CHAPTER FOUR

DIPLOMACY AND WAR

The previous chapter attests to the fact that the structure of government and related aristocrat politics was undergoing a transition as the Bragança monarchy evolved and produced a more mature period of dynastic rule under João V. These shifts marginalised the bureaucratic apparatus dealing with overseas matters. Prior to this, the weight and importance of various dominions under the empire were also undergoing change at the turn of the seventeenth century, a trend that had begun in the late sixteenth century. As we shall see, the king had no desire to abandon India, as reflected partly by the exchanges of the Overseas Council on behalf of the king to deliberate on matters there; and by the special attention in times of crisis. This chapter will detail and analyse the matters brought up for deliberation by the centre in matters of war and diplomacy to prove there was continual engagement to sustain India during a fluctuating and tense period there during the first half of the eighteenth century. The struggle for the Portuguese colonies was also conducted at the periphery through mobilisation of resources and manpower on the ground. In terms of the overall thesis, this chapter will show that the instruments of state, in particular diplomacy and the use of organised force, were important in propping up the formal Estado da Índia, so often overlooked in the study of eighteenth-century Portuguese India.

Mixed Outcomes of Diplomacy

Works probing into the character of Portuguese or European activities in the Indian Ocean have varied between those highlighting violent nature and those highlighting its peaceful quality. This ‘peaceful quality’ reflects those interactions, if involving common folks engaging in exchange and trade in ordinary lives, were deemed as relatively ‘non-hostile’. The characterisation of this has been surveyed in chapter 1. The treatment of violence in this chapter and the next is intended to explore the term more in usage as part of statecraft.
Diplomacy was an instrument that was readily used by the Portuguese in preserving their existence. In the general repertoire of foreign policy instruments in the present or pre-modern context, there were a number of recourses a state could take to respond to the external environment. These instruments included: Diplomacy and treaties; economic sanction or exclusion; and use of force or war. ‘Economic exclusion’ will be deferred for discussion in chapter 5. War was not a readily affordable option, considering the meagre revenue collection of the Estado and the rising cost of war. Hence, diplomacy was readily resorted to. Saldanha reveals how, in the instructions issued by King Sebastião to Viceroy D. Luis de Ataide, ‘peace’ and ‘friendship’ were to be counselled rather than war.1

Colonial relations may be seen in more traditional sources as an extension of tensions in European international politics.2 Colonial relations in India were undertaken by the viceroy, as specifically delegated to him in the royal appointment to office, the letter of patent, or in a separate letter of authority. Negotiations and treaties signed with the Great Mughals and other local powers were deliberated by the Overseas Council during the period of the negotiations (if they were drawn out), or usually reported after they had been settled by the viceroy. On occasion, relations with a state such as China might receive more than the usual attention from the king. When matters involved disputes with European powers outside Europe, the link with the centre meant that these were often coordinated and taken up by ambassadors in the respective courts in Europe.

The Portuguese world view and classification system with regards to the people they encountered is a focal area of Saldanha’s thesis. Greco-Roman and Catholic religious cultural roots and beliefs played an important role in the classification system. Because of the many peoples encountered in Asia, classification was also multi-variant. For example, the Chinese seemed to be categorised by the Greco-Roman standard of civilisation to be “superior”. Reciprocally, the Chinese overcame their own protocol by according the Portuguese the status of the Russians, who were not denigrated to tributary standing. With regards to the Mughals, the situation was not straightforward either.

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