



Seeing Like a Princely State: A Review of the Political and Politics

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Reviewed works

Banerjee, Milinda. 2018. *The mortal god: Imagining the sovereign in colonial India*. Cambridge University Press, 450 pp.

ISBN: 9781107166561, \$120.00.

Purushotham, Sunil. 2021. *From Raj to republic: Sovereignty, violence, and democracy in India*. Stanford University Press, 360 pp.

ISBN: 9781503613256, \$ 140.00

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Introducing the princely states of South Asia

The number of historiographies on the princely states of South Asia must be as many as they were in number. And there were about 600 of them. Territory wise, the princely states were scattered across the Indian sub-continent, occupied huge parts, and varied in sizes. Ruled by princes and pejoratively called princely states by the British administration of India, they were in political tandem with the British Indian empire through the Paramountcy laws and other political allegiances. As the British influence increased through various political machinations, the states were indirectly ruled by the British Crown till they became a part of either India or Pakistan with exceptions. This allowed the British Indian administrators to not just control their adjacent colonies but also unfavourably shape the image of these states.

Not much has been written to retrieve the outlook towards the states within the discipline of history. This dearth of historiography convinces us of a major lack in South Asian historiographies—political history writing is either centered around the nation or colonialism. This essay is an attempt to extensively review the recent research on the princely states and outline the scattered scholarship across time and trends to understand the future scopes of these now absorbed political units in South Asia.

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I have chosen texts from the last decade centered on the princely states that allows me to create a connective and comparative telling of the way they can be seen beyond the popular perceptions. The historiographic trends of the princely states of South Asia have coincided and changed with the trends in history as a discipline has changed in the region. Different lenses have been adapted and those have impacted the historiographies of the princely states. I will primarily focus on the historiographies of the states that existed after 1800s with certain degree of autonomy.

The choice is guided by the fact that the princely states beyond the watershed year of 1857 have been prone to the historian's craft than many of their predecessors in South Asia.¹ This exercise will allow me to invoke an alternative and non-colonial way of looking at South Asia as well. This denationalising and decolonisation efforts towards the princely states studies will be charted through an intellectual history of political ideas like sovereignty and self-determination, history of sciences and technology, provincial and global histories and histories of gender, class, labor and religion.



Reading sovereignty

The mortal gods: Imagining the sovereign in colonial India by Milinda Banerjee allows various lines of inquiry by sparking many blindsided conversations in colonial and post-colonial historiographies of the princely states of South Asia. The core arguments are a dovetail of repositioning the princely states and their historical studies closer to the center of discussing sovereignty in South Asia and highlighting their contributions to Global Intellectual Histories of political ideas like sovereignty and kingship.

Through a metonymic study of two princely states, namely Cooch Behar and Tripura, Banerjee carves his argument that underlines the existence of multiple regionally developed concepts of sovereignty in sub-continental India. He manages to diffuse the myth of the princely states as puppets to the colonial rule and recognises their individual agencies. Further, his choice of the Rajbongshis of Cooch Behar and Tripuris of Tripura aptly punctures the princely state historiography that is not focused on eastern princely states of the Indian sub-continent and the intellectual historiography of Bengal that ignores the non-colonised parts of the region.

The mortal gods' central argument is to aid the identification of sovereignty in multiplicity and multiple sovereignties through the case studies of the two given princely states during the colonial period in South Asia. These states are seen as fertile sites of emergent forms of sovereignty and oppositional to the establishment of centralised sovereignty from time to time. Banerjee discredits the Nehruvian vision of the princely state as the geographic and social pockets that preserve pre-colonial India.² With the intellectual mobility and opposition that the princely states were generating, relegating them to the status of pre-colonial conservatory is reductive and illusory. It is also an effort towards a better comprehension of the Rajbongshis and Tripuris who fashioned their princely states along democratic and inclusive ideas of sovereignty and kingship which were often more progressive than the visions of the Indian National Congress in their anti-colonial movements and ideas of forming the nation.

