Mondes parallèles dans les espaces coloniaux

XVIᵉ-XXIᵉ siècles

Regards croisés dans le monde indiano-océanique : histoire, patrimoine, fiction
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In sixteenth century India, the Portuguese, Catholic friars and the Mughal emperors came together through design and the desire of kings and emperors to explore new lands and extend their influence. Along the way, despite the wars that Islam and Christianity were waging in Europe, unlikely friendships were forged between devout Jesuit priests, who had arrived under the aegis of the Portuguese but who turned out to be their strongest critics, and the Muslim monarchs. Here, I wish to view the history of this interaction of the Portuguese in their corner of India and the Mughal emperors at Agra in the north, through the politics of the friendship, incompatible though it might appear, that developed between the Jesuits and Akbar and his son Jahangir.

Riven with puzzlements and paradoxes, the theme emerges slowly in keeping with the natural diffidence of the characters. In an effort to understand a new kind of polity, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida has retraced the idea of the friend in the writings of thinkers through the ages in his essay Politics of Friendship. Classifying friendships, he maintains that all friendship is in some respect political, even though the merely pleasurable one is the most unstable. The so-called political friendship is grounded in association or community in view of the useful. However, he still deems friendship a kind of madness because it accepts incompatibility and says,

That one must be mad, in the eyes of the “metaphysicians of all ages”, to wonder how something might (könnte) rise up out of its antithesis; to wonder if, for example, truth might be born of error, […]¹.

The friendship between the Jesuits and the Mughals lasted the duration of two monarchs. With both Akbar and Jahangir, the Jesuits expressed deep disappointment. In letters to their superiors, they ascribed unflattering and intranscendental reasons for the emperors’ association with them: their desire to have Portuguese wives, to use them

as a bargaining chip vis a vis the English embassy of Sir Thomas Roe or as a counter to the power of the Muslim clergymen in their courts. So there was an aporia, friends thought they had been misled. In Derrida’s words,

[They] have been misled, and have misled each other because they have first mistaken friendships, confusing in one case, friendship based on virtue with friendship based on usefulness, [...] friends who are indeed friends, but have not yet managed to concur on friendship, one wanting one of its forms, the other yet another [...] 3.

Though the disillusionment of the priests is understandable as they had sent three embassies and expended considerable prayer and effort, yet through their interaction, this period stands illuminated and gains visibility as the historical legacy of the period are the Christian influences on Mughal art and the nostalgia of a secular past embodied by the emperor Akbar. If current day ideas of friendship insist on equality, then the friendship between the Jesuits and the Mughal emperors would not qualify. Both sides maintained their indissoluble difference and singularity but the French philosopher advises us to unlock the traditional concept of friendship, to displace it, which I think it is possible to do with the Akbar – Jesuit relationship. The emperor offered hospitality to the priests but did not expect them to assimilate nor acculturate nor did he try to keep intact his own space and culture. He freely allowed them to educate his offspring and harangue with the Muslim clergy. Akbar’s own life in a way disproves any easy, either / or distinction between being a Muslim or not. Though he personally could not read or write probably due to dyslexia as contemporary historians surmise, he graciously received the priests’ presents such as The Royal Bible in four languages and knelt in front of the pictures of the Virgin Mary as he saw the priests do. He furnished sumptuous lodgings for them and desired their company even during his war campaigns. 4 He was

2 El Rey había permitido, o buscado, la conversión de sus sobrinos “por interés de encontrar doméstica conversación con Portugueses para que les diesen sus hijas y mujeres”... cited in Angel Santos Hernández “La misión del gran mogol”... en Santos Hernandez Angel, Madrid, EAPSA, 1977, p. 447.
3 Derrida, op. cit., p. 206.
4 Fr. Rodolfo Acquaviva vividly describes these events in a letter to Fr. Everard Mercurian, Superior General, Fatehpur Sikri, 18th July, 1580. “Three or 4 days after our arrival we presented to the King the Bible in four languages, gilt and excellently produced. He was with all his captains and great men of the state. He was overjoyed, because he had written to the Provincial that he should send it to him.
however circumspect at court so as not to further displease the nobles who saw his alliances with Hindu rajas as provocative and against the grain. Though this interaction receives scant attention from contemporary historians, they do concur in that his interest in other religions was key to his tolerance.

