, op.cit, p. 22.
attempted by Afonso de Albuquerque, these first ‘official’ voyages to these new regions also comprised a large component of private commercial interests.

It is clear from the details of the da Cunha and Pero Paes voyages that their composition was complex and difficult to define. Thus, the nature of the Portuguese interaction with Bengal and Pegu cannot easily be placed into ‘official’ and ‘private’ categories. Unlike the areas west of Cape Comorin, where the Portuguese presence was established with Crown funds, personnel, initiatives and priorities as the driving force, things were far more ambiguous and multilayered in our region of study.

The Portuguese interest in the Bay of Bengal, it has been argued, increased enormously following governorship of Lopo Soares de Albergaria (1515-1518), who succeeded Albuquerque. His succession itself in large part was indicative of the Crown’s willingness to accommodate the private commercial aspirations of the Portuguese nobility. Many amongst the fidalgoes were opposed to the royal monopoly pertaining to all aspects of Asian trade that was imposed strictly by Albuquerque. With the liberalization and relaxation of state control in his regime, opportunity to trade and make profit in one’s private capacity (and not merely as an employee of the Estado da India) opened up to the Portuguese personnel in Asia. This led to the emergence of two tendencies. First, officials of the Estado began to use their positions to grant favours and to make money, to the detriment of the Estado’s own interest and to an unprecedented degree. Second, Portuguese soldiers began to desert the factories of the Estado in search


35 Thomaz, De Ceuta, op. cit., p. 436.
of opportunities to make more money. Both tendencies were manifest almost immediately.

In 1516, the captain of Malacca, Jorge de Brito, granted a voyage to Pegu to one of his relatives, Henrique Leme. This was the first sanctioned private Portuguese expedition to the Bay of Bengal. The clash between the two interests that the fidalgo combined in himself, the Crown and the Estado da India that he represented on the one hand, and his own private ambitions, on the other, surfaced. En route, Henrique Leme seized a junk belonging to some Muslim merchants of Pegu, which led to the expulsion of the whole Portuguese expedition from Pegu, a very poor reception given to subsequent expeditions and a sudden rupture of the tentative relations that the Estado da India had been trying to establish with that kingdom.36

As a further manifestation of the same tendency, the captains of Malacca, began using their official fleet to force all ships headed for Pacem, on the northern coast of Sumatra, towards Malacca. A Portuguese factory had been recently established here by the Estado, and officials in the region were generally instructed to encourage trading vessels to call at it. The Malacca captains began rounding up the ships, ostensibly to make them pay the obligatory duties at the royal customs house, but really to extort as much as they could from them. Thus, the factors at Pacem complained to the king in 1516 that in the last five months not a single ship had come to that port.37 By the middle of the century Crown officials, in general, were indulging in corruption and misuse of

36 R.B. Smith, ‘The Voyage of Anrique Leme – 1516’, in The First Age——to the Kingdoms and Islands of South-East Asia, op. cit., Chapter II, Section 4, pp. 22-25.
37 Thomaz, op. cit., p. 437.
their positions. Even the captains of the fleet of small foists which were meant to safeguard the king’s pepper trade around Goa were, instead, harassing local merchants to make money. A letter to the king, written in 1523 recorded:

“...they come upon the naos that have your safe-conduct and make some of them pay 100 pardoas, and others 50 and from others they take rice and cloth and cause much oppression, in such a way that...the Moors give them what they ask so that their voyages will not become a total loss.”38

Further the captaincy of Malacca became a very lucrative and coveted post among Portuguese fidalgoes because of the vast opportunities it presented to its holders to generate extra income. Even at the end of the century the câmara of Goa complained to the king of Portugal that the captains and factors at Malacca were misusing their position to give primacy to their personal trade. A representation made in 1596 noted –

“the captains, in collusion with their factors, retain all the wares that are coming from Java, Dachem, Banda, the Moluccas, Pegu and Siam and from other areas for themselves...And [resort to] very serious harassment of the person who navigates to the said ports without their express permission, about which Your Majesty must take suitable steps.”39

The second major development which became manifest during the regime of liberalization under Viceroy Lopo Soares de Albergaria was the exodus of Portuguese soldiers who began to desert the factories of the Estado. In this situation the lucrative Bay of Bengal, region, which was also unfettered by any official presence was the territory most preferred by the deserters. In 1523, Antonio da Fonseca told the king,