Peasants and indigenous communities who prove that the Indian National Congress and the British administration were not the only actors in shaping the political landscape of the sub-continent. Here, Banerjee decolonises and democratises our ideas of the ideal sovereign and state-formation while engaging in a detailed evolution of sovereignty in the two princely states. It enables us to understand messianic sovereignty and its incumbent opposition to Indian anti-colonial movement and Brahminical ideas of sovereign polity. We encounter the



influence political identity formations in the princely states have on caste community formation of the region and consolidation of the movements by disenfranchised people groups that continue into post-colonial India.

The thesis of *the mortal gods* emphasises that sovereignty is not plural in South Asia and between the princely states and British Raj but is pluralistic by nature through the study of Cooch Behar and Tripura. Sovereign polities of all degrees influence each other and are never static. Western/ English ideas of sovereignty are either coalescing or struggling with indigenous forms in the princely states, South Asia and beyond. And the contemporary crisis around the erstwhile princely states in India is because the people of the princely states conceived of different sovereignties that do not add up to the sovereignty offered to them by the Indian nation state in the post- colonial world.

However, Banerjee is limited in offering two case studies to represent more than 560 princely states in the Indian sub-continent and their political developments during the colonial period. If accepted as a study locating sovereignty and allied political ideas across non-colonial South Asia and peripheries of colonial Europe, the thesis makes a good study within various historiographic traditions beyond that of the princely states. Banerjee enables us to look beyond the colonial gaze while asserting that people-centric sovereignties are familiar ideas in the Indian sub-continent if the histories of the princely states are investigated.

Uwe Skoda, on the other hand, engages in a more contemporary study of sovereignty in the former princely states of Bonaigarh in Orissa. In "Deities, alliances and the power over life and death", the princely state of Bonaigarh has undergone many transformations yet holds on to a few slivers of royal sovereignty through myths and rituals with participation from the autochthonous community. Skoda brings a rare insight into the kingship that has continued a peculiar form of sovereignty. Bonaigarh has sustained the transition into a nation state in the form of sacrificial practices but could not beat the industrial expansion into the hinterlands of Orissa supported by Indian state. As the region is undergoing a change of order due to industrialisation, it has renewed this princely sovereignty.

At the face of decline of Bonaigarh, the bond between the royalty and the Bhuiyans/the subject of the princely state-turned-citizens has strengthened. Together, the Bhuiyan community and royal family protests and increasingly use anti-industrialization protests drawn from rhetoric of Bonaigarh royal sovereignty. Skoda in his essay traces the royal sovereignty of the former princely state of Bonaigarh transition into an indigenous sovereignty powered by multiple movements across



post-colonial India by the indigenous communities that goes beyond the myths and rituals of Bonai sovereignty.

Enlightened by science

Recent influences of the history of sciences have made its way into the study of the princely states of South Asia. To borrow the argument made by Aashique Ahmed Iqbal, the princely states of South Asia were important and progressive sites of scientific and technological growth in the region while similar scientific growth were not encouraged in the colonial domain unless it served special colonial interests. In fact, to understand the importance and prevalence of science and science diplomacy in the princely states, we will have to delve into the unequal and peculiar relationship between the states, the British colonies and the metropolises.

Baasit Abubakar and Saradindu Bhaduri in their recent essay on the electrification in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir between 1900 and 1920 identify the historical and scientific importance of electrification in a non-colonial South Asian state as a progressive rhetoric towards scientific advancement. They observe that it contrasts the electrification in British colonial spaces powered by the biblical rhetoric of bringing light in the darkness. It is an extensive exploration of the symbols of electric light in the colonial and non-colonial spaces in Srinagar through meticulous references to aesthetic, science, technology, progress, crime, and identity. The electric lights were instrumental in changing the mode of illumination and energy transition from oil to electricity and the technopolitics of Kashmir. Though Abubakar and Bhaduri do not overlook the fact that the electrification of the city of Srinagar in Kashmir was 'first associated with the notions of royalty and class' (Abubakar & Bhaduri, 199) and strengthened the imbalanced resource allocation between rural and urban areas.