Since the Missions established by the priests are conjoined with Portuguese imperial history, the origins of the Portuguese involvement in India are of special interest. Into this narrative is fitted a friendship grounded in contradiction which gave rise to a project of tolerance and was the new religion that the Mughal monarch wished to found. Though the project was a non-starter, yet the idea would outlive the protagonists involved. This interaction also evidences the non-monolithic character of colonialism as theorists have been trying to show. Relationships developed autonomously despite the inherent exploitative logic of colonialism and the scramble for trade privileges in India by European powers and for this reason it is necessary to emphasize the contributions of the pioneers as well as the crooks and to acknowledge that positive imaginings of colonialism could exist for certain sections of Indian society.

Portugal's first goal was commercial and originated in the search for spices but later scientific and missionary ambitions also prevailed. They were encouraged by the Church that since the XVth century had been giving the right to sovereigns to construct churches of the Church of Rome under Crown Patronage. In tandem with the ongoing Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors there also began a new period of overseas expansion to convert Muslims in their own territories. The Pope, Nicholas V, looked on this as a new crusade and in 1452 he gave the Portuguese king the right to conquer and subdue all lands of infidels. Pope Sixtus IV in 1471 agreed to let the Portuguese make churches and provide them with the necessary personnel. They

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There were great celebrations, and in front of all he took up each volume of it and placed it on his head, kissing it with great reverence, and he ordered it to be kept in his own chamber. He came twice to our oratory, which we have here well arranged. Once he came alone, and removing his cap or turban, kneeling on the ground, with great devotion, he prayed before the picture of Christ and of the Virgin, venerating thrice, once in our manner, the other in that of the Muslims and the third, in the Hindu fashion, that is to say prostrate, saying that God should be adored with every form of adoration. In Letters from the Mughal Court. The First Jesuit Mission to Akbar (1580-1583) ed. and Introduction by John Correia Alfonso, Bombay: Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, 1980, p. 58.

could trade freely and would be considered the owners of these regions on the condition that they not provide arms to the natives. The spiritual jurisdiction from Cape Bojador and Nou up to the Indies rested with Portugal forever. After Vasco da Gama’s return in 1499, King Manuel assumed the title of Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India and by the end of King Manuel’s reign the Estado da India was established. The “Grocer King” as he was derisively called by the English established coastal strongholds and trading settlements and Joao da Silva Tello who became a Viceroy in 1640 began to be regarded as a Fellow Potentate by several important Asian rulers. The first diocese of the East, Goa, was founded in 1557 under Alfonso Albuquerque who was designated Governor in 1509. It got a Senate like Lisbon and became the administrative centre of Portuguese India with a Bishopric being established here. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the splendour of Goa was at its peak and it was referred to as “Golden Goa”. As the saying went, “Quien ha visto Goa, no hace falta que vea a Lisboa”6 (Whoever has seen Goa does not need to see Lisbon). It became the commercial centre of the East from the Red Sea to Pacific Ocean and the principal naval base from where the Portuguese dominated the Indian Ocean from the Cape of Good Hope to the China Sea.

The Portuguese Padrão conferred privileges and obligations. Through the former, Portugal could propose the names of bishops and among the obligations they had to strictly comply with the propagation of the faith. The question arose on whether the Padrão was a privilege or a right. If just a privilege the Holy See had the right to modify it and Portugal was at first averse to the idea but it was later decided that the Holy See could not unilaterally break this Patronato without a concordato or agreement with the patrono.

Portugal always alleged that Holy See acted on its own especially with regard to India and they objected to appointments as will be seen in the exchange of letters sent by Portuguese priests to each other (see below). Right from the start, chaplains accompanied the discoverers. Vasco da Gama was accompanied by the Trinitarians. Franciscans accompanied Pedro Alvarez Cabral and Alfonso Albuquerque and both Franciscans and Dominicans accompanied Almeida. Since they were just a handful they established themselves within the military garrisons and did not venture into the hinterlands as the local Muslims opposed them. Three Franciscans who were the first to come to India were assassinated

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6 Cited in Angel Santos, op. cit., p. 138.
in Calicut. The first church was established in Cochin and in the
convents founded the main subjects were Christian doctrine, liturgical
lessons, hymns and Portuguese language and grammar. The Franciscans
were often accused of 'Portugalizing' India but they were also instru-
mental in making possible the conversion of the Paravas of the Fishery
Coast.

