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H-Diplo has commissioned reviews of the Makers of the Modern World Series (Haus Publishing), which concerns the Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and their aftermath. The 32 volumes are structured as biographies in standard format or as specific national/organizational histories.
<http://www.hauspublishing.com/product/229>

H-Diplo Review Essay on Hugh Purcell, *The Maharaja of Bikaner: India. (Makers of the Modern World Series)*. London: Haus Publishing 2010. 187 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, chronology, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1-905791-80-4 (\$19.95, cloth).

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/Haus-India.pdf>

Reviewed for H-Diplo by Barbara N. Ramusack, University of Cincinnati

The *Maharaja of Bikaner* traces the political life of Maharaja Ganga Singh who ruled the Rajput desert state of Bikaner in northwestern India from 1898 to 1942. During his lifetime Indian nationalist organizations and leaders mobilized Indian masses to demand first responsible and then self-government as British power at home and abroad languished. With an impressive physique, an easy command of English and shrewd political instincts, Maharaja Ganga Singh quickly achieved prominence in international and domestic political spheres. Hugh Purcell ably chronicles Ganga Singh's contribution to what the British initially had demanded of their princely clients -- military support. Serving first with British forces during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 in China and briefly on the French front during World War I, his personal and material assistance was acknowledged with invitations to London for the Imperial War Conference in 1917 and the Imperial War Cabinet and Conference in 1918, and to Paris for Peace Conference in 1919. An earlier monograph pointed out the seminal nature of Bikaner's role at these Conferences, which for the first time revealed British acceptance and acknowledgement of the fact that the princes could be representatives of the princely states and of India in international politics.¹ Purcell significantly extends this scholarship

¹ Barbara N. Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire: Dissolution of a Patron-Client System, 1914-1939* (Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 1978), chapter 2 and 72.

with his analysis of the key debates and detailed documentation of Bikaner's activities in London and Paris.

One contentious issue at the Peace Conference was whether India should have the same representation as the so-called White Dominions such as Canada and Australia in the League of Nations. India clearly was not a self-governing State, Dominion, or Colony, the criteria for membership in the League. Purcell details the efforts of Maharaja Ganga Singh, S. P. Sinha (the first Indian appointed to the Executive Council of the Governor-General of India in 1909, President of the Indian National Congress in 1915, and, as Lord Sinha of Raipur briefly the Under Secretary of State for India in 1919), and Edwin Montagu, then Secretary of State for India, at the Peace Conference to ensure India's admission to the League of Nations. Since a resolution of 25 January 1919 stated that the League would be open to every civilized nation, Bikaner (princes were frequently referred to with the name of their state) argued that "I would venture to urge with all the emphasis at my command that if the people of India with their ancient civilization were considered fit to fight in Europe and in other theatres of the war side by side with the other nations of this world in this tragic drama, then on the grounds of civilisation and the still higher grounds of our common humanity there can be no just or cogent excuse to deny India her admission into the League." (92) He concluded that "Where it is a question of securing the peace of the world, the important fact must be borne in mind that India represents one fifth of the entire human race." (92-93) Subsequently Bikaner lobbied successfully with Lord Robert Cecil and President Woodrow Wilson who then supported a seat for India in the League of Nations. Purcell's analysis is based on research in Bikaner archives and in London in the papers of S. P. Sinha and Edwin Montagu and the minutes of the British Empire delegation and the Covenant Committee of the Peace Conference.

Chapters on Maharaja Ganga Singh as a leader of Indian princes who sought greater autonomy vis-à-vis the Government of India frame those on his work abroad. Ganga Singh was the first Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, inaugurated in 1921 as an advisory body to the Viceroy, the leader of the princely delegation at the Round Table Conferences in the early 1930s in London, and an increasingly reluctant participant during negotiations over the proposed federation of British Indian provinces and the princely states. These activities and the personality of Bikaner are briefly sketched. A definite plus are the photographs of the Maharaja at various stages of his life as well as the analysis of the painting, *Peace Conference at the Quai d'Orsay* by Sir William Orpen at the Imperial War Museum. An equally reproduced painting that includes Maharaja Ganga Singh is *Some Statesmen of the Great War* by Sir James Guthrie at the National Portrait Gallery. In the former, Bikaner is standing centered behind David Lloyd George but in the latter he is in the shadow at the end of the assembled men. One wonders at the reasons for this difference between the two paintings.

The narrative of Indian politics is on less firm ground than that of diplomatic negotiations. Some less germane facts are incorrect such as the statement that Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty was from Persia. (5) He was a Chaghatai Turk from

Central Asia. More troubling are assertions such as that the seeds of Pakistan could be traced back to when Muhammad Ali Jinnah “had taken the [Muslim] League out of the INC [Indian National Congress] in 1920.” (129) The Muslim League was never part of the Congress. In 1920 Jinnah personally left the Congress and became more active in Muslim League. Here is evidence of limited reading in the extensive historiography of early twentieth century India.

Occasionally Purcell includes local gossip in his narrative. One such story asserts that after Lord Chelmsford, then the Viceroy and Governor-General, had asked Bikaner “what he would like for his services during and after the war, he [Bikaner] had replied ‘Mesopotamia.’” (106) Ian Copland and I have cited a letter of 1 March 1917 from Chelmsford to Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India in London, in which Chelmsford said that Bikaner had written to the Viceroy to ask for land grants in India or captured territory abroad such as German East Africa as rewards for war contributions by the Indian princes.² Here and elsewhere an opportunity is missed to compare such a story apparently still told in Bikaner with available written records that relate the same incident differently and then to speculate on what this local knowledge indicates about the continuing stature of Maharaja Ganga Singh within his state. Such stories also indicate the difficulty of recreating the past.

This volume will be most useful for readers interested in the princely states and one of the most prominent Indian rulers of the twentieth century, Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner, and for diplomatic historians who want to learn more about the anomaly of how a British colony, India, became an autonomous member of the League of Nations. A particularly useful feature in this book and series is the chronology of Bikaner’s life in relation to broader historical and cultural events.

Barbara N. Ramusack is Charles Phelps Taft Professor History Emerita at the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A. Her more recent publications on the princely states are *The Indian Princes and Their States*, Vol. III, 6 in *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and “Kingship in India” 46-71 in *Maharaja: The Splendour of India’s Royal Courts* edited by Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer with Deepika Ahlawat (London: V&A Publishing, 2009). Her current research is a comparative study of maternal and infant health in Madras city and Mysore princely state. One publication on this topic is “Women’s Hospitals and Midwives in Mysore, 1870-1920: Princely or Colonial Medicine” 173-193 in *India’s Princely States: People, Princes and Colonialism* edited by Waltraud Ernst and Biswamoy Pati (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

² Ian Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire, 1917-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 35 and Ramusack, 61.

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