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Aya Ikegame. *Princely India Re-imagined: A Historical Anthropology of Mysore from 1799 to the Present.* Routledge/Edinburgh South Asian Studies Series. Oxford: Routledge, 2012. 212 pp. $145.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-55449-7.

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India's Non-sovereign Kings

It shows some daring for an anthropologist based in Britain to publish historical work, especially if it does not involve marginal or downtrodden "subalterns." In her first monograph, *Princely India Re-imagined*, Aya Ikegame does precisely that, guiding us through two hundred years of history of the kings of Mysore, one of India's foremost former kingdoms, where Ikegame (who is fluent in Kannada) devoted several years to archival and ethnographic research. This richly detailed account of the Mysore royal household is an important contribution to Indian historiography. It also sheds light onto a substantial blind spot in Indian ethnography, where India's kings still hardly figure, despite having ruled a third of the subcontinent less than a century back.

The task Ikegame sets for herself is not easy: to address both historians of British colonialism and political anthropologists. To the historians, she presents a carefully researched account of how Indian kings asserted political authority during and after colonialism; to anthropologists, she tries to show how and why kings in India remain politically meaningful today. She refutes a prevailing claim in Indian historiography, advanced most effectively in Nicholas Dirks's 1989 monograph, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, that British colonialism emptied Indian kingship of political substance, turning the economically and politically vital distribution of goods into a vain charade. Dirks insisted that the Raj cut the kings off from their political followings and sources of religious authority, leaving them only hollow crowns. Ikegame, conversely, insists that the rajas who were stripped of sovereignty found new ways to forge and consolidate subjects' loyalties, legitimize their power, and, in important ways, rule.

Her argument is not presented in a linear manner, but instead she uses each chapter to offer a different view onto princely Mysore. Each chapter will carry a different appeal to different readers and the book as a whole is best read as a collection of essays on a shared theme.

We begin our journey to Mysore (in chapter 2) in the royal palace, where the East India Company installed the four-year-old Krishnaraja Wodeyar III after killing Tipu Sultan in 1799. In 1830, Wodeyar III was thrown off the throne by a peasant uprising, but was soon reinstated by the British. From then on he became the East India Company's pensioner and the management of Mysore passed under the Company's direct control. To rescind the raja's power definitively, British authorities attempted to separate his private funds, "the raja's share," from the state's "public property." This was a major political, fiscal, and cosmological shift. The palace, which used to be a synonym for the state and housed the raja, who embodied the kingdom, now became a private retreat for an ornamental king.

But Wodeyar III resisted this "privatization." While his resources and sphere of influence diminished drastically, he continued to lavish land grants (*inām*s) on his followers: Brahmins, vassals, temples, and monasteries, as well as military retainers. He made grants to individuals, institutions, and public services, like the maintenance of reservoirs, and in doing so consolidated the donees' loyalties, casting the public-private divide firmly aside. British authorities derided this liberality as a corrupt "misalienation" of land, and ultimately abolished *inām*s. Yet instead of curbing his generosity, the king refocused his giving on a tighter circle of followers in the palace. Far from becoming a quiet retreat, the palace grew into Mysore city's biggest employer and purveyor of charity. By 1868, the palace employed nearly ten thousand people–that is, every sixth person in Mysore!–and every day it distributed six hundred pounds of rice to the poor. "The raja's share," remarks Ikegame, "was literally eaten up by people in the palace and city" (p. 26).

While the poor ate the raja's rice, the Brahmins and aristocrats craved royal honors. Under Company rule, the king continued to dispense royal insignia, servants, and paraphernalia. Ikegame shows (in chapter 3) that, contra Dirks, there was nothing fetishistic, decorative, or residual about this process. The distribution of honors was a politically substantive exercise through which the king asserted supremacy and demarcated his subordinates as the king's subjects. The honors not only conferred superior status on honorees–like the royal gift giving of precolonial India–but also quite literally incorporated them into the royal fold by devolving the palace's ritual, political, and economic functions. As in earlier segmentary polities, this centripetal process produced other centers of power–most notably, the *maṭha* Hindu monasteries–which became key providers of welfare, education, healthcare, and dispute resolution. For the elites of Mysore, and for those who hoped to join them, this royal recognition had vital importance. The old city teemed with bitter contests over royal honors and by the twentieth century the palace received so many petitions for honors and complaints about their wrongful enjoyment that the hierarchy of honors had to be regularized. Ikegame notes that this regularization was a curiously hybrid process. While sharing in the spirit of colonial enumerative efficiency, it retained a distinctly indigenous aim: not simply to enumerate but also to confer recognition on the groups it honored.