The Company of Jesus that had been founded in 1534 was in close
touch with John III and it was the king of Portugal who had invited
them to India and thus their first Non European residences were
established in territory under Portuguese control. Accordingly there was
a northward movement from Goa and soon Jesuit stations sprang up at
Bassein, Bandra, Thana, Damaun and soon even in Muslim territories of
the north like Surat in north-western India. Francisco Javier arrived in
1542 with the new governor designate Alfonso de Sousa. He had been
earlier made the Legate of the Holy See and was also the Royal Visitor as
well as the Nuncio Apostolico and the Religious Superior. He has been
accused by critics of using civil authority in the work of the missions but
since he was the Royal Visitor he had to advise authorities about abuses
and wrong customs as civil, military, political and religious authority
went hand in hand in those feudal times. As part of his work he covered
roughly 40,000 miles in India from Goa to the Fishery Coast and even
Japan and a bit of China before he died on an island on the shores of the
latter. In South India, he baptised almost 10,000 people in Travancore
and used interpreters or learnt the lessons on the sacraments by heart in
the local languages. Goa, by then, a completely Christian city was never
his ultimate plan and this makes evident the considerable autonomous
influence wielded by the Jesuits albeit under the umbrella of the
Portuguese.

From his letters we get a first glimpse of the difficulties the Jesuits
faced with the behaviour of their hosts, the Portuguese. Full of praise for
the Governor and the King of Portugal, he nevertheless often took the
side of the Indians against the Portuguese. In a letter to Francis Mancías,
he reports on a complaint by the Raja of Travancore that a Pathani had
been unjustly put in chains by the Portuguese comandant Cosmo de
Payva in charge of the fort of Tuticorin. Complaining that this act of the
comandant had put an obstacle in the way of the conversion of Hindus
in the area, Francis Xavier writes,

I wonder whether the Portuguese would think it good if, when one
of the natives happened to have a dispute with one of themselves,
he was to seize the Portuguese by main force, put him in chains, and
have him taken out of a place in our territory and carried up the
country. [...] The Indians must have the same feelings; why should
we do to them what we don’t wish to be done to ourselves? [...] Where can we possibly find a pretext to cover even speciously the
shameful disgrace of our faithless breach of agreement? [...] I have
long had the idea of leaving India altogether, where so many
obstacles are placed in the way of the advancement of the Gospel
from quarters from which least of all such obstacles should arise,
and going instead to Ethiopia [...] where there will be no
Europeans to oppose us and pull down what we have built up.7

In a letter to Ignatius Loyola in 1549 he also pointed out the
shortcomings of Portuguese colonizing policies,

The Portuguese in these countries are masters only of the sea and of
the coast. On the mainland they have only the towns in which they
live. The natives themselves are so enormously addicted to vice as
to be little adapted to receive the Christian religion. They so dislike
it that it is most difficult to get them to hear us if we begin to preach
about it, and they think it like death to be asked to become
Christians. So for the present we devote ourselves to keeping the
Christians whom we have. Certainly, if the Portuguese were more
remarkable for their kindness to the new converts, a great number
would become Christians; as it is, the heathen see that the converts
are despised and looked down on by the Portuguese, and so, as is
natural, they are unwilling to become converts themselves.8

Neither did he mince words in describing certain kings who
showered gifts on the King of Portugal but were bitter enemies of the
Christians. He warned the King that people gossiped that

They say that your Highness does not use your imperial power in
India for the enlargement of the Kingdom of Christ, but only for
the purpose of scraping together riches and securing for yourself,
and those who belong to you, human and temporal advantages
alone.9

7 Cited in Coleridge, Henry James, The Life and Letters of St. Francis Xavier, Second
8 Coleridge, ibid., Vol. 2., p. 70-71.
9 Coleridge, ibid., Vol. 2., p. 81.
Though outspoken about official lapses, he advised his priests to be circumspect when dealing with the local authorities.