39 Carta que a cidade de Goa escreveu a Sua Magestade, o anno de 1596 [1596], J.H.da Cunha Rivara, op. cit., Fascículo 1, Part 2, pp. 31-49.
“Your Highness has many men here but, because they are scattered, they seem very few, and they are so dispersed that some go to Malacca. Others to Pacem, others Bengal, Pegu, others Choromandel, and along the whole Bay of Bengal to many of the ports there.....each man in search of the best way of life he can find....And they go about like this because the land is very broad and long, and greed excessive, and another cause of this is that Your Highness cannot pay their wages, or even maintenance, where for they are forced to find their own way of life.”

The first Portuguese recorded to reach Bengal, (according to Antonio Galvão and João de Barros) was a certain João Coelho. He was sent in private capacity, in 1516, by an Italian merchant, Giovanni da Empoli, on board a Bengali ship owned by a relative of the governor of Chatigão, entrusted with a cargo of pepper and sandalwood, owned mostly by Empoli and partly by other Portuguese merchants. Empoli was serving as the royal factor at Pacem at that time. He sent João Coelho to Bengal, furnished with the written authorization of Fernão Peres de Andrade, the fidalgo who was granted the official right to discover Bengal and China, by D.Manuel in 1515. Andrade had meanwhile halted at Pacem, on the way to China, and intended to go to Bengal later, on his return. In João de Barros’ account the João Coelho voyage assumes an official character, whereby he was sent by Andrade to prepare the way for his own voyage. In fact this was a common practice followed by the Portuguese authorities in Asia. The first messages to China were carried by Chinese merchants who were trading at Malacca at the time of its conquest by Albuquerque.

40 Letter from Antonio de Fonseca to the King, Goa, 18.10.1523, op. cit., pp. 197-199.


42 Thomaz, ibid., p. 439.

43 ibid.
Whether João Coelho was an official envoy or was an agent of an Italian merchant in Asia is not altogether certain. Nonetheless, by 1515 the private aspirations of royal officials in Portuguese Asia were exerting intense pressure on the Crown to open up the right to explore and trade in regions like the Bay of Bengal, and beyond, to private enterprise by officials. In all probability they knew only too well that the race was between them and other employees of the Estado, much lower down in the hierarchy. Such private individuals (soldiers, sailors etc.) were not so well-placed in the Estado and were thus, easily able to choose between the two – continuing to serve in their official positions or crossing over and turning renegade. Thus, thousands of soldados were deserting the Estado every year in order to partake of the huge potential profits of private trade disallowed by the state. The ruling class of the fidalgos could not make this choice so easily and were, thus, not able to put to use the opportunity available to them. The Crown relented in 1515 and began to grant this right to deserving officials of the Estado da India, as a reward for good service. The intense feeling of urgency on the part of the Portuguese ruling class can be seen from the fact that D.Manuel granted the right for the official discovery of Bengal and China to Fernão Peres de Andrade, as a reward for his defense of Malacca against the Javanese in 1512. This privilege was granted to Andrade in 1515 itself, the same year that the king decided to give the governorship of the Estado da India to Lopo Soares de Albergaria and to loosen the Crown control of the Estado.

The early official expeditions sent to the Bay of Bengal also had a very large private component. This is evident from the composition of the expedition to China, led by Fernão Peres de Andrade in 1517. His fleet comprised four ships of the King and
three junks, one of which belonged to Antonio Falcão, a Portuguese merchant, another to Fulata, a Chinese merchant, and the third to Cure-Diraja, a Muslim merchant of Malacca. This third junk was captained by a Portuguese captain, João Botelho. In this junk, as well as in one of the Crown ships, part of the cargo belonged to Giovanni da Empoli. It is quite likely that the official expedition to Bengal possibly also had a mixed composition of official along with some private shipping.

