CHAPTER XIV

EASTERN BENGAL

The Fall of Gonsalves and the Rise of Piracy

The power which Sebastião Gonsalves had acquired in Sandwip was not destined to last long. In 1615 Gonsalves conceived the plan of conquering Arakan. Though he had always ruled as an absolute and independent prince he proposed to the Portuguese Viceroy in Goa offering to acknowledge the suzerainty of the King of Portugal and deliver every year a galleot of rice either at Malacca or Goa as a yearly tribute if he would help him in the conquest of Arakan. He further assured the vast treasures of the King of Arakan would be at their disposal. The Viceroy Jeronymo de Azavedo, who was quite pleased with this offer, fitted out an expedition of fourteen galleots, a flyboat, and a pink under the command of Dom Francisco de Menezes Roxo, the former Governor of Ceylon*. This expedition arrived on the 3rd of October 1615 and after a consultation with Gonsalves it was decided that Menezes should attack Arakan, the head quarters of the King and that Gonsalves should follow him. A new power had however come to help the Arakanese, a power that eventually contributed a good deal towards the downfall of the Portuguese in the East. On the 15th October the Portuguese saw a Dutch fleet coming down the river composed of such a large number of ships that, as Faria y Souza says†, the Portuguese could not see the end of it.

* This expedition is described by Bocarro, Decada XIII, and by Faria y Souza, Asia, Stevens, Vol. III, p. 226.
† Asia Portuguesa, Stevens, Vol. III, p. 224 et seq.
Against this force Menezes had to defend only with sixteen vessels, nay, only with fourteen, because one had fled and another had gone in pursuit of it. Yet they engaged the combined fleet of the Dutch and the Arakanese. The fight lasted the whole day. Though the Portuguese lost four galleots they wrought terrific havoc among the Dutch. In the evening the Dutch retreated thinking fresh succour had come to the Portuguese, while it was only the pink that had gone in search of the running vessel. Gonsalves now joined Menezes with fifty ships and they arranged themselves in two squadrons. The fight commenced again and all throughout, the advantage was on the side of Portuguese, but at about sunset D. Francisco de Menezes fell struck with two musket balls. Ebbtide then set in and the fleets parted. The Victory was more on the side of the Portuguese than of the Dutch.* About two hundred Portuguese died and were buried in the sea. The Portuguese sailed back to Sandwip and D. Luiz de Azavedo who had succeeded Menezes in command, returned with his squadron to Goa inspite of Gonsalves’s repeated requests not to do so. Many of Gonsalves’s men took this opportunity to abandon him and returned with D. Luis de Azavedo to Goa. In the following year (1616) Gonsalves being quite abandoned by many of his followers, the King of Arakan invaded Sandwip, defeated Gonsalves and took possession of the island besides some other islands in the Sundarbans. Gonsalves was, as Faria y Souza says, reduced to his former miserable condition.

In estimating the character of Sebastião Gonsalves one cannot ignore from what beginnings he rose to be a potentate, whose alliance was sought for by the ruling princes of Bengal, though more from

* L. S. S. O’Malley says in the Chittagong Gazette p. 28, that the Portuguese were defeated by the Dutch. This is inaccurate according to the Portuguese historians. The spost that can be said is that the victory was indecisive.
fear of his power than from a friendly feeling for him as a ruler. He was an adventurer, unscrupulous and remorseless. But he was not, as he is supposed to be, a pirate, in the strict sense of the word. He committed at the outset of his career some piratical raids on the coast of Arakan, but it was in revenge for the massacre of Dianga. There is no evidence that during the eight or nine years of his rule (1607-1616) in Sandwip, he fostered piracy. However, many of his treacherous acts stain his character with the darkest blots. As in Rob Roy of old, wickedness and worth are often curiously blended together. It is wonderful, indeed, how Gonsalves was able maintain his sovereignty, beset as he was with such powerful enemies as the Mughals and the King of Arakan, not to speak of the chiefs of the other principalities that lay near his kingdom. Referring himself to Faria y Souza’s remarks that the kingdom of Gonsalves passed like a shadow, that his pride was humbled and his vileness punished, H. Beveridge justly makes the following observations,* "such are the unsympathising remarks of the Portuguese historian about a man who at least possessed vigour and ability, and who owed his fall in great measure to the impetuosity of the Portuguese officer who was sent from Goa to assist him, but who was too proud or too rash to co-operate fully with him. The Viceroy was also to blame, for he directed his officer not to wait for Gonzales. We cannot but think that if Gonzales had been an Englishman and his historian of the same nationality, we would have heard a great deal about Anglo-Saxon energy, the Barseker-spirit and the Vikings.” If D. Luis de Azavedo had, indeed, co-operated with Gonsalves and had not sailed back to Goa, the fate of the Portuguese possession of Sandwip might have been different. Incidentally, the dispersal of the Portuguese in Eastern Bengal and Arakan would not have taken place if