When you reprove vices in the pulpit be careful never to speak against or attack any person by name, especially those who are officers or magistrates [...] They have power at their back, they are accustomed to adulation; and it is more likely, in such cases that they will shake off all restraint and moderation, and send their inopportune censor about his business, with a good deal of abuse into the bargain.\textsuperscript{10}

Reprimanding a priest Fr. Alfonso Cipriani he writes,

Very ill indeed have you understood the directions which I gave you to be followed in Meliapore. You show clearly what little good has remained to you – that you have profited very little, – from your intercourse with our blessed Father Ignatius\textsuperscript{11}.

Despite Francisco Javier’s great appeal and other illustrious and hand picked men, the missions were often unsuccessful. Conversions happened due to materialistic reasons and they were unable to get many converts from the elite classes. The attitude of the Portuguese authorities towards the Indians in the religious sphere was far from being syncretic. The Protestant principle that every nation should have its own private religion and exclude all others was applied. The conqueror of Goa Alfonso Albuquerque felt that the Muslims should be dealt with in the same way that the Moors had been dealt with in the peninsula. In this scheme of things Hindus were treated better. Mixed marriages were advocated but higher castes that didn’t go in for mixed marriages were abhorred and in 1546, John III prohibited the brahmanic cult in Portuguese territories. Though a seminary for indigenous clergy was established in 1541 in Goa and was supposed to be a multi racial institution, indigenous priests were recruited from upper caste Brahmans who had been more or less forcibly converted according to Boxer.\textsuperscript{12}

They occupied a subordinate position. Later by 1761, the Marquis de Pombal who attacked the Jesuits and was a Jekyll and Hyde character, wanted equality for the Indian clergy. As far as multi culturalism went,

\textsuperscript{10} Coleridge, \textit{ibid.}, Vol. 2., p. 113-114.
\textsuperscript{11} Coleridge, \textit{ibid.}, Vol. 2., p. 418-419.
there was little intention to study beliefs and cultures of India and when it did happen the Eurocentric view prevailed.

This was the negative part; on the positive side a Portugalization was put into effect with the language and customs of Portugal being adopted and the native clergy getting Westernised and learning Portuguese. Lamenting that political differences between Spain and Portugal was a cause of the scant unity between Portuguese and Castilian Jesuits, the Visitor to Japan, Fr. Valignano wrote a lengthy epistle from Goa in 1595 to Claude Acquaviva the General of the Society of Jesus. Spain and Portugal being neighbours in Europe, he wrote, were often involved in wars with each other and contenders for the distribution of lands after the Treaty of Tordesillas by Pope Alexander; and thus there was perhaps naturally competition and rivalry between lay people of the two nations especially since Portugal was under the Spanish crown. However he was surprised to find that even the Portuguese and Spanish Jesuit clergy were indulging in the same bickering which, according to him, was not normal but had vicious overtones. Recognising that the conquest of India had been the work of the Portuguese who had sacrificed so many of their own, it was only fair that they be in charge of the governance and the Jesuits would always prefer them. Though he didn’t blame only the Portuguese, he mentions the case of Francisco Cabral who he had personally heard saying that the Castilian Jesuits were debauched and he had reprimanded him. More than one priest emphasized that the

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13 [... ] “El principio de esta desunión es quasi natural, como otras veces tengo escrito a V.P., entre los castellanos y portugueses porque, como son naciones confines, tuvieron muchas veces entre sí guerra; y como repartieron entre sí por conquistación del Papa Alexandre 6 la conquista de todas las tierras incógnitas, en que tienen también sus controversias como apetitos de gloria y de tierras, tuvieron siempre entre sí una cierta manera de emulación. Mas después que vinieron los estados de Portugal al Rei Don Felipe, creció mucho esta emulación y poca unión entre ellos”. FR. Valignano A. S.J., to Fr. C. Acquaviva S.J., General Goa November 18th 1595 in Documenta Indica [Doc. Ind.] ed. Wicki, Rome, 1948-1954, p. 192-200.