Similarly, Aashique Ahmed Iqbal in his recent work on aviation and diplomacy in the princely state of Jodhpur looks at the usage of science diplomacy in non-colonial spaces. He looks at the role of technology in advancing diplomatic relations between the Indian princely state of Jodhpur and British India during the world wars wherein Jodhpur played an important role in defining the aviation rules and helped Britain during the wars. The princely state strengthened its image of Rajput martial modernity through its aviation diplomacy. It is a case of Jodhpur as a non-colonial space asserting its agency on its own terms by working with one of its powerful technocrat neighbors i.e. British India. Here we see a breakdown of the popular binary of colonial modernity and traditionalist princely states through the element of science and technology. As more and more princely states of South Asia are studied, it is fair to say



that we would notice a decentering of the ideas of western sciences of the colonies and nations and scientific modernities.

Seeking the local and translocal

Razak Khan in his *Minority pasts: Locality, emotions, and belonging in princely Rampur* (2022) writes a sensitised history of the princely state of Rampur where he throws light on the local historical imagination of Rampur through rare affective archives. As we are reminded of the struggles of conducting niche research on the princely states and the Muslims of Indian subcontinent, Khan innovates by employing sources like Tazkiras (biographical compendia), Tarikhs (local chronicles), Safar-namas (travelogues), Hayats (life narratives), and family genealogies etc. And when those have served their due diligence, he brings several disciplinary perspectives from urban studies, political geography, history, literary studies, and political sciences to counter the monolithic conceptions of princely states of South Asia and Muslim of Rampur. His encompassing history of the minor princely state of Rampur and the minority community of Rohilla Muslims through 1850s to 1950s foregrounds the location and emotions of belongingness of the Muslims from a princely state within the paradigm of the colonial, national and pan-Islamism.

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Minority pasts looks at the post-Mutiny of 1857 world of the allegedly uncultured Rohilla Muslims of Rampur and questions the colonial lens to evoke a deeper understanding of the self-governance and sovereignty derived from their localised Islamic piety. The princely state had created two unique local geographies out of the mosques and the madrasas, and the print media that serves as a public site of localized political and social conversations in a post-Mughal world. In his efforts to strictly write about the princely states beyond the princes, Khan has debunked the centrality of Nawabi textual production from Rampur and showed that the new Muslim middle class of Rampur were equally active in defining Rampur beyond pejoratives like Arampur and Harampur and through their cultural productions at sites like masjid, madrasas and literature.

The princely Rampur proves its mettle in many ways against the British colonial interventions by successfully adjusting our vision towards the colonial presence as the real cultural threat and political violence in the South Asia. Khan uses contemporary sensational literature from the region to both contest and rebuild the image of the princely state in ways that leaves us asking the question: are there other ways of seeing the sovereignty of Rampur beyond its political sovereignty as a princely state?

The localised political and social history of Rampur exhibits signs of modernisation and democratisation that were not associated with the



princely states of South Asia. In fact, Khan reminds us that the British colonial models of governance were not suitable for many princely states of South Asia and the trope of a progressive princely states was also a colonial trope. And Rampur actively subverted colonial ideas of progress and governance by inventing its own brand of localised modernity.

The urge of the princely state to retain its unique identity despite the homogenization of the princely states and the Muslims in South Asia after the fall of the Mughals and the rise of the nation state is evident in Khan's abundant uses of vernacular and local sources on Rampur sourced from across the globe with distinct Rampuri flavor. This indicates the important duality of struggle and innovation of many contemporary historians of princely states who struggle to find relevant archives while supplementing it with non-traditional and non-colonial archives making their work truly about the non-colonial space like the princely states and local yet trans local.