While the Urs aristocracy clamored for honors at the palace gate, in their turn, the princes pursued marks of distinction from colonial overlords. The British were, in their turn, unstinting with accolades: gun salutes, imperial titles, orders, and so on. The key badge of imperial recognition was Englishness, and the rajas schooled themselves diligently in English language and manners, and the virtues of honesty, modesty, and athletic verve. In chapter 4, we learn a great deal about the rajas' English education–the one colonial mechanism that successfully domesticated India's kings and distanced them from their subjects. When the teenage Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV traveled through villages, crowds fell in noisy adulation as they caught holy vision (*darshan*) of their king. The king, however, more accustomed to polo grounds than the racket of popular Hindu devotion, was shaken to the core. By the turn of the twentieth century, Indian kings were turning from rivals of imperial sovereigns into their vassals. When, late in life, Maharaja Wodeyar III was told that the British official serving as resident (or regent) might be removed from Mysore, he burst into tears, complaining that "as long as he had a Resident, he was still considered to be a prince, but by the removal of his Resident he would be lowered to the level of a poligar [subordinate chief]" (p. 150). In this shifting conception of kingly authorization, legitimacy came less from below, or the raja's people, and increasingly from the imperial masters above.

Chapter 6 offers a fascinating study of marriage strategies of the Mysore rajas, who now set their eyes on alliances beyond their state. Unlike other Indian royals, the kings of Mysore never married European women, but sought brides instead from north Indian royal houses. It turned out, however, that northern royalty did not recognize Mysore as Rajput stock or treated them as rank inferiors. At most, they might accept a wife from Mysore, placing the Wodeyars, through the logic of hypergamy (marrying up) logic, as wife-givers who stand below. At the end of a long search, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV had to marry an eleven-year-old princess from a tiny kingdom in Gujarat with no gun salutes at all. The new trans-local alliances drastically upturned the old "vertical" pattern of marriage with local aristocrats, who were duly furious at the royals' novel preference for "foreign women."

This dramatic change poses several questions: Why did the Mysore royals suddenly turn away from local marriages? Why did the northern rajas reject them? And why did the Mysore family accept the degrading position of wife-givers? After all, in the imperial hierarchy, Mysore was right at the top, its twenty-one gun salutes placing it above any kingdom in Rajputana. Ikegame tells us the Wodeyars' pan-Indian aspirations were in line with their increasing linguistic, cultural, and spatial mobility, something true of most other Indian royals. She also points out that by homogenizing the princely class, the British unwittingly created India's first national class. To explain Mysore's difficulties in procuring northern alliances, she embarks on an intricate discussion of classical kinship theory, concluding that Mysore's nuptial aspirations failed largely because the southern (Dravidian) system of reciprocal cross-cousin and uncle-niece marriage clashed with the asymmetries of hypergamy practiced in the North.

This fails, nevertheless, to explain why the Wodeyars were happy to accept the subordinate standing instead of marrying further afield in the South, where they were undisputable rank superiors. One wonders whether the Wodeyars might have also had less than imperial aspirations. Like many other South Indian kings, the rajas were royal upstarts who not long ago had been among lesser *poligar* chiefs. The empire might have bestowed on them the highest honors, but for established South Asian royals they were parvenus. While joining the cosmopolitan

elite, the rajas of Mysore also seem to have pursued an indigenous path of ascent, climbing up the hierarchy of royals, which they entered much nearer to the bottom than their imperial titles suggest.