14 “También, como otras veces tengo escrito a V.P., me parece que está en mucha razón que, pues esta conquista de India es de portugueses y ellos con su sangre y con la muerte de infinitos de los suyos y grandísimos gastos y trabajos la conquistaron y consiervan hasta agora, gozen también del fructo de sus manos y que, así como los seglares goviernan el temporal de la India, así también entre los nuestros sean siempre preferidos los portugueses en el gobierno a las más naciones extranjeras, especialmente en los coelgios y casas que están entre los portugueses.” Valignano, ibid., p. 194.

15 “Mas lo que daño y me parece ser pasión viciosa y que sale de la razón, es meterse entre los nuestros una cierta manera de asco y aborrecimiento entre los castellanos y portugueses, pareciendo que por sólo ser desta o de otra nación se cause grande
frictions between the two nationalities was leading to a loss of recruits and that the winning of friends was especially necessary in India. 16

Besides what Acquaviva had noticed, the accounts of the mistreatment of Spanish Jesuits by Portuguese authorities were also publicised. A certain Brother Gonzalo de Belmonte wrote to General Acquaviva in 1593 of how setting sail from New Spain or Mexico they reached China after a trip of 82 days and their goods were confiscated by the Portuguese who jailed them for a year and a half. 17

The extreme nationalism of the Portuguese in the matter of high appointments became clear when Jerome Xavier the nephew of Francis Xavier was appointed as Provost of the Professed house in Goa. Fr. Cristovão de Castro writes to Fr. Claude Acquaviva Goa on October 29, 1593, complaining that the appointment had been taken ill both within and outside the Society. The writer put the general on guard against appointing Fr. Xavier as a provincial as he was young and lacked authority. 18 Similarly in another letter to Claude Acquaviva dated the 1st of November 1593, Fr. Jerónimo Rabelo claimed that Father Jerome Xavier was fit for the office of rector of St Paul's but not for that of provost of the professed house 19 and finally in despair even Fr. A Valignano wrote to Claude Acquaviva from Macao on November 15, 1593 that because of the rivalry between the Portuguese and Spaniards it

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16 De Gouveia, Fr. Francisco S.J. Provincial to Fr. Claudio Acquaviva S.J. General Coimbra November 18, 1595 in Doc. Ind., op. cit., p. 234.
17 “Fue Dios servido que llegamos a China en 82 días viaje que a todos admiró y el capitán de nuestro nao pidió licencia al capitán de la ciudad para entrar el puerto. Le presentó las provisiones que traía de su Magestad aseguróle el puerto y diole licencia para que entrase, y cada vez que se quisiese volver, se fuera. Todo fingido y debajo de cautela entramos dentro del puerto y luego nos tomaron la nave y la moneda que el capitán traía, la depositaron y nos hicieron mil agravios por ser españoles y al cabo vinieron a enviarlos presos a esta India al virei para hicese justicia de ellos. Y se sabe si el portugues Duarte de Sanda quisiera, si lo estorbara todo, porque luego que saltamos en tierra mis compañeros y yo nos fuimos al colegio y le dimos quinta de nuestra venida, presentándole nuestra patente y sabiendo el Padre Rector que un navío que había venido de Nueva España allí tenían los portugueses al capitán y soldados en la cárcel un año y medio y que en ninguna manera los dejaban volver por ser españoles”. De Belmonte, Br. Gonzalo to Claude Acquaviva S.J. Goa December, 20 1593 in Doc. Ind., op. cit., p. 583.
19 Fr. Jerónimo Rabelo to Fr. Claude Acquaviva, November 1, 1593, Doc. Ind., op. cit., p. 211.
was not appropriate to appoint a Spaniard either as Provincial or as Provost.

Other Catholics like the Franciscans were also often at odds with the Jesuits. A letter from Father Ros to Acquaviva dated December 24th 1593 tells us that the Franciscans in Cranganore favoured Mar Abraham and spread rumours that Jesuits were not religious but only clerics. This occasioned the publication on February 1st 1583 of the Papal Bull declaring that the simple vows of the Jesuits were real religious vows.