Discussing alternative political futures

Princely states have been ripe sites of political activities and have brought various political changes and movements to the Indian sub-continent. Rama Mantena in her *Provincial democracy: Political imaginaries at the end of Empire in twentieth century South India* (2023) brings out voices and organisations from the princely state of Hyderabad to assert the political contributions of the state at the brink of decolonisation and nation formations in South Asia. Yet again, we witness that the princely states are not pockets of pre-colonial pasts of South Asia but brimming with political and civic engagements with each other, with the various colonial powers in the sub-continent, and globally. In fact, Mantena's core theses would be a good prelude to start our inquiries into the princely states of South Asia as non-colonial political spaces that offer many alternative political imaginaries and futures than are accounted for in the histories.

Many prominent princely states had vocal anti-monarchical political movements where they pushed for better governance and socio-administrative changes inspired by the popular ideas of sovereignty and democracy circulated in the adjacent British colonies or metropolises.³ However, we can truly provincialize these political ideas in South Asia if we focus more on the princely states and highlight their interactions with and contributions to the international political discourse to understand the unique ways in which they interpreted the ideas of sovereignty and democracy in their contexts.

To borrow from Mantena's ideations on the ways Hyderabad demanded for self-determination, self-rule, federation of states instead of one



nation state, provincial autonomy, and decolonisation, we witness a strong conversation on provincial autonomy in the princely states and in certain pockets of the colonies as well that were different from prominent nationalistic self-determination of the anti-colonial movements in the British colonies of South Asia. Mantena cites a report by Abhyankar on self-determination for the princely states people' asserting that the state people had more power and autonomy before the arrival of the colonisers (Mantena 2023, 112). They had overthrown rulers and dissented from time to time till the rulers were solely endorsed or controlled by the coloniser. Despite this, the states held on to their individual trajectories and remained non-homogenised by colonial influences. In fact, they make an interesting research prospect to understand the alternate or parallel political evolutions and imaginaries in the Indian sub-continent as opposed to the directly controlled British colonies.

Provincial democracy allows us to rethink the place of provincial politics in relation to the anti-colonial politics of twentieth century South Asia. It brings to our attention the various political groups that demanded various versions of self-determination and self-rule. These versions actively competed with the anti-colonial rhetoric. We are also reminded that the princely states hosted different political and linguistic groups that were not homogenised by colonial political hegemony, singularised demand for a nation state or that they were struggling to maintain their political sanctity in the power tussle between the colonised and coloniser. To explain this crisis in the princely state of Hyderabad, Mantena uses the lack of the usage of colonial language and heavy reliance on the vernacular as the gateway to alternate and provincial democratic units.

The reliance on Telugu and translated work into Telugu in the Hyderabad region allowed discussions on niche set of provincial concerns in open. The Telugu linguistic politics of the princely states unlike the political world of Bangla or Marathi allowed new 'affective communities'⁴ between the international politics and princely state politics (Gandhi 2006, 99). The text impartially looks at the centrality of Hyderabad and princely states to understand the fears at the brink of decolonisation-absorption of princely states into the new nation state of India or Pakistan and their loss of autonomy or balkanisation of India due to princely states forming a federation with the newly decolonised India. Thereby, bringing out the range of political perspectives from different political quarters like the Indian National Congress, Communist groups and others.

As we are bound to undertake the task of exploring the political origins of India, the histories of the absorption of the princely states despite the



many political futures they held is important to acknowledge the place and space they provided in defining the Indian nation and its political superfluity. *Provincial democracy* becomes more relevant in this scheme of affairs as it also helps us understand the recent bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into Telangana with roots in the absorption of the princely state of Hyderabad into India in 1948.