Fernão Peres de Andrade in fact never was able to make the trip to Bengal. The official Portuguese expedition to this kingdom was finally made by D. João da Silveira in 1518. His mission was to request permission to build a factory for the Estado da India to trade with Bengal. The fact that such “official” mission carried piggyback the private commercial aspirations of the fidagoes became evident subsequently. On his way to Bengal, D. João da Silveira captured two Muslims vessels sailing from Bengal to Gujarat, of which one belonged to a relative of the governor of Chittagong, “a principal City of the Kingdom [of] Bengal.” This sabotaged his embassy to Bengal itself, where news of his actions preceded him. He was received by a hostile governor at Chittagong, where all that he achieved was to gain the upper hand in a series of naval skirmishes in the port itself. D. João then sailed on to the kingdom of Arakan without ever performing his functions as an emissary to the king of Bengal.

Another tendency that surfaced in the course of the century was that members of such official expeditions also began to move away to make their own individual fortunes in these waters. Thus, the crew of the foists of the fleet commanded

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45 Barros, Decade III, Livro II, Capitulo III; R.B. Smith, op. cit., pp. 69-76.
by D. João da Silveira revolted against their captain, elected one among themselves as their new captain and "returned to the coast of Bengal with the intention of seizing everything they found." 46 By 1520, the waters of the Bay of Bengal were littered with the ships of the envoys of the king running into vessels of Portuguese personnel who had turned renegade in this region.

The next viceroy of India, Diego Lopes de Sequeira (1518-1521) sent Rafael Perestrelo as the next official agent on a commercial voyage to Bengal in 1521. While he was trading at Chittagong, there suddenly appeared a craft with as many as fifty men abroad, who were pirates. These elements had revolted against the authority of the viceroy of India, had based themselves in the Choromandel and were plundering the ships of the Moors. They were reported to have robbed a vessel near Tenasserim and then sailed on to continue their freebooting activities. 47

By the 1520s it was the common perception of all concerned - the Crown, its officials, the fidalgos and the homiziados 48 - that trade with these eastern regions had huge potential for profit. The viceroy started despatching state officials in rapid succession; in 1521, itself, two envoys were sent to Bengal; soon after Rafael Perestrelo was sent from Pegu, the viceroy, Diego Lopes de Sequeira sent Antonio de Brito via Pacem. 49 There was much coveting and jostling among the Portuguese nobility in Asia to

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46 Letter of Antonio de Miranda de Azevedo to the King, D. Manuel, Ceylon, 8.11.1519, translated and reproduced in R.B. Smith, op. cit., p. 78.

47 Barros, Decade III, Livro VIII, Capitulo II; R.B. Smith, op. cit., pp. 80.

48 Literally, ‘the refugees’, this was a term used to refer to all those who had turned renegade and deserted the Estado da India.
obtain the grant of official voyages to these areas. Each new viceroy of the *Estado*
freely distributed these lucrative permits to different ports around the Bay of Bengal to
his trusted supporters. At times these grants were questioned by the *fidalgoes*, who
appealed to the king in Lisbon against the viceroy’s ‘prerogative’. In 1550, Jorge
Cabral, the viceroy of India, had to justify his granting of a trip to Bengal to his brother-
in-law, one Jam Roiz de Carvalho,

“because this trip is vacant with the case against Cristovão de Crasto.....as he [Jam
Roiz] has served you so well for so long and Your Highness has praised him in
your letters; I take the initiative to bring [this] to the notice of Your Highness
because I know there are there [in Lisbon] many slanderers that accuse me of
having put in jail Cristovão de Crasto in order to give up the trip to my brother-in-

To further their private ambitions officials as well as soldiers were
tempted to desert the service of the *Estado da India* in these waters that held much
commercial promise and were far away from royal control. In a proverbial sense, they
were attracted to the Bay of Bengal like iron fillings to a magnet; such was the allure of
Bengal. To take the example of Cristovão Jusarte, he had left Portugal to escape the
stigma of a family accused and convicted of various crimes. He came to India around
1506, without any patronage and support in order to seek a fortune and to acquire social
standing. He found his way to Bengal and in 1521 was trying to sabotage the official

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50 Notes sent to the King regarding the arrival in India of Martim Afonso de Sousa and of his government,

