

Contribution of Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner Towards the Foundation of Chamber of Princes

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Abstract

After the revolt of 1857 there was a change in the policy of British government towards princely states. Because the princely states not only sided with the British government of India during the revolt of 1857 they helped the British government of India by supplying their troops in order to suppress the revolt. Lord Canning openly remarked that the princes helped us as break waters in the storm. Now there will be no territorial extension and their rights and dignities would be respected in relation to the British crown. In pursuance of this policy it was Lord Lytton who first thought of the possibilities of utilising the princes as a strong bulwark against the demands of the British India. It was the Delhi Durbar of 1911 which aroused the feeling of unity in their minds. They wanted the conferences of the princes should be convened from time to time to discuss the matters affecting them vis-à-vis the government of India. Various princes went on repeating the suggestions and expressed freely themselves on the scheme. The important minute presented by the Maharaja of Bikaner to lord Hardinge marked the real origin of the Chamber of princes.

Keywords: Princely states, British government of India, revolt of 1857, Delhi durbar, bulwark,

Introduction

In February 1921 Chamber of Princes was founded by the British government of India as a representative body of the princes. It was an advisory and consultative body and has no executive powers. It represented a reorganisation of the right of the princes to be consulted in framing the policy of the British government relating to the Indian states. Various ruling princes from time to time contributed in the foundation of chamber of princes. Among them the maharaja of Bikaner played a leading role in the foundation of the chamber of princes. In this way the contribution of maharaja of Bikaner is most important one.

Objectives

1. Role of maharaja of Bikaner in the conference of ruling princes in October 1916.
2. His role as the secretary of the conference of the ruling princes and chiefs in October 1916.
3. His role in the foundation OF Camber of princes' from October 1916- february1921.

Maharaja Bikaner's contribution towards chamber of princes

Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner was born on 17th October 1887 in the royal family of Bikaner. His father's name was maharaja lall Singh. He ascended the throne in presence of the nobles and high officials of the state. After taking the administration of state in his own hands in 1885. It was the period of extreme difficulty for the Indian states Vis-a Vis the British authority. And their sovereign character was denied and they were reduced to feudatories. The sovereignty of the crown was unchallenged everywhere. The maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner got actively involved in the idea of creating some machinery which would secure sustained and intimate cooperation between the British government and princely states. The maharajas' proposal for some machinery of cooperation the princes was accepted by the lord Hardinge and his address to the chiefs' college conference held in Delhi on 3rd march 1914. Lord Hardinge alluded to the eagerness of the princes to share with me and my government the burden of imperial rule.

After the departure of lord Hardinge from India lord Chelmsford summoned the first conference of the ruling princes in October 1916. The conference was opened by the Viceroy lord Chelmsford in the imperial legislative council chamber. The motive of the ruling conference covered a variety of subjects including the ceremonials to be observed at the installation of ruling princes, the administrative training and education of the minor princes. It was the conference of unique character which was held on all India level. It was the first conference in which the 41 ruling princes and chiefs from different parts of India attended the conference. The prominent princes who attended the conference were the rulers of Patiala, Bikaner, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kolhapur, Bhopal, Kashmir, Gwalior and Baroda. While opening the conference the viceroy told that while the ruling princes and chiefs have gathered at the Delhi from all parts of India to discuss upon the matters of affecting the interests and to assist the government to solve the matters of all India interest. Let me make it clear that your highness have been invited to meet together to advise the government on the matters about yourselves, your states, and your people. There are questions about yourselves, your state on which the government of India would like your view. I would ask you to content your selves with the useful task of advising the government of India in certain specific matters. It was at this conference the maharaja of Bikaner presented the important

minute to lord Hardinge which led to the origin of Chamber of Princes.

The maharaja of Bikaner was elected as the general secretary of the conference. As a general secretary maharaja of Bikaner worked hard in organising the princes' opinion and on several occasions by acting as their spokesman. Due to this he was re-elected as the general secretary for the next conference. He was selected as the one of the three representatives invited to attend the imperial conference of 1917 in London as India's spokesman. As a representative of the princes of India he made the British parliament to realise importance of the ruling princes and chiefs by his great ability. At the imperial conference in London, the maharaja put forth an impressive appeal for liberal reforms in India. The members in the conference were much impressed by his advocacy of the cause for freedom. The secretary of state Austin Chamberlain was much impressed by his views and requested him to send his detailed report on India's reforms. The maharaja of Bikaner took the advantage of this opportunity and forwarded his detailed minute on the whole problem to the secretary of state for India. It is worth noticing that in response to the historical declaration of 20th August 1917 the Maharaja of Bikaner suggested the secretary of state that the policy of his majesty government are incomplete accord, that of increasing the associations of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government.