As Sarath Pillai remarks in his relevant essay "Archiving federally, writing regionally", the princely state history writings of postcolonial India need to advocate with questions around federation related unfulfilled futures and the archives at regional level must reflect that through their archiving processes. Rightly so, in a world of national histories, princely states histories and archives are a reminder of other obscured political pasts and futures that do not align with the national imaginations.

Absorbed into nations

The history of the absorption of the princely states into India and Pakistan remain rather understudied yet a vital lens to study the formation and evolution of all fundamental political ideas in the two South Asian nations. Tied to the British colonies and metropolises through the Paramountcy laws, the princely states and the conversations of the Princes Chambers leading up to the years of decolonisation and Partition in 1947 understood and demanded state formation in South Asia with more autonomy. The rulers invoked Paramountcy laws in these conversations that honored their equation with the British administration in India as a collaboration of two empires of equal sovereign powers. Later, the Cripps Mission promised them options to either join India or renegotiate their terms of treaties with the new nation of India.

The rulers wanted to create a federation of small states with ample space to accommodate regional political aspirations. Whereas the Indian National Congress feared that this would lead to balkanisation of the region. Eventually, most of them had to settle for the instrument of accession that absorbed them into India with very limited political say. With the increasing international pressure to create a territorially contiguous India, the new nation violated the princely states by compromising their political wills (Khan 2022, 3). While the recent scholarship of Sunil Purushotham, Rakesh Ankit, Afsar Mohammad and Yaqoob Khan Bangash⁵ foreground a similar pattern of aggression by the new nations in absorbing the princely states, it is worthy to study all such cases with equal focus and importance.

Rakesh Ankit made a significant argument about these histories in his recent work on the absorption of the princely state of Junagadh in 1948



with the freshly recovered archival deposit of Mountbatten Papers at the Hartley Library, University of Southampton. Histories of absorption of the princely states are also histories of state and nation formation in South Asia and remind us of the 'internal violence' committed by the newly formed nations (Purushotham 2015, 436). In fact, the colony-turned-new nations of South Asia used colonial tactics against many princely states to come to existence while it decolonized itself from British colonialism. Ankit looks at this 'mobilization of violence' by the state to understand the case of Junagadh between July 1947 to February 1948 (Ankit 2016, 371). The histories of the absorptions are also intertwined with communal violence in cases of Junagadh and Hyderabad.

Along with Rakesh Ankit, Sunil Purushotham and Afsar Mohammad look at the violence towards the Indian Muslims of the princely states. They document the extensive diplomatic plays by the two nations to utilize the communal rifts created by the British administration, Indian National Congress, Muslim League and often the princes too. Sunil Purushotham in his *From Raj to Republic: Sovereignty, violence and democracy in India* (2021) addresses the bloodshed toward Muslims during the Police Action and economic blockade of 1948 in Hyderabad that coerced the princely state into joining India. Hyderabad like many princely states were feared to be the third front of the Partition and bore the communal violence of the time.

The new nation feared multiple Partition and chose to suspend the sovereign will of the population of the princely state. Purushotham calls it the 'nationalist onslaught on their sovereignty' (Purushotham 2021, 39). This push to present a republic statehood in India primarily by the Indian National Congress, Purushotham says, was the reason behind the campaign by many political leaders like Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel and V. P. Menon to circumvent many international interferences and questions of democratic nation formation through the incorporation of the princely states. Interestingly, Afsar Mohammad's *Remaking history: 1948 police action and the Muslims of Hyderabad* offers us a look into the rubble of Hyderabad after the Police Action and absorption in 1948.

Earlier trends

A look at the earlier historiographic trends within the study of the princely states in Indian subcontinent have been consistently progressive and revelatory. The scholarship has successfully led to the many contemporary conversations about the princely states of South Asia as discussed in the earlier sections. As I review the early historiographies of the princely states, there were extensive conversations about the equation



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between these non-colonial states of South Asia and British India. Most of this scholarship was using the abundantly available colonial archives. The introduction of British residents in the princely states and their correspondences had led to a significant repository in the British colonial archives to understand the princely states. However, they remain lopsided and subject to deeper exploration.