51 Jorge Cabral to the King, Cochin, 21.2.1550, A. da Silva Rego, *Documentação——Padroado Português

52 Thomaz, *De Ceuta——*, op. cit., p. 465-466.
embassy to the court of the Sultan.\textsuperscript{53} Again, in 1521, on his way to the Moluccas while
captaining an armada of the Crown, Jorge de Brito got tempted by another such
Portuguese adventurer in Acheh to attack the city and capture the treasure that was
supposed to be stored in a temple on the island. He paid for the deviation from his official
duties with his life as well as those of fifty of his crew, almost a quarter of the total
number going to Molucca.\textsuperscript{54}

The interesting case of Jeronimo de Figueiredo illustrates many
dimensions of the world of the freebooter and the Estado. De Figueiredo was the captain
of one such voyage, granted in 1544, to search for the legendary island of gold (Ilha de
Ouro) in the east. In a unique correspondence between the captain and his crew, we are
given the details of his misbehaviour in these distant seas.\textsuperscript{55} He seems to have turned
renegade, as reported by part of his crew that stole some crafts and escaped to Ceylon. He
assumed absolute power, deriding the king of Portugal and his authority – "he used to
say that....he was King, Pope and Emperor that would do and undo the law, being God
up above and he down below......"\textsuperscript{56} He began to send boats to capture local women and
slaves, to threaten the use of force to make extortions from local kings, and to attack
peaceful ports all along the coasts of Pegu and Bengal in order to capture Asian shipping
and acquire riches rapidly. "All his purpose was centered on making profit......as he had

\textsuperscript{53} Bouchon and Thomaz, \textit{Voyage dans----, op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{54} Thomaz, \textit{De Ceuta------, op. cit.}, p. 468.

\textsuperscript{55} Notes sent to the King regarding the arrival in India of Martim Afonso de Sousa and of his government, 1544, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 218-234.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid}, p. 232.
made up his mind not to return to India in such poverty...."57 It should be remembered that many of its fidalgoes had come to India with the express purpose of making their fortunes. No wonder officials of the Estado complained to the king in 1544, that the Portuguese nobles in Asia, in general, had become an unruly lot:

"......the fidalgoes that had passed the Cape of Good Hope.....are like Lucifier as they ignore any master and they say and do all that comes to their mind without remembering that one day they would be presented under the eyes of Your Highness......"58

A commonly growing tendency in the 16th century was the desertion of the service of the Estado da India by soldiers stationed at different garrisons. By the 1520s there were a motely bunch of Portuguese characters sailing around the Bay that together made up their variegated presence in the region. The Crown agents were constantly trying to coax these rebels to surrender to them and return to the state fold. The renegades, in the meantime, raced to grab as large a share of the trade as possible, in an effort to outdo each other and beat the Crown itself. That all these categories themselves were fluid and overlapped with one another is perhaps best exemplified in the rival embassies at the court of Gaur in 1521.

In the account of the embassies of 1521 appear the different characters that constituted the Portuguese presence in Bengal by this time. That it was a multidimensional presence is clearly visible in the very make-up of the expedition granted by the viceroy to Antonio de Brito in 1521. This voyage was deeply motivated

58 Ibid.
by the private interests and aspirations of the casados of Cochin, as is evident from the command of the second of the three ships that made up the fleet being entrusted to Diogo Pereira. Diogo Pereira was a leading member of the prosperous Portuguese mercantile community of Cochin and had been settled there since 1505. He was also a great friend and feudatory of the local raja and controlled a private trading network that extended from Gujarat up to Malacca. 59

The expedition under Antonio de Brito was not a mere trading expedition; but was primarily an official embassy sent by the viceroy to the Bengal royal court located at Gaur to establish good relations and to negotiate duty-free trade between the Estado and that kingdom. 60 As the anonymous author of this account wrote, “...we have not come here to load or unload goods but to serve the King whose vassals we are......consider the importance of peace with Bengal to the service of our lord so that provisions could be supplied to Malacca and Pasai which had such need of them.....” 61 Nonetheless private trade by the officials and crew of these ships was an integral part of such voyages. It was noted by the chronicler that, “apart from their pay and provisions,.....all these who serve the King in this part of the world have the authority to trade on his ships and to take all they want without paying freight or dues.” 62

An interesting facet about these expeditions which reflects the attitude of the Portuguese official is that the fidalgoes to whom such voyages were granted often did

