
Reviewed by Cynthia Talbot (University of Texas at Austin)
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James Tod and Indian History

This slim volume bearing the name of Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph was published posthumously. For years before Susanne’s death on December 23, 2015, at the age of eighty-five and Lloyd’s death on January 16, 2016, at the age of eighty-eight, the two had expressed a desire to compile their writings on Colonel James Tod in book form. This wish came to fruition with the assistance of Susanne’s brother Francis W. Hoeber, who shepherded *Romanticism’s Child* through the publication process. In addition to five essays about Tod by the Rudolphs, it contains the individual testimonies of Tod and James Mill—offering radically different advice—to the British Parliament in 1832.

On the surface, the Rudolphs and Tod seem to have little in common. The Rudolphs were eminent political scientists whose publications on post-independence India include *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (1967), *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (1987), and *Explaining Indian Democracy: A Fifty-Year Perspective, 1956-2006* (2008). Tod, on the other hand, was an officer of the East India Company in the first decades of the nineteenth century, whose interests were antiquarian. Yet the Rudolphs encountered Tod’s hugely influential *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829-32) on their first trip to India in 1956; it remains in print in both English and Hindi and intrigued the Rudolphs throughout their careers.

Like Tod, the Rudolphs were fascinated by the region of Rajasthan and often mingled with its Rajput elite. Rajasthan’s Rajputs and their adaptation to the changing world of independent India were the main focus of the Rudolphs’ *Essays on Rajputana: Reflections on History, Culture and Administration* (1984). With the help of Amar Singh’s nephew, Mohan Singh Kanota, the Rudolphs also undertook the editing of a massive diary compiled by Amar Singh, a Rajput noble and officer in the Indian Army; *Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh’s Diary, A Colonial Subject’s Narrative of Imperial India* (2000) contains select entries dating from 1898 to 1905. The Rudolphs were largely responsible for introducing the Rajasthan region to the world of area studies scholarship that became prominent in the United States after World War II; in that sense, too, they resembled Tod, who first brought Rajasthan to the attention of European scholars of an Orientalist bent soon after the territory came under British sway. No wonder then that Tod and his work resonated so much with the Rudolphs.

Tod’s magnum opus is the focus of “Writing and Reading Tod’s Rajasthan: Interpreting the Text and Its Historiography,” the previously published essay with which *Romanticism’s Child* opens. In this longest and most comprehensive of their writings on Tod, the Rudolphs provide an overview of Tod’s life, along with a discussion of the intellectual influences underlying *Rajasthan* and the later impact of the text. The Rudolphs note that British policy changed after the 1857 rebellion
in ways that accorded with Tod’s views: Indian rulers were now considered loyal vassals and recognized as such in quasi-feudal rituals and ceremonies, such as the 1877 Delhi Durbar. Tod’s casting of Rajputs as warrior heroes also contributed to the construction of the martial race theory, according to which only certain Indian communities were suitable for recruitment into the Indian Army in the post-1857 era. Amar Singh, the diarist, was among the Indian officers who served the British Raj subsequently, while maintaining a strong sense of his own Rajput identity.

Tod’s sympathies toward the Rajputs were not widely shared in his day, as is made clear in “Tod vs Mill: Clashing Perspectives on British Rule in India and Indian Civilization: An Analysis Based on James Tod’s and James Mill’s 1832 Parliamentary Testimony.” Also previously published, this essay juxtaposes the policy stances of Tod and Mill, the well-known author of the History of British India (1818). Tod advocated what later came to be termed indirect rule—that is, allowing indigenous rulers to maintain some semblance of sovereignty—while Mill supported direct rule, the annexation of all Indian states. The Rudolphs regarded Tod as part of the so-called Orientalist faction that lost influence over East India Company policy in the 1830s to the Utilitarians, including Mill. The triumph of Utilitarianism led to the disastrous 1857 rebellion and the subsequent adoption of policies more aligned to Tod’s earlier recommendations. The Rudolphs end by drawing a contrast between the abstract and deductive approach to history displayed in Mill’s History of British India and the more inductive and contextual approach based on local knowledge in Tod’s Rajasthan.