Michael Fisher in his *Indirect rule in India: Residents and the residency system, 1764-1858* (1991) focuses on understanding the relationships between East India Company and the princely states through the introduction of subsidiary alliances and installation of residents in these states yielding newer colonial control strategies. While Ian Copland in his *The British Raj and the Indian princes: Paramountcy in Western India, 1857-1930* (1982) studies the Bombay Presidency and its interactions with 350 or more princely states in the western part of India. Copland makes strong arguments about the indirect British rule and its role in caricaturing the rulers while it empowered them to promote their dynastic interests with increased autonomy. Both Fisher and Copland like many others of their time largely use the collection of epistolary and administrative correspondences between British residents in selected states like Awadh, Hyderabad and Mysore, and the British metropole administrations.

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The early scholars of princely states in South Asia have also addressed the assumptions about the anti-colonial stands of many princely states. The princely states were often branded as collaborators with British India administration for squashing anti-colonial dissent in their territories. However, many scholars have extensively debunked these sweeping conjectures by prominent nationalist groups of the time. Recent scholars like Teresa Segura Garcia in her doctoral dissertation addresses the challenges faced by early scholars to debunk the accusation of collaborationism against these states. She encourages future scholars to look at the relations between the rulers and the population of these non-colonial spaces with reference to the colonial administration and colonial subjects through different and individualised lenses.

In her research, Garcia explores the intellectual and political learning curve of Maharaja Sayaji Rao III of the Baroda state through the last decades of 1800s and early decades of 1900s who used his power to participate in the anti-colonial politics of British India. She tracks his political philosophy as a mix of 'ideas and resources that held the British empire together and at the same time contributed to its eventual demise' (Garcia 2015, 4). She explores Sayaji Rao's active role in travelling to the British metropolises and exporting radical ideas to the sub-continent.



He also promoted education through travel in his reign and sponsored the overseas education of the anti-colonial and anti-caste movement leader, B. R. Ambedkar who held important roles not just in the anti-colonial movement of India but also in formation of India after decolonisation.

As the historiographical studies of the Indian Subcontinent took on discussions around categories like gender, labor, religion and subaltern groups, a lot of nuanced scholarship of the princely states were surfacing. Princely states studies after the subaltern turn was particularly concentrated in ways that it took charge of uncovering more complicated narratives with innovative methodologies. Janaki Nair in her *Miners and millhands: Work, culture and politics in princely Mysore* (1998) explores the labor and cultural history of the princely state of Mysore. Her work looks at the miners of Kolar Gold Field and millhands of Bangalore within the Mysore state to understand the underbelly of a princely state and its interactions with the British colonies. Nair prompts us to think of the princely states as hybrid and nuanced spaces where the subaltern caste and class was seeking more opportunities to experience freedom otherwise denied to them in British colonies while the ruler claimed economic development at their cost.

More contemporary resonances of such interventions and combinations of historiographies of labor and princely states can be found in Amanda Lanzillo's *Pious labor: Islam, artisanship and technology in colonial India* (2024a). Lanzillo has theorized the work culture and use of technology by the Muslim artisans of the primarily Muslim dominated princely states of Hyderabad, Bhopal, and Rampur. She talks about the evolution of the lithography and the lithographic practices in these spaces by the primarily Muslim artisan community. They derive their concepts from local lithographic practices and their lithographic content from Islamic learnings. These artisans from the princely states were aggressively challenging the concept of colonial modernity and technocracy through their rooted artistry to remind us of the subaltern quarters that the princely states have presented themselves as.