The friendship and confidence that the Jesuits enjoyed with the Mughals aroused envy among other European powers. The difficulties of trade with India had also to do with the lack of interest the Mughal monarchs showed in dealing with Europeans. In complete contempt of traders, they regarded only other Asian counterparts as equal to them like the Persian Shah and the ruler of Constantinople. Though during the time of Jahangir, the English and Jesuits had reached an understanding, the early pages in the diary of Sir Thomas Roe who led the British embassy to the Mughal court give us an insight into this irritation. It was the Jesuits, according to Roe, at the Mughal Court in Agra who thwarted English desires of having trade access to India. Since they had the ear of the Mughal monarchs they termed the English traders as thieves in reference to pirates like Francis Drake and William Hawkins and warned them that their ports would soon be seized under the pretext of trade.

Akbar’s closeness to the Jesuits made him heed these warnings, as the Mughals were fearful of the European mastery of the waves. However William Hawkins was successful in reaching the court of Jahangir though his success there was short-lived and his sudden departure led to skirmishes with the Portuguese at sea. These contretemps were seen in England as a Jesuit conspiracy and controlling them was of paramount concern. The necessity of having a permanent ambassador at Agra was mooted before the despatch of a fleet in October, 1615, to “answer any

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20 "Por las mismas razones desta desunión que ha entre estas dos naciones, no conviene en ninguna manera haverse en la Provincia de la India Provincial castellano, porque esto (como ya otras veces lo escribí) lo tomarían mui mal así los nuestros como los más portugueses, porque, como allá el cuerpo de los nuestros es de portugueses y las ciudades y fortalezas que el Rey tiene son todas habitadas de portugueses, los unos y los otros tomarían mui mal ver el gobierno universal de la Compañía en mano de castellanos;" Fr. A Valignano to Fr. Claude Acquaviva, Macao November 15, 1593, Doc. Ind., op. cit., p. 260.
21 Fr. Francisco Ros to Acquaviva December 24, 1593, Doc. Ind., op. cit., p. 596.
matters that may be objected and prevent all plots and conspiracies that will be attempted by the Jesuits to subvert our trade..."23 It would be opportune at this point to insert the major breakthrough that the Portuguese made through the Jesuits at the Mughal court, a friendship initiated by Akbar and which was initially reciprocated only reluctantly by the Jesuits but which the Portuguese encouraged once they realized the emperor’s fascination with the priests.

Akbar ascended the throne in 1556 and is considered India’s greatest emperor. He consolidated the Mughal dynasty that his grandfather Babur had laid the foundations for in India and with his capital at Agra made possible the construction of various monuments like the Agra Fort, Humayun Tomb in Delhi. One of the things he is lauded for by Indian historians is his attempt to reach out to Hindu kings and win their allegiance through his marriages with Hindu princesses. Akbar was by all accounts a sui generis Muslim monarch and his son and successor Jahangir too would imbibe these traits of tolerance, which would be reversed by Aurangzeb two generations later.

Akbar was favourably impressed by the Jesuits in 1576 in Bengal when they refused to give absolution to Christian merchants who were not paying taxes to the Mughal government. He next invited a Jesuit priest Julian Pereira to visit his capital Fatehpur Sikri and dispute with Islamic clergy, something that Akbar encouraged as he was intent on keeping the Muslim clergy on the defensive incensed as they were with his inter religious marriages. Pereira informed the monarch about the College of St Paul’s in Goa. Apprised of these developments, Pope Clement VIII wrote to Akbar on the 17th of December, 1592 that he had heard from the Jesuit fathers about his interest in the Christian religion “outside which there is no hope of salvation. Christ the son of God himself taught this religion and sealed it with his blood”. The Pope exhorted Akbar to listen to these missionaries and accept the faith should God move him to do so. The Pope wished that Akbar have a share in the blessedness resulting from this law and recommended the missionaries to him.24 Meanwhile in 1579 Akbar’s embassy arrived in Goa with letters for the Viceroy and Jesuit Archbishop asking for an embassy whose return he guaranteed. The embassy was received with great honour and although the Portuguese Viceroy Luis de Ataide feared that the Jesuits could be used as hostages he let the Italian Rudolf

23 Foster, op. cit., The citation is on page xix of the 1926 edition.
24 “Letter from Pope Clement VIII to Akbar the Great Moghul”, Rome December 17, 1592 Doc. Ind., op. cit., p. 27.
Acquaviva, the Catalan Antonio Monserrate and Francis Henriquez who was a Persian by origin, embark on this mission.