Next is “Tod and Vernacular History,” which Lloyd Rudolph had circulated among colleagues since at least 2010 but not published anywhere. It examines Tod’s impact on more popular constructions of the past, such as those found in vernacular-language texts. The Rudolphs make the valid point that Tod has long been overlooked by mainstream historiography, both as a political actor and as a scholar. Only recently has there been greater appreciation of the many ways in which Tod’s Rajasthan inspired the imagination of Indian writers like R. C. Dutt in their historical fiction and other vernacular works. The heroic histories presented by Tod affected even Mahatma Gandhi, who stated that “Colonel Tod has taught us to believe that every pass in Rajputana is a Thermopylae” (pp. 97-98).

Another essay that appears in publication for the first time here, although a draft of it dates back to 1993, is “Tod’s Influence on Shyamal Das’s Historiography in Vir Vinod.” Shyamal Das was a court poet commissioned by the court’s princes to produce a history of Mewar. His Vir Vinod (Heroes’ delight) was printed between 1886 and 1894 but remained largely inaccessible to the public until after India’s independence. A noteworthy feature of Das’s publications is their inconsistent approach to historiography, so much so that the Rudolphs wrote that “there were, in a sense, two Shyamal Dases, the Shyamal Das who wrote the Mewar sections of Vir Vinod and the Shyamal Das who wrote for the professional journals of his time” (p. 125). Das followed Tod’s romantic paradigm and “imaginative” approach when covering the history of his region and its rulers, in stark contrast to his stress on empirical facts when writing about affairs outside of Mewar. Das can thus to “be regarded as one of India’s first modern historians,” despite the heavy imprint on his work of Tod’s construction of Rajput history (p. 134).

The last of the Rudolphs’ essays is “Representing/Representing Rana Pratap: Introduction to Kesri Singh’s Maharana Pratap: The Hero of Haldighati.” Tod’s valorization of the Mewar king Rana Pratap is the main point covered in this short foreword to a book by the younger brother of the diarist Amar Singh. Here, as in their other essays, the Rudolphs discuss how much Tod’s perspective on Mewar’s resistance against Mughal power, which he viewed as a noble fight for freedom, was shaped by the romantic movement’s admiration of the Greeks in their struggle for independence from the Ottoman Turks. Going even further than Tod, Kesri Singh argued that Rana Pratap did not flee from Mughal forces at the famous Battle of Haldighati in 1576 but rather made a deliberate withdrawal; Singh attempted to defend Rana Pratap’s heroic reputation from any taint by this means.

In the second section of Romanticism’s Child, we are provided with primary sources that demonstrate how greatly Tod’s opinions on company rule differed from those of Mill. First is the oral testimony that Mill gave before a parliamentary committee in 1832, followed by Tod’s written responses to questions from the same committee. In most respects, the two men offered radically different assessments of the quality of company governance in the past and its recommended future course of action. Mill claimed that governance in the subsidiary and protected (later “princely”) states was far worse than in areas controlled by the company, and so he urged the company to annex them all. Tod was instead a vehement proponent of non-interference into the affairs of the Rajput states, which should be protected from manipulation by British commercial interests as well. He also offered
advice on the distribution of the company’s armed forces and on the system of patronage for entry into company service, among other practical matters.

Had the Rudolphs been able to complete *Romanticism’s Child*, they would no doubt have situated these two testimonies to Parliament within the larger context of the renewal of the East India Company’s charter in 1833. Or they might have provided a lengthier analysis of these documents in their essay on Tod and Mill; instead, the reader should turn to the fourth chapter of Jason Freitag’s *Serving Empire, Serving Nation: James Tod and the Rajputs of Rajasthan* (2009). Other shortcomings in *Romanticism’s Child*, such as the repeated references to Henry Hallam’s model of medieval feudalism and other influences on Tod’s thinking, would presumably have been addressed, and some concluding observations would have been offered to wind up the book.

Even as it stands, however, *Romanticism’s Child* is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship on Tod. Several books have been published in the past few years besides Freitag’s noteworthy monograph: *James Tod’s Rajasthan: The Historian and His Collections*, edited by Giles Tillotson (2007); *Itihāskar Karnal Jems Tod* (The historian Colonel James Tod) edited by Bhawani Singh Patawat (2011); and *Knowledge, Mediation and Empire: James Tod’s Journeys among the Rajputs* by Florence D’Souza (2015). The Rudolphs’ clear writing, broad perspective, and succinct formulations of Tod’s significance make *Romanticism’s Child* a good introduction to Tod for a nonspecialist audience. The book will be especially cherished by the many scholars of Rajasthan’s history and culture, like me, to whom the Rudolphs gave unstinting encouragement over the decades.

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