* District of Bakharganj, p.38.
they had not lost their possession of Sandwip, and thus no occasion would have arisen for them to live mainly by piracy, which has sullied their name.

From the time of the fall of Gonsalves upto 1665, the history of the Portuguese in Eastern Bengal is a history of the Portuguese in their worst form. The fall of Gonsalves did not mean the end of his men. The vast rivers of Bengal and their banks became their homes. Schooled as they were not to recognise any law or authority, they sought the means of subsistence in plundering and piracy. Arising as a necessity, piracy eventually became an art, a trade. It was a time, moreover, when plundering was generally accepted as the best method of avenging wrongs, real or supposed and of punishing the enemy. The Afghan Kings of Bengal, the Kings of Arakan and of Tippera ravaged one another's territories without the least scruple. But this game was generally carried on from land. The Portuguese introduced a new element with their fast sloops and newer methods of ship-building, so that depredations began to be carried more from the sea and the rivers of the delta. The Portuguese were neither the originators of these nefarious practices nor the only culprits. The Mughals themselves indulged in them and the Arakanese or the Maghs were the greatest of all plunderers. Wonderful legends connected with the famous pirate and bandit Dilal Khān are still current in Sandwip. He is said, however, to have protected the poor, though he plundered the rich.* It was Husain Bey, the general of Shaista Khān who eventually captured Dilal Khān and confined him in a prison at Dacca, where he ended his days. Still more striking is the story of the English free-booter J. Shepherd, who made the Sunderbans the scene of his piratical exploits until he was arrested and banished for life only a few years ago.

---

* J. E. Webster, Noakhali Gazetteer, pp. 19-20.
An event occurred in 1638 which gave an additional impetus to the game of piracy in its most frightful form. Ever since the Mughals had made themselves masters of Bengal, they were bent upon conquering Chittagong from the King of Arakan and, if possible, the whole of his kingdom. A favourable opportunity arose in 1638. Matak Rai, the Governor of Chittagong rebelled against the King of Arakan, named Islam Khan Mushaddi, and acknowledging himself the vassal of the Mughal Emperor handed over Chittagong, though nominally to the Mughal Governor of Bengal. This action of the Governor of Chittagong did not materialize into anything, but it served to light up the fire of a long-standing enmity. To revenge on the Mughal kingdom of Bengal, the King of Arakan made friends with the Portuguese adventurers, took them into his service, paid them high salaries and settled them in Dianga. With their help he built vessels large enough to carry cannon. Thus equipped he began ravaging and laying waste the Mughal territory, and extended his depredations even up to Dacca. These cruel practices of the Arakanese and the Portuguese, to which the people of Bengal were subjected, continued till 1665 when Shaista Khan conquered Chittagong and broke their power for ever.

