

Princely states have been an integral part of the political landscape of India during colonial period. While some princely states were perceived as favoring the British colonialism some supported India's independence and worked for the welfare of the people. Dr. Teresa Segura-Garcia, who is a historian of Modern South Asia at Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) in Barcelona, spoke to Niranjani Marjani, the Consulting Editor of The Kootneeti Español, about her research on the princely state of Baroda under the rule of Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III.

Niranjani Marjani: How did you choose to research on South Asia and India?

Dr. Teresa Segura-Garcia: When I was studying for a Bachelor of Humanities at the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF), in Barcelona, I was already very interested in South Asia. However, the region was not very present in the study plan of this degree, and it was not in the study plans of other Catalan or Spanish universities as well. When I saw that the UPF Department of Humanities was offering a scholarship for undergraduate students to go to the University of Delhi, I didn't think twice. Thanks to this scholarship, I spent a few months in the Department of Romance and Germanic Languages, where I taught Spanish at the BA and MA in Hispanic Studies. Beyond the classrooms of the North Campus, I discovered a complex and fascinating city, with a long history that I was completely unaware of. I started by reading the first book on Indian history, then a second... and ended up defending a doctoral thesis on Indian history at the University of Cambridge.

This journey would not have been possible without the Master in World History at UPF, where I began researching India with a thesis directed by Josep M. Fradera. It was he who encouraged me to go to Cambridge to work with C. A. Bayly, who was my thesis supervisor. Nor would it have been possible without the grant from the "la Caixa" Foundation that allowed me to study for a doctorate.

NM: Any particular reason to focus on the role of princely states in India?

TSG: The princely states of India are privileged spaces for the study of colonialism, because they were not under the direct control of the British Empire. They were formally independent territories that in practice were under different forms of British rule. The intensity and specific forms that this dominance takes vary in each of the approximately 500 principalities that existed in the subcontinent from the mid-19th century until the arrival of Independence in 1947.

Despite this complex panorama, the princely states have often been forgotten by historians, who have focused mainly on the study of the provinces ruled directly by the British in India. This trend is changing in recent years: there is a new generation of historians such as Eric L. Beverley, Kate Boehme or Razak Khan, among many others, who are making very important contributions to the study of princely states.

NM: Your doctoral thesis deals with the global ties of the princely state of Baroda in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Could you tell us more about that? It is interesting that you explore these links, as the British dealt with India's foreign relations during this period.

TSG: It is true that the treaties regulating relations between the princely states and the British Empire did not allow princes to establish diplomatic ties with other countries. These diplomatic functions were exclusively in the hands of the colonial government. However, this is not to say that some princes did not attempt to establish informal political ties both with other princely states and with territories and individuals beyond the Indian subcontinent. The participation of Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III of Baroda in the global networks of Indian anti-colonialism in Europe and the United States is a good example of this. Like the other European colonial empires, the British were not omnipotent: there were individuals, connections and forms of resistance that were beyond its control.



Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III of Baroda (Image - www.historyofvadodara.in)

NM: Apart from global ties, what interests you about the government of Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III?

TSG: His tense relationship with the British Empire as Maharaja of Baroda, the great princely state of western India and the third most important in the subcontinent, after Hyderabad and Mysore. When Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III ascended to the throne in 1875, he did so under the tutelage of the colonial government, which hoped to make him the greatest exponent of a new generation of princes loyal to the empire. These hopes were soon dashed: in the final decades of the 19th century and until practically the First World War, Sayaji Rao not only restrained from allying with the British Empire, but he also gave different types of aid to anti-colonial activists who were committed to the end the rule of this empire, such as Aurobindo Ghose, Bhikaji Rustom Cama, and Shyamji Krishna Varma. In the last decades of his reign (until his death in 1939) he abandoned these clandestine activities, which had

brought him to the brink of deposition.

NM: Please tell us about your postdoctoral work in India.

TSG: In 2016 I was a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi, hired by the M. S. Merian - R. Tagore International Center of Advanced Studies: Metamorphoses of the Political (ICAS: MP). My work at ICAS: MP was developed within its gender studies group, with a project on the role of masculinity in the education of Indian princes. I focused on a specific form of princely education: that which took place within the Indian courts themselves under the direction of British tutors. This is precisely the model that the British Empire promoted in Baroda to educate Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III as a pro-British grand prince, with the disappointing result I discussed earlier.

NM: The popular discourse is that many of the princely states in India sided with the British. Given that your writings focus on the princely states and British rule in India, what is your perspective on the interactions between the two?

TSG: The interactions between the princely states and the British Empire are much more complex than we have long believed. Taking into account the great diversity of the princely states, it cannot be otherwise. The case of Baroda is paradigmatic of the construction of a political alternative to the British Empire that goes through the exercise of forms of authority and local power. Baroda is not, however, a unique case: we find similar attempts, although less ambitious, in other princely states. These alternatives disappeared in 1947, when the vast majority of the princely states acceded to the newly independent states of India and Pakistan without many complications, but we should not underestimate the potential they had at the time. This potential can be detected in the hopes that part of the Indian anti-colonialism placed in the princes, as well as in the anxiety of the colonial administrators regarding the participation of some princes in the anti-colonial movement.

NM: How important is India in academic and research circles in Spain?

TSG: India has a growing presence in Spanish universities. At the research level, the most active discipline is undoubtedly Philology, through the study of the postcolonial literature of India and its Diasporas. In other fields, including history, there is still much to do.

The Spanish Association for Interdisciplinary Studies of India (AEEII) plays a key role in the dissemination of research on India. Since 2007, the AEEII has organized annual conferences and seminars that bring together a good part of the researchers who work on India in Spain, as well as international academics.

NM: Given that the emerging world order is Asia-centric, do you see a simultaneous growth in interest in studying India among researchers and students in Spain?

TSG: Although the presence of India is increasing in Spanish universities, it is clear that it does not correspond to the global importance of the country. In this sense, China and East Asia have captured much of the academic attention, from research projects to the creation of specialized degrees.

In the field of History, there is interest in establishing comparative projects with other empires. Especially with the Spanish, who had overseas territories not only in America but also in Asia, in the Philippines. These efforts have focused on the Research Group on Empires, Metropolises and Extra-European Societies (GRIMSE), of which I am a member at UPF. At the moment they have had results such as *Unexpected Voices in Imperial Parliaments*, which I have co-edited with Josep M. Fradera and José María Portillo (Bloomsbury, 2021). The book examines the trajectories of colonial subjects in parliaments and metropolitan courts, from Dionisio Inca Yupanqui in the Cortes of Cádiz to Dadabhai Naoroji in Westminster.

India also generates interest among students. For example, for a couple of years the AEEII has awarded prizes to the best final degree projects, final master's degree projects and doctoral theses on Indian studies defended in Spanish universities. It is likely that a few years ago there was not enough critical mass for this type of initiative.

NM: Thank you for speaking to The Kootneeti.

TSG: Thanks to you for talking to me; It has been a pleasure.

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