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The Bourbons and Begums of Bhopal

The Forgotten History



Indira Iyengar

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ISBN: 978-93-86906-38-0

228 x 152 mm

236pp; 130gsm art paper (matt)

All colour; 101 photographs

and 3 Maps

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Magdaline Bourbon was a descendant of Jean Philippe de Bourbon, who arrived in India in the 1560s and was appointed a senior official by the Mughal Emperor Akbar at his court in Delhi. Regarded as a son of the Bourbon royal family of France, Jean Philippe de Bourbon was known as the Raja of Shergarh and established a dynasty in India. In the late 1700s the family moved to Bhopal and played a crucial role in supporting the ruling Begums of the state.

The Bourbons' bravery, administrative acumen and sound advice helped in the development of Bhopal, where their deeds are still remembered. The harmonious coexistence of different communities in Bhopal during the rule of the Begums, is also a valuable historical memory worth remembering.

In this historical account with a personal flavour, Indira Iyengar, the daughter of Magdaline Bourbon, records her mother's memories, traces the fascinating history of the Bourbons of Bhopal and reminds us of life in a romantic and swashbuckling time.

Indira Iyengar's comprehensively researched and accessibly written book on the Indian Bourbons recovers a colourful family history. Her lively account of battles, espionage, romance and cultural mores will appeal to readers interested in a wide range of topics—from shared religious traditions, language and dress to architecture and government in Mughal, colonial and princely India.

—Dr Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, Reader in International History,
University of Sheffield, UK



Indira Iyengar is a social activist and founder of Mahashakti Seva Kendra, an organization formed to help underprivileged women become economically independent, helping more than 5,000 women in Bhopal and across tribal areas in Madhya Pradesh. Previously, she had worked with Mother Teresa to establish the Missionaries of Charity's first home for the destitute in Bhopal.

She views this book as her tribute to the Bourbon legacy and their contribution to Bhopal state, as well as the fulfilment of a promise she made to her mother to record her family's unique history.

Traces the history of John Philippe de Bourbon of the French royal family, and his descendants in India.

Relates the fascinating account of the Bourbons of Bhopal and their role in supporting the Begums of the state.

Includes over 100 images, documents and a family tree of the Bourbons of Bhopal.