Various statements have been made to the effect that all the Portuguese in Bengal were generally pirates or adventurers, and even to-day in the folk tales of Bengal the name of the Portuguese is always associated with piracy. Nothing could be farther from the truth, than a generalized statement of this kind. It was only the Eastern and not Western Bengal that was a haunt of the Portuguese adventurers. These men were taken into the employ of the Arakanese who in conjunction with them devastated the southern part of Bengal, especially the Sundarbans. The Portuguese of Western Bengal were quite
a different section. In the Hooghly river there were, however, a few Portuguese pirates about twelve miles above the Saugor Island whence the river or one of its branches at that part of its course was known as the Rogue’s River.* Their field of operations was the coast of Hijili (Midnapore) and Orissa. These men who had leagued themselves with the Arakanese were not of the type of the Portuguese from Hooghly, but were outlaws and fugitives from Goa and other Portuguese places. They were disowned by their own Government in Goa and were not recognized by their own brethren in Hooghly. It is true the Portuguese Viceroy sent help to Gonsalves, but then he was not a pirate but an independent prince who agreed to pay a yearly tribute of a ship of rice to the King of Portugal, in return for the help received. Even before Gonsalves and his troops had taken to buccaneering, Stephen Palmeyro who was an aged and a genuine type of Portuguese, refused to command them because they had committed a few justifiable depredations on the coast of Arakan out of revenge on the massacre of the Portuguese in Dianga. Ruy Vaz Pereira who saw in Chittagong a Moorish ship, built after the Portuguese fashion, being used in privateering, seized it because such practices would unjustly sully the name of the Portuguese.†

An excellent example of how different the real Portuguese in Bengal were from the adventurers in the Sunderbans, was afforded on the very coast of Bengal.

The Pirate Damílio Bernaldes

Nuno da Cunha, the Portuguese Governor, gave in 1531, to Damílio Bernaldes a license for a voyage to Bengal.‡ After rounding the Cape Comorin he turned a corsair and in Nicobar captured a Moorish

---

† *Vide* pp. 30-31.
ship worth £9000. Nuno da Cunha, on hearing of this, asked Khājeh Shiāb-ud-din, who as already said,* was a friend of the Portuguese, to seize Bernaldes when he landed in Chittagong or else to kill him and his crew on the spot. There were then seventeen Portuguese vessels in Chittagong which in concert with Khājeh Shiāb-ud-din awaited the arrival of Bernaldes. When this pirate actually arrived they did him no harm immediately, believing that he would ask for pardon and give up his mode of life. Far from doing so he seized a influential Moor and though his men who had landed were captured, he refused to exchange this Moor with his men except for a ransom of £2000. The Portuguese spared no efforts to capture him and he was at last caught in their settlement of Nagapatan, sent to the Governor in Goa in chains and banished for ten years, during which he died. Such was the punishment accorded by the Portuguese to the pirates. When the Portuguese became the masters of the whole Bay and rivers of Bengal they indeed, enforced their principle of not allowing any ships to sail without their passes but they granted these passes freely and these ships were absolutely safe except when they fell into the hands of the adventurers lurking at the mouths of the Ganges. Even the Muhammadan historian Khāfi Khān gives the credit to the Portuguese while he has much to complain against the English. Speaking generally of the Portuguese he says† “On the sea they (Portuguese) are not like the English; and do not attack other ships, except those ships which have not received their pass according to rule; or the ships of Arabia or Maskat with which two countries they have a long-standing enmity, and they attack each other whenever opportunity occurs. If a ship from a distant port is wrecked and falls into their hands they look upon it as their prize.” The author of the Bādshāh-

---

* Vide p. 33.
† Elliot, Hist. of India, Vol. VII, p. 344.
nāmā has another story about the Portuguese. He says* "The village and districts of Húglí were on both sides of the river and these the Europeans got possession of at a low rent. Some of the inhabitants by force, and more by hopes of gain, they infected with their Nazarene teaching and sent them off in ships to Europe. In the hope of an everlasting reward, but in reality of an exquisite torture, they consoled themselves with the profits of their trade for the loss of rent which arose from the removal of the cultivators. These hateful practices were not confined to the lands they occupied, but they seized and carried off every one they could lay their hands upon along the sides of the river." This contrasts very strongly with what Khāfi Khān says about the Portuguese. The passage in the Bādshāhnāmā is really based upon the report of Kasim Khān whom Shāh Jahān had sent with preconceived ideas against the Portuguese and who in spite of his constant and minute watching could not find any casus belli for four years to overthrow their power. In this report the charge of piracy and aggressions was, however, levelled only against the Portuguese of Eastern Bengal, while it accused the Portuguese of Hooghly of fortifying themselves, of drawing away all the trade from Sātgāon and of having committed many acts of violence, presuming to exact duties from all the boats and vessels which passed their factory.† It is true, the Portuguese of Hooghly had grown insolent and haughty but they cannot be said to have been pirates. Writers who have never cared to differentiate the real Portuguese from the outlaws of Sunderbans have made sweeping generalizations against them all. Far from being pirates, the Portuguese of Hooghly promised Akbar and also Jahangīr to stamp out piracy and agreed to keep the Bay clear of the pirates that nestled