The maharaja of Bikaner was again invited to the imperial conference by the viceroy, but the maharaja showed his inability to accept the offer on personal grounds. On his return to India maharaja took up the task of the organisation of the Princes Council. He took a leading part in the conference of November 1917 and in his opening speech to the conference the viceroy made reference of great political events that were taking place, welcomed the princes who meet for the second time once again discussed the certain matters about which the Government of India in a friendly and informal manner. Reference was made to the question of Imperial service Troops and princes cooperation as regards to the question of requirement of army. While making replay to the opening speech of the conference of the viceroy towards the close of conference the maharaja of Bikaner observed that when the political reforms in British India are shortly to be considered, we have no doubt that you will also consider the questions connected with the ruling princes and the Indian states. And we hope that before the British government came to any decision on such questions, we hope that the ruling princes will be consulted. The maharaja of Bikaner further expressed the views of the princes that we must kept a definite goal before us that our rights and our states cannot afford to lag behind in the advance which India's associations with great Britain has rendered possible. It is for these reasons that we want to see the early establishment of the constitutional chamber which may protect our interests and rights of our states. On the last day of the conference of ruling princes and chiefs a committee of four persons was appointed including the maharaja of Bikaner to draw up scheme for the important future changes that might suitable in the interest of the ruling princes and their states. From 18th to 20 December of 1917 the committee held its second meeting at Alwar and considered its previous proposal and further recommended the following points that the assembly shall be composed of the ruling princes of India who exercise full sovereign power namely 1. unrestrained criminal and civil jurisdiction in their states, 2. the ruling princes should have power to, make laws, 3. that they should be autonomous in their internal matters. It shall be within the jurisdiction of chamber to add to its number of rulers of other states whose inclusion in the chamber may be advisable. Informally this proposal was discussed by the viceroy and secretary of state for India with some princes at New Delhi between 4th and 5th February 1918. As a result of this discussion proposals for the formation of a council of princes were included in the Montague-Chelmsford Report in paragraphs of 302 and 306. The princes conference of 1919 at Delhi considered these proposals. The maharaja of Bikaner, who had to go to Europe to attend the peace conference of 18th, January, 1919 at Paris sent a note known as the Dufferin note in this vote maharaja of Bikaner expressed that the important question would be considered in a generous spirit by the viceroy and the government of India. The conference of ruling princes and chiefs held in January 1919 after careful deliberations passed resolutions on various items. This conference appointed a committee to consider the questions of the establishment of a permanent council of princes and its composition, consisting of the then highness of Alwar, Dewas, Gwalior, Patiala, Bhopal, Cutch, Dholpur, Navanagar and Sangli, who first proposed to call the assemblage "The chamber of Princes" and recommended that only those rulers should be the members of the chamber who having full and unrestricted powers of civil and criminal jurisdiction and the power to make their own laws. The Princes Conference passed a resolution recommending that the chamber of Princes should consist of sovereign princes and others as the government of India may decide to include in consultations with the princes. The government of India prepared a memorandum showing the restrictions on the powers of various rulers whose eligibility for the membership of the Chamber might be in doubt and placed it before the conference of January 1919. and the restrictions on the powers of the rulers were subsequently removed by the government of India. Another important act of this conference was to appoint a permanent committee of six princes to sit with the sir G Lowndes, political Secretary to the government of India and sir R.E. Holland and to discuss the question of the Codification of Political Practice. The princes presented a memorandum in which there was the unanimous decision of the princes for the early establishment of an organisation of the princes which is to be hereafter called by the name of Narendra Mandal

in English the Chamber of Princes. During this period being in London the maharaja got an opportunity of influencing this final decision when the constitution of the chamber was going to be drafted. The Maharaja of Bikaner also served on the committee which met at the India office from 6th to 20th June 1919. The main agenda for the consideration was the constitution of the Chamber of Princes. The committee accepted the formula of the maharaja of Bikaner. The Committee of Princes under the leadership of his Highness of Bikaner, Alwar, Patiala, Navanagar, Gwalior, Malerkotla, Cutch, took up the question of the preparation of scheme for the institution of the Chamber of Princes at its meeting held in January 1920. Finally it was by the royal proclamation that the chamber of princes' was instituted on 8th February 1921 and the inauguration ceremony was performed by his highness the Duke of Connaught in the Diwan-I am of the red fort on the behalf of his majesty the king Emperor. At last the dream of maharaja of Bikaner reached to the realisation. The idea of cooperation that originated in the year 1877 during the regime of Lord Lytton culminated finally in the establishment of the chamber of princes.

Conclusion

From October 1919 to February 1921 maharaja of Bikaner played a very important role in the foundation of Chamber of princes. It was maharaja of Bikaner who presented important minute to lord Hardinge which marked the real origin of the chamber of princes. In London as the representative of the princes of India maharaja put forth the grievances of Indian princes before the British parliament for the liberal reforms in India which led to the foundation of Chamber of Princes in February 1921 which marked the new relationship between the British India and Indian princely states.

References

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