59 Thomaz, op. cit., p. 459.

60 Bouchon and Thomaz, Voyage dans---, op. cit., paragraph 81.

61 Ibid, para 11, 15.

62 Ibid, para 85.
not feel confident enough to leave the safety of their ships and lead such embassies to the Sultan’s court on their own.63 Also it was not easy for them to sub delegate this task to members of their crews either – Antonio de Brito had to pay Gonçalo Tavares twelve cruzadoes from his own pocket to go to Gaur in his place.64 Similarly it was only after much coaxing and promise of payment that the anonymous author of our account in turn went very reluctantly on his behalf to the court of the king of Pegu. Similarly, Rafael Perestrello too stayed at Chittagong and sent as his representative, Cristovão Jusarte to the Sultan of Bengal. And all this caution and hesitation on their part came at a time when Portuguese persons who had left the Estado were already settled in Bengal since many years. These were people like Martim de Lucena, who both the delegations came across at Gaur, wearing his hair and beard and clothes in the local fashion so that he “looked more like Mohammad than the mummy of him.”65 Lucena refused to recognize the authority of the king of Portugal or his representatives in Asia and had crossed over beyond the pale of the Estado.66

In Gonçalo Tavares, Cristovão Jusarte and Martim de Lucena we encounter different strands of Portuguese presence in Bengal. Gonçalo Tavares represented the interests of the Crown and the Estado; Cristovão Jusarte stood for the fidalgo pushing his own prospects in the area, constantly toying with cutting the umbilical cord trying him to the Portuguese state and turning renegade; Martim de

63 This point is made by Thomaz, De Ceuta-----, op. cit., p. 464.
64 *Voyage dans-----, op. cit., para 15.
65 *Ibid*, para 32.
Lucena was the chatim or deserter who had already crossed over many years ago. Not surprisingly, it was only Gonçalo Tavares and his team who were constantly talking of service to the King. The main object of Cristovão Jusarte’s rival embassy to the court at Gaur was to sabotage the official embassy, for which purpose he was willing to try every trick in the book. Thus, before the Sultan, on the one hand he claimed to be the “Son of the Regent of Portugal”, while on the other hand he said that “he was a Muslim... and dressed in the attire of the country [and]... shaved off his hair and beared”. He labelled Gonçalo Tavares and his party “mere peasants not worthy of serving him”, whose “mission was a hoax.” Yet, he clearly told Gonçalo Tavares that “he did not know the Governor of India that he did not even know who he was.” In collusion with Martim de Lucena who was on good terms with the local administration and “well-versed in the customs and habits of the country that he knew so well by virtue of living there”, Cristovão Jusarte managed to get the first audience with the Sultan and to discredit the official embassy and almost get its members beheaded.

The temptation to turn renegade was very strong in these lands as is evident from the case of Rafael Perestrello. By the time our anonymous author, Gonçalo Tavares and their mates returned to Chittagong, in any amazing development “all of Rafael Perestrello’s Portuguese followers... [were] clothed in the style of the country. They were now the opponents of all those abroad the King our Lord’s ships.”

67 Ibid, para. 63.
68 Ibid, para. 88.
69 Ibid, para. 32.
It was a case of gamekeepers turning poachers. The deserters had joined the Turk, Ali Agha. Further,

"on several occasions I saw them come down from the top of the hill to raid the town, seize the other Portuguese and take them back in irons as if they were Moors."\(^{70}\)

All these complications notwithstanding, the official embassy did succeed in obtaining the sultan’s favour and the sanction to conduct duty-free trade in Bengal.\(^{71}\) This was as much due to the splendid oratory and persuasion of our author, the interpreter of the embassy, as to the arguments of the pro-Portuguese party at the Sultan’s court. By 1521, thus, there were nobles at the court of the Bengal Sultan who had profitable trading relations with the Portuguese state at Malacca and who realized that the Portuguese were powerful enough at sea to blockade the ports of Bengal and to place an embargo on all the overseas trade of that kingdom.\(^{72}\) Ironically, the trading concessions extracted by Gonçalo Tavares’ embassy covered all Portuguese persons trading in Bengal, even those hostile to the *Estado*, like Cristovão Jusarte.

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\(^{70}\) *Ibid*, para. 90.

\(^{71}\) *Ibid*, para. 86.

\(^{72}\) *Ibid*, para. 79.