Like the historiographies of labor and laborers, the historiographies of Muslims as a subaltern category in princely states of South Asia are equally nuanced. Monographs like that of *Resisting regimes: Myth, memory, and the shaping of a Muslim identity* (1997) by Shail Mayaram explores the dynamics of religion and identity formation in non-colonial spaces like the princely states. Mayaram explores the Meo peasant revolt from the Mewat region in the princely state of Alwar and Bharatpur of 1930s. She relooks at several already discussed dynamics between the ethnic Muslim group of Meos, the two predominantly Hindu princely



states and British administrative policies towards certain subaltern groups. We see a revision of the image of the princely states as modernising political units in a world of colonization, as a reflection and practitioner of many political practices in British colonies like communal bias towards Hindus and Muslims and as less talked about sites of communal violence towards Muslims during the Partition of 1947 in the Indian sub-continent.

In fact, in recent times, Siobhan Lambert Hurley in her *Muslim women, reform, and princely patronage: Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal* (2007) has paved the path for an alternate way of perceiving the Indian Muslim women with the princely state of Bhopal as the center of study. Hurley, with the wave of feminist writings on Muslim women has combined the historiography of the princely states as a site of gender reforms and redefining the contribution of the Sultan Jahan and the begums of Bhopal using Islamic precepts and universalism. With extensive focus on female autonomy and education, Bhopal under the direction of Nawab Sultana Jahan Begam explored a new kind of feminist world that would serve the princely states on its own accord in the 1920s and later. The Nawab dabbled with Islamic and Colonial/ Christian discourses of womanhood to bring radical changes among the Muslim and Hindu women without compromising their religious trait thereby making gender reforms more amenable to her subject.

Clearly, the historiographies of the princely states of South Asia have evolved to offer fresh narratives that contribute to our understanding of the non-colonial pasts of the region and furthers newer theories and revisions of the same. Though the historiographies remain deplorably low as noted since the publication of the edited volume of *People, princes and paramount power: Society and politics in the Indian princely states* (1987) by Robin Jeffrey, recent scholarship has informed us progressively well about the princely states in many ways. In recent times, many scholars have impressively arranged to focus on the princely states in ways that not just coincide with the new trends of history writings but also reminds us of the varieties of available narratives that must be explored.

Concluding observation of the princely states

There are many concurrent conversations within the historiographies of the princely states of South Asia that were not covered by this essay. Yet it remains widely understood that the relatively narrow field of study is lopsided in many ways and there is a need for more research on the princely states. There is a need for more research on the eastern princely states, the histories of incorporation into India or Pakistan, the



plebiscite history of the states as they joined one of the two nations, post-colonial legacies of the states, subaltern and the underbellies of the states, the after lives of the regions they joined, the archival lack and innovations to compensate the lack while writing the histories of the state, rise of communal divides in the state and much more. Each new historiographical contribution nuances our understanding of the princely states and moves towards a compassing knowledge of them. The rising number of historiographies that interrogate the prevalent stereotypes about the states have nuanced our understanding of them to help us perceive the erstwhile princely states and the political past of South Asia as a region better. If we can pursue more particularized histories of each of the princely states, we will have more narratives to look beyond the colonial and national histories.

Endnotes

¹ The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 was an extensive and first of its kind uprising by the native soldiers and others against the East India Company. After squashing the mutineers, the mutiny was followed by the establishment of the British Crown rule in India.

² Jawaharlal Nehru (1942) refers to the princely states of South Asia as despotic spaces with no political modernity. Nehru claims that if these states were to be left to their rulers after the departure of the British Crown, they will turn into feudal barons.

³ For example, Shail Mayaram (1997) and Janaki Nair (1998) bring up instances of anti-monarchical voices in favour of better governance and socio-administrative changes in the princely states.

⁴ Leela Gandhi (2006) qualifies the term as the cross-cultural collaborations and camaraderie between various groups like the trade unions, animal welfare movements, homosexual groups, mystics, radicals from the metropolises, colonies and beyond producing rare cultural conversations.

⁵ Yaqoob Khan Bangash (2015) looks at the absorption of the princely states that found themselves in close proximity to the newfound territory of Pakistan in 1947.

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