Father Monserrate has left a text that gives us insights into Akbar’s charm and ingratiating manner with the Jesuits. The Mughal emperor would wear Portuguese dress and order his sons to do so as well and in his dining hall, Monserrate writes, he had pictures of Christ, Mary, Moses and Muhammad. He also announced that the Christians should live freely in his kingdom as they did in Turkey. In Monserrate’s words “No one could think this an innovation, since he allowed the idolaters to live in and build their temples in his empire.” And even his adviser Abul Fazl “was so attracted to Christianity that, whenever he entered the little chapel, he declared that he was deeply moved in his mind but that the reverse was the case when he entered a mosque.” The Jesuits were impressed with Agra, Akbar’s capital city and in general a spirit of euphoria gripped the Mission. In letters sent by Father Henriquez and other priests and collected in a contemporary volume, the feeling was that with Akbar the whole kingdom would come under Catholicism and the Portuguese would also help in the endeavour. They write of how impressed Akbar was that although the priests had feared danger yet they had come and how he admired the priests’ strength of character and contience. They reveal major concessions given to the Portuguese, his willingness to learn the language as well as his fascination with the pictures of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Trinity. He encourages them

26 Ibid., p. 47.
27 Ibid., p. 58.
28 “He is very happy with the Portuguese he has here, and grants them favours and he desires that many more of them should come and live here, and he provides them with houses reserved for this purpose. To those who wish to leave he not only gives them permission to do so easily, but also provides them with mounts and guards and a firman so that his commanders may convey them safely from place to place. With such a firman, a man can travel greatly at ease until he reaches our territory. He also grants them money to cover the travelling expenses according to the status of the individuals”. This is an extract of a letter from Fr. Francis Henrieus to Fr. Lawrence Peres dated the 6th of April at Fatehpur Sikri in Letters from the Mughal Court. The First Jesuit Mission to Akbar (1580-1583) ed. and Introduction by John Correia Alfonso, Bombay: Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, 1980, p. 23.
29 “The day after we shifted was Saturday, and the King came to see the house and entered alone. The first thing he did was go into the church which was well appointed with perfumes and fragrance. On entering he was surprised and astonished and made a deep obeisance to the picture of Our Lady that was there,
in the theological arguments at court and eggs them on to bait a Muslim priest. The priests for their part advised the emperor against gladiatorial contests to which they had been invited and he appeared to listen to their advice.

Some writers have considered as highly optimistic the hopes of the priests; others consider that the circumstances did warrant such hopes. Akbar seemed to have distanced himself considerably from Islam and had given the priests free rein to preach and he had one of the priests tutor his son Jahangir who was born of a Hindu mother. But his principal aim was not to convert but that the priests engage with him in philosophical debate and advise him on political questions and become his intermediaries with his recalcitrant nobles as well as other European powers. Two embassies followed the first. In 1591, two priests Duarte Leitao and Christoval de Vega and a lay brother Estevao Ribeiro were selected. A school was opened attended by sons of nobles and the King’s own son and grandson, but since Akbar’s own conversion was nowhere in sight, the mission failed and the priests returned to Portuguese India. The Portuguese Viceroy was however interested in political results being obtained from these Missions and a third mission was attempted by Fr. Jerome Xavier and Frs. Emmanuel Pinheiro and Benedict de Goes from 1595-1605. Jerome Xavier who was with Akbar till the latter died, would accompany him on his journeys to subdue the Deccan. Ironically the emperor would make requests for arms and ammunition through the priests to the Portuguese. The Jesuits however refused on the grounds that it would be contrary to Christianity. This closeness to the emperor fetched them other rewards They were able to save the lives of renegade Portuguese soldiers who had defected to the side of the enemies of Akbar and get recommendation letters from him for Portuguese ambassadors in other Muslim lands.