In chapters 7 and 8, Ikegame returns to the question of royal authority, and particularly of how the indigenous concept of *rājadharma* (moral duty of kings), which she translates as "sovereignty," was refashioned under the Raj. Chapter 8 is a potted history of Mysore, in which Ikegame argues that the city's physical transformation expressed the new hybrid conception of kingly rule, which combined the indigenous idea of *rājadharma* with the colonial notion of "improvement." The *dharmarāja* (righteous king) was now expected to create beautiful public spaces and build sanitary suburbs with latrines. The ancient idea of kingly encompassment and transcendence found new expression in the idiom of "toleration." And Gandhi himself extolled Mysore under Maharaja Wodeyar IV, who supported Muslim, along with Hindu and Jain, religious institutions, as Rama Rajya–the kingdom of Rama. Mysore became an architectural crossbreed, both a modern city and "an ideal Hindu capital" (p. 137). Ritual assertions of kingship–the palace, its royal assemblies (*darbārs*), and the royal Dasara celebrations–were also transformed. The *darbārs* now took place in a palace newly designed by an Irish architect and the ceremony followed a new "Anglo-Indian ritual code" (p. 153). Women around the city synchronized their domestic worship with the gun salutes they heard fired in the palace. The idea of *rājadharma* proved as polyvalent and adaptable to new circumstances as scholars of premodern India have shown it to be. The study definitively refutes the idea that "tradition" is in any way fixed.

All this–the royal sponsorship of mosques, temples, and schools, as well as the public royal rituals–came to an end in 1971, when Indira Gandhi rescinded the kings' pensions, or "privy purses." It was not colonial masters, concludes Ikegame, but Mrs. Gandhi who finally aborted the rule of Indian kings. The king has literally disappeared from sight and today the *darbārs* are private parties with very few guests.

The royals, we are told in the final chapter, have also vanished from politics, now dominated by the formerly "backward" castes of Okkaligas and Lingayats. This is in itself astonishing: how could the king and aristocrats become political absentees overnight? We gather from Ikegame's own description that the change was less complete. In chapter 5, we learn that one of Karnataka's most ardently populist and widely admired politicians, Devaraj Urs, was a high-ranking aristocrat. Ikegame dismisses his election to the post of chief minister as a matter of "luck" (p. 94), but it seems unlikely that his election was pure fortune. We learn (again in passing) that in 2004 the son of the last maharaja lost parliamentary elections, but not before spending four terms in office. For two decades he must have been the candidate of choice, and not only for the aristocratic minority. It would have been interesting to know whether Ikegame thought his social standing played a role in the electors' choice. And if not, why not? Another fascinating development, which she mentions briefly and many readers will no doubt wish to learn more about, is the increasingly powerful role of the Hindu monasteries, once the kings' foremost donees, in electoral politics.

Readers will also be keen to learn more about today's politics, but here the account falters as Ikegame leaves discussion of the current context to the last few pages. She suggests that while the kings lost their influence, kingship persists as a representative order and the king as an emblem of rule. Like Pamela Price in her *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (1996) and I in my edited collection, *Patronage as Politics in South Asia* (2014), have recently shown, Ikegame sees kingship as surviving in a set of associated ideals and values. But, unlike Price or Norbert Peabody (*Hindu Kingship and Polity in Pre-colonial India* [2003]), she tells us little about which ideals and values have persisted or how they shape competitive politics today. Those looking for a study of kingship as an idiom of political authorization will find more prosopography of erstwhile kings than analysis of political legitimacy today. Instead of returning to the wealth of kingly discourses, symbols, gestures, and practices she so well describes in the earlier chapters, she turns instead to obscure musings by Gayatri Chakrabarti Spivak.

These omissions reflect the extreme difficulty of combining a historic account of royalty with an analysis of kingship as a political idiom. It is one thing to study the fate of hereditary kings. It is quite another to examine kingship as a set of ideas that shape the politics of the modern world.

Readers will, nonetheless, gain many fascinating insights from Ikegame's excellently researched study, which will no doubt make them reflect on what kingship without kings may be and who the kings are in the absence of royal sovereignty, in India and beyond.

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