* Elliot, Hist. of India Vol. VII. p. 32.
† Stewart, History of Bengal, pp. 266-267.
there. They did not however keep their word. Yet it must be said they did not in general indulge in the very thing they had promised to extirpate.

As to the Portuguese in Eastern Bengal in the seventeenth century no amount of vituperation and invectives would be too strong for them. As Manucci says* they had reached the very acme of evil doing and at one time even a priest named Frei Vicente acted as their leader. The horror of their practices can better be imagined than described. Yet they held a secondary place to the Maghs. François Bernier gives a very graphic account of them. He says† "For many years there have always been Portuguese in the kingdom of Rukan (Arakan) or Mog, and with them a great number of their Mestices or Christian slaves and other Français gathered together from all parts. This was the retreat of fugitives from Goa, Ceylon, Cochin, Malacca and all the other places once occupied by the Portuguese in the Indies. Those who had fled from their convent, who had married twice or three times, assassins—in a word, outlaws and ruffians, were here welcomed and held in repute, and led a detestable life, utterly unworthy of Christians, going so far as to massacre and poison each other with impunity, and to assassinate their own priests, who were often no better than themselves. The king of Rakan, in perpetual terror of the Mughal, kept these people for the defence of his frontier at a port called Chaitgou (Chittagong) assigning them lands and letting them live and follow their own devices. Their ordinary pursuit and occupation was theft and piracy. With small and light half-galleys called galleasses they did nothing but sweep the sea on this side; and entering all rivers, canals, and arms of the Ganges, and passing between the islands of

* Storia de Mogur, Vol. II, p. 117.
Lower Bengal—often even penetrating as far as forty or fifty leagues into the interior—they surprised and carried off whole villages and harried the poor gentiles, and other inhabitants of this quarter at their assemblies, their markets, their festivals and weddings, seizing as slaves both men and women, small and great, perpetrating strange, cruelties and burning all that they could not carry away. It is owing to this that at the present day are seen so many lovely but deserted isles at the mouth of the Ganges, once thickly populated, but now infested only by savage beasts, principally tigers". It must be said to the credit of Bernier that however bitterly he may vent his wrath on the Portuguese he acknowledged that the Portuguese who carried on these frightful depredations were outlaws, fugitives and ruffians, that fled to this convenient buccaneering haunt in the River Delta of Bengal from other Portuguese settlements. The practices referred to here by Bernier are correct but he ascribes them all to Feringhis while the fact is that the main offenders were the Maghs. In Rennel's map of Bengal published in 1794, the note "this part of the country has been deserted on account of the ravages of the Maghs", is written across the portion of the Sundarbans, south of Bāckarganj. Bolts refers to the Maghs alone and not to the Portuguese as plunderers of the Sunderbans.* The Sunderbans, at least the greater part of them, were never in a flourishing condition, and as it has been shown, the portion, south of Bāckarganj, was plundered more by the Maghs than by the Portuguese. Bernier continuing says that the Feringhis sold a part of their slaves in Goa, Ceylon, St. Thōne and to the Portuguese of Hooghly, and that a part of them were converted to Christianity and were trained in theft, murder and rapine. He concludes that in spite of the strong militia and numerous bodies and guards and also a small

