

Anita Anand, *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary*, Bloomsbury, New York 2015, pp. 416.

Anita Anand's *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary* provides an opportunity to contemplate themes as royalty, imperialism and race relations. Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, born in Britain in 1876, came into the world under considerably changed circumstances from her very wealthy and powerful grandfather, Maharajah Ranjit Singh, ruler of the Sikh Kingdom in the Punjab. In a tale stranger than fiction, writer Anand takes considerable care in outlining the background of Ranjit Singh's life and death and the subsequent fallout from court intrigues in which only his youngest widow and son survived (all other wives partook of sati, burning on the funeral pyre with their departed husband and several potential heirs were subsequently murdered). With infant Duleep Singh placed on the throne and his mother Jindan appointed regent, the kingdom suffered considerable instability and, with much internal treachery, the British saw their opportunity to seize and take control of the Sikh Kingdom. Imprisoning widow Jindan, the British, who had promised protection of the young royal Duleep, played both conqueror and saviour. Duleep, placed under the care of a Scottish doctor and his wife and brought up speaking English, eventually converted to Christianity. Queen Victoria intrigued by the conversion of her exotic "subject" eventually arranged for Duleep to travel with his guardians to England. The young Maharajah became a favourite of the queen and the court, was provided with a large annual income and developed extravagant tastes. His overspending and penchant for dissolute pleasures eventually wore thin the early welcome that he received. The book's narrative spends a significant portion of its pages on following the ups and downs of Duleep's life and the subsequent impact of his actions on his family, taking time getting to the story of Sophia, the title character. Sophia had siblings and they all enjoyed great privilege growing up; however Sophia had the added claim to Victoria's affections and favours because of the queen being her godmother. The Singh presence added an exoticism to court life, yet in spite of the three attractive daughters becoming debutants at Buckingham Palace in 1894, Sophia and her two sisters would never manage to be fully integrated into British social life because of being women of colour. This reality is alluded to in the book; however, the fact of the Singhs' otherness is never fully analyzed. Their extravagant lifestyles and sense of entitlement as royals (albeit Indian royals) was only possible because of their being supported by the British crown, yet Sophia and her sisters display varying degrees of righteous anger and revolt against their benefactors. One sister ended up living most of her days in India and later Pakistan, supporting the growing native movement against the colonial regime. Another sister spent the better part of her life in Germany with the Singhs' former governess who became her life companion. After living the high life of a horsewoman and dog breeder and enjoying the latest Parisian fashions, Sophia embraced radical suffragette activity, but when the First World War came, she took on the nursing of soldiers and, like the WSPU suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst, reverted to a form of patriotic service to the nation. Alternately raging against the British

government and dependent upon the state to support her privileged lifestyle, Sophia seemed to only settle into a more contented way of being in her later years when she had the opportunity to “mother” a number of children, one of whom was the daughter of her housekeeper and others who were wartime evacuees under her care. The complicated relationship that existed for the Singh family who were both victims and beneficiaries of British imperialism highlights the insidious nature of colonial rule.

Anand’s extensive research is admirable and the story of the Singh family is a remarkable tale. Nevertheless, Princess Sophia remains an ambiguous character, out from the shadows because of this biography but still remaining a shadowy figure.

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