As can be gauged from the letter of the Pope, there could be no doubt in Akbar’s mind as to what was hoped from him and yet he did nothing to disabuse his guests. In great part this friendship was still based on a silence. It kept silent about the truth that Akbar never even contemplated becoming a Christian. But his imminent conversion was

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always in the air, in the horizon of expectation. Yet from both sides the overtures were political. Akbar interested himself in other religions because he wanted to create a new one, the Din – I Ilahi that would weld his kingdom together in a common faith of which he would be the creator. When the Jesuit priests discovered this, they turned away from him in disgust because for them it was blasphemy to take the place of God. The Jesuit priest Pierre du Jaurric writing in 1608 says, “We see in this Prince the common fault of the atheist, who refuses to make reason subservient to faith…”

Inbuilt into this friendship there was a dissymmetry because it was between unequals, “the impossibility of a return to offered or received hospitality”.

And Derrida goes on to question,

But is there more or less freedom in accepting the gift of the other? Is this reorientation of the gift that would submit friendship to the consideration of the other something other than alienation? And is this alienation without relation to the loss of identity, of responsibility, of freedom, that is also translated by ‘madness’, this living madness which reverses, perverts or converts (good) sense, makes opposites slide into each other and ‘knows’ very well in its own way, in what sense the best friends are the best enemies.32

And yet it was a friendship that resisted being just an illusion. It gave renown to its protagonists beyond death because it illustrated itself through Christian influences in Mughal art. And apropos the quote from Derrida, Akbar had managed to neutralize his potential enemies from other religions. A disappointed Pierre du Jarric says at the end of his work that “so greatly did this powerful monarch desire to make himself master of Goa and the Portuguese possessions in India with the regions adjacent thereto, that he constantly referred to the subject when conversing with his friends”33.

With the wisdom of hindsight and many wars later, one can be grateful for Akbar’s fascination with his enemies. Derrida reminds us that:

[...] losing the enemy would not necessarily be progress, reconciliation or the opening of an era of peace and human fraternity. It

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32 Derrida, op. cit., p. 64.
33 Du Jarric, op. cit., p. 113.
would be worse; an unheard-of violence, [...] The figure of the enemy would then be helpful – precisely as a figure – because of the features which allow it to be identified as such, still identical to what has always been determined under this name.\textsuperscript{34}

The Portuguese were defeated inland by the Marathas and by the Dutch at sea. Historians have ascribed the decline of the Portuguese empire to its over extension. Stretching from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan Portugal tried to control more territory than its meagre resources enabled it to. It laid claim to a monopoly of the trade by sea between Europe and the East Indies. When the English resisted the monopoly and established a trading post at Surat on the west coast, the Portuguese attacked the East India Company’s ships. However the English persisted and under Henry Middleton in 1611 defeated the Portuguese in the Bay of Cambay. In 1603 and 1639, the Dutch put a blockade on Goa and Portuguese power declined. Perhaps the reason was the fact that Portugal and Spain were united under one crown so Portugal too attracted the same number of enemies that Spain had in Europe. Besides this, the pull of Christianity was too strong to let go any of the territory. The thought of giving up any portion of the Padrão Real (Crown Patronage of Church) to heretics, Muslims or heathens was heart wrenching for the Portuguese upper classes who were also very proud of their empire as Boxer states. Even so many English and Dutchmen considered that many of the Portuguese in Asia might have been prepared to live under the English Crown provided they could freely practise the Catholic religion\textsuperscript{35}.

Akbar had tried to make the rest of India liveable for them. A Muslim emperor and some of the most learned men of Europe had got together, almost like the kind of miracle that the Jesuits had hoped for. Since then, the Jesuits have continued to stay in India, except for the forty years when the Pope suppressed their Society (1773-1814). Today there are more Jesuits in India than in any country in the world – nearly 4,000, 99\% of them Indian Jesuits.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


\textsuperscript{34} Derrida, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{35} See in this regard, C.R. Boxer, \textit{Portuguese India in the mid 17th Century}, Delhi, OUP, 1980, p. 3-19.