* Bolts, Indian Affairs.
naval armament of *galleasses* which the Mughals maintained, the Portuguese did not "cease to make frequent and strange ravages and to penetrate into the country, laughing at all this army of Mughals, having become so bold and so expert in the use of arms and in navigating these galliasses that four or five of their vessels would not hesitate to attack fourteen or fifteen of those of the Mughal—destroying, taking or sinking them, and coming off with flying colours."* The Muhammadan historian Shiāb-ud-din Talish gives a much more detailed account of the practices of the pirates in the Bay of Bengal and apportions the blame both to the Maghs as well as to the Feringhis, though the translation of Mr. Jadunath Sarkar is headed "The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon".†

No sooner was Shaista Khān appointed Viceroy of Bengal than he determined to invade Arakan and conquer Chittagong in order to put an end to the piratical raids of the Arakanese and the Portuguese and also to avenge the murder of his nephew Shāh Shuja whom the King of Arakan had put to death when he had gone to take refuge there, after his defeat by his brother Mir Jumla.‡ Shaista Khān assembled a large fleet of 300 ships and an army of 13000 men. Abul Hassan was ordered with 200 ships in Sangrangar to oppose the Arakanese and the Feringhis. Muhammad Beg Aakash with 100 ships was to stay at Dhapa and re-inforce Abul Hassan when necessary. His own son Buzurg Umed Khān was appointed to command the army, consisting of 4000


men, which was to march by land and co-operate with the fleet. Seeing that the conquest of Chittagong would be no easy task so long as the Portuguese defended it, Shaista Khān sent his officer Shaikh Zia-ud-din Yusūf to the Portuguese captain of the port of Hooghly, requesting him to write to the Portuguese of Chittagong to desert the King of Arakan and enter his service and offering them a large grant of land where their families could form a colony. He promised imperial favours and offered much better terms than those granted by the Raja of Arakan. The Portuguese gladly accepted the terms, but according to the Alangעירמנה, all the Feringhis did not desert the Raja. Some of them informed the Raja of Arakan about the desertion and he planned to murder them all. The Alangעירמנה says that some letters fell into hands of a Magh who communicated them to the King of Arakan. What followed is described in the Alangעירמנה*: “The Feringis learning of [the intended Arracanese treachery] resisted and fought the Arracanese, burnt some of the ships of the latter and started for service in Bengal with all their goods and ships. On the 19th December 1665, fifty jalbas (Shiāb-ud-din says 42 Jalbas or Jaleas) of the Feringis full of guns, muskets and munitions and all the Feringi families reached Noakhali”. As soon as the Feringhis left Arakan, Shaista Khān decided to attack Chittagong and, as Shiāb-ud-din Talish says, consi-
dered the coming over of the Feringhis as the commencement of the victory. They were taken, says Shiāb-ud-din Talish, in the imperial army and liberally rewarded, but Bernier very unjustly remarks that Shaista Khān ill-treated them and put an end to those wretches.† The ablest of the Portuguese were chosen to take part in the campaign against the King of Arakan and the rest were sent to the Governor,

* J. A. S. B. June, 1907, p. 408, n.
† Bernier’s Travels, pp. 181-182
who allotted to them a large area, twelve miles south of Daccá, known as Feringhi Bazar, where still the Portuguese descendants reside.\(^*\)

Shiāb-ud-din Talish gives a spirited account of what passed after the Feringhis left Chittagong\(^+\): "In December, 1665, the Feringis of Chātgāon, partly in fear of Arracanese treachery and partly won over by Shaista Khan's tempting overtures came with all their families in 42 jalbas and took refuge with Farhād Khan the Mughal thanadar of Noakhali. The Khan sent their chief, Captain Moor \(^\dagger\) with a few of their great men to Shaista Khan at Daccá, while he kept all the others with their ships a Noakhali, with great attention and kindness. The captain and other leaders of Feringis had audience of the Nawwāb at night and received splendid robes of honour and other unexpected favours. The Nawwāb asked them, 'What did the zeminder of Maghs fix as your salary?' The Feringis replied, 'Our salary was the Imperial dominion! We considered the whole of Bengal as our jagir.'

\(^*\) Manucci has a different version, *Storia*, Vol. II p. 118. He says Shaista Khan sent for a Portuguese, named Antonio de Rego, who was in Hooghly and had a brother named Sebastião Gonsalves in Chittagong. The Nawab paid Rego Rs. 25,000 and Rs. 50,000 more for his brother Gonsalves in order to deliver Chittagong to him. Gonsalves instructed Rego to send the Mughal fleet up to Sandwip. Chittagong was then captured without any loss of life. It would be interesting to know whether this Gonsalves was the same Sebastião Gonsalves Tibau who had made himself Lord of Sandwip. He came to India in 1607 and if he was, say about 25 years old then, he would be about 83 years old in 1665 and might have been living. But it is impossible that even till 1665 he could wield such power in Sandwip and Chittagong as Manucci suggests. That the names of the two brothers are quite different is no evidence against the fact, because there are many instances in Portuguese history in which two brothers had no common names or surnames, the latter having been, perhaps, surpressed by the Portuguese historians.

\(^+\) *J. A. S. B.*, June 1907, p. 425.

\(^\dagger\) Both Shiāb-ud-din Talish and the *Alangirnâmâ* refer to the Portuguese captain named "Moor". This is not a Portuguese name. Muhammadan historians have frightfully mutilated Portuguese names. Pedro Taveiras has been converted into Partab Bar (*Vide* p. 52), and Rodolfo into Radif in the *Abburnânâ*. The real name of captain Moor might have been Mourão or Moraes.
All the twelve months of the year we made our collection, [i.e. booty] without trouble. We had not to bother ourselves about amlas and amins; nor had we to render accounts and balances to anybody. Passage over water was our [land] survey. We never slackened the enhancement of our rent viz. booty. For years we have left no arrears of [this] revenue. We have with us papers of the division of the booty village by village for the last forty years.’ One can infer from this answer the condition of things and the weakness of the Governors of Bengal. The coming over of the Feringis gave composure to the hearts of the people of Bengal. Two thousand rupees were presented from the Nawwāb’s own purse as reward to Captain Moor and the other Feringis who had come from Chatgaon and from the Imperial treasury a monthly stipend of Rs. 500 was settled on the Captain, and other comfortable salaries on others of the tribe.”

The conquest of Chittagong by the Mughals and their mastery over the Sundarbans broke the power of the Portuguese adventurers and thenceforward they joined hands with the other Portuguese that were spread all over Bengal even after the siege of Hooghly, becoming peaceful civilians and merchants. They drove a peaceful trade and must have wielded much influence and power especially in Chittagong even up to 1727, for Alexander Hamilton writes*: “The Mogul keeps a Caddie or Judge in it (Chittagong) to administer Justice among Pagan and Mahometan Inhabitants but the Offspring of those Portugese that followed the fortune of Sultan Sujah when he was forced to quit Bengal, are the domineering Lords of it”. There is an earlier account of the Feringhis of Chittagong by

* A New Account of the East Indies, Vol. II, Chap. 35, p.25. Bernier (Travels p. 109) also mentions that when Shāh Shuja was driven away from Bengal by Aurangzeb, he went to take refuge in Arakan in Galliasses manned by the Portuguese. He adds that the Portuguese robbed Shāh Shuja of his precious stones on the way. Hamilton betrays little knowledge about the origin of the Portugese of Chittagong.
Fr. Barbier, a Jesuit missionary, who in 1723 describes in a letter to another Jesuit Father, an Episcopal Visitation by Rev. Fr. François Laines, Bishop of St. Thomé, Madras.* In a detailed description of the Feringhis and their customs, he says that they were divided into three colonies each having its Captain, its Church and its Missionary. They were held in great respect by the natives: they carried arms and had military discipline and full liberty to celebrate the feasts in the same order and with the same solemnity as in Europe. The writer regrets, that Chittagong was not chosen in preference to Hooghly as the headquarters of the European (Portuguese), settlements. It is very interesting indeed to see that the Portuguese and their descendants had a sort of military discipline even in the eighteenth century. At this time, however, the Portuguese in Eastern Bengal were mere mercenaries. Even till 1786 when Chittagong District was invaded by the Arakanese under a Peguan general, against whom Major Ellerber was sent, the Arakan army contained 500 Portuguese mercenaries.†

† O'Malley, Chittagong Gazetteer, p. 39.