



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

RE-EXAMINING 'GHODE WALE BABA' AS A ROMANTIC TRAVELER: ROMANTICISM AND MARGINALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper is concerned with the non-equilibrium between Western ideas of exotic East and Eastern hard reality by taking 'ANNALS AND ANTIQUITIES OF RAJASTHAN', a romantic historiography of Rajasthan (desertic state on the western border of India) written by British colonial administrator Col. James Tod (famously known here as "GHODE WALE BABA") in 1829 with an oriental outlook. Tod's perception of Rajasthan, his ideas of RAJASTHANI FEUDALISM, and his imposed Western epistemic violence have solidified a romantic exotic perception of the land and its people. His ideas prove problematic as he seemed to idealize one community and painted the entire societal structure in the same color. ANNALS has faced charges of bias (of his kind) towards Rajput gallantry, as the narrative primarily speaks of it. In doing so, it unfortunately, marginalizes other social groups, paints a partial picture, and is full of unrealistic notions that are founded on bardic legends. The paper attempts to bring out the factors which shaped a certain understanding that Tod harbored by using a suitable theoretical framework and prove him more of a travelogue inspired by the influx of romantic fascination, than a historian pronouncing solid facts.

The two volumes of his now classical text remain essential reading for anyone interested in the history and culture of Rajasthan and the early colonial encounter in India. Thus, it becomes crucial in understanding the state's Historical past and political present and exerts a subtle influence on the national imagination of contemporary Rajasthan.

After the introduction of Oriental theory by Edward Said, much study has already been undertaken in uncovering the foul truth of colonial power, it presented the East, for the benefit of the West, in the shades that comforted existing Western ideology. The paper intends to employ a combination of Orientalism, Post-colonial theory, Euhemerism, and Neo-Historicism to unravel the complexities of the text in question. Also, it will question the 'ANNALS' canonization as the founding stone for the written History of this colorful desertic landscape called the LAND OF KINGS(RAJASTHAN).

KEYWORDS: Rajput, History, romanticism, feudalism, colonial-orientalism, othering

INTRODUCTION

Rajasthan, located in northern India, embodies a complex interplay of historical narratives, cultural expressions, and diverse desertic topography. Recognized for its expansive arid landscapes, imposing fortifications, and vibrant cultural practices, Rajasthan mirrors the essence of India's cultural heritage. Rooted in ancient civilizations, the region showcases architectural masterpieces and its heterogeneous populace, notably the valorous Rajput community, has significantly shaped its societal fabric. Rajasthan's amalgamation of vibrant colours, celebratory traditions, and culinary richness underscores its cultural resilience. Amid its

arid expanse, the state's enduring allure beckons both explorers and scholars to engage with its intricate historical tapestry.

Colonel James Tod, famously remembered as “Ghode wale baba” in Rajasthan, was a distinguished luminary within the echelons of 19th-century British military intelligentsia, wielded an incontrovertible influence upon the global cognitive schema pertaining to the province of Rajasthan. Born amid the annals of 1782 in the hallowed environs of London, Tod consummated his affiliation with the expansive dominion of the British East India Company's military machinations, transpiring during an epoch of British imperialistic expanse into the veritable heartland of India. However, the tapestry of Tod's pursuits transcended the martial domain, permeating the realm of the cerebral and cultivating an irrevocable infatuation of profundity toward the multidimensional, cultural, historiographical, and societal tapestry that is emblematic of Rajasthan, India.

Tod's profound interest in Rajasthan and his extensive journeys across the region can be attributed to a multitude of factors. These encompass the region's opulent cultural heritage, captivating landscapes, and dynamic traditions. Rajasthan is celebrated for its heterogeneous cultural legacy, which weaves together a rich tapestry of customary practices, artistic expressions, and architectural marvels. The state boasts emblematic landmarks, notably including the Amber Fort, Mehrangarh Fort, Udaipur's City Palace, and the exquisitely fashioned Hawa Mahal. Extending beyond the well-recognized urban centres, Rajasthan's rural terrains provide an intimate understanding of the quotidian existences led by its inhabitants.

The stark and arresting allure of the desert landscapes, characterized by undulating sand dunes and resplendent sunsets, exercises a compelling allure on those seeking extraordinary natural panoramas. Tod's inclination towards romantic exploration rendered him susceptible to the irresistible charm of these landscapes. The corpus of his endeavors has engendered heightened curiosity in the historical and heritage dimensions of Rajasthan. Propelled by the impetus of his narrative, contemporary Rajasthanis proactively immerse themselves in explorations of their historical trajectory, diligently unraveling the intricate facets of their past and navigating the intricate interplay of diverse regional communities.

TOD AND RAJPUTS

“If we compare the antiquity and illustrious descent of the dynasties which have ruled, and some which continue to rule, the small sovereignties of Rajasthan, with many of celebrity in Europe, superiority will often attach to Rajput.” (Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R)

The Rajputs, a martial aristocracy originating from the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent, occupy a significant position within the historical and cultural landscape. Their origins trace back to medieval times, characterized by a valorous ethos and intricate codes of chivalry. Rajputs emerged as dominant power centers through strategic alliances and military prowess, exerting influence across princely states. Their architectural patronage is emblematic of grandeur, as seen in imposing forts and palaces. This warrior caste, marked by a distinctive social hierarchy, continues to wield a profound impact on regional narratives, societal structures, and the broader historical consciousness.

During the late 18th century, a period marked by the Rajput rule in Rajasthan, concomitantly, a wave of romanticism was diffusing throughout the industrialized Western sphere. Within this temporal milieu, Lieutenant-Colonel James Tod emerged as a distinct product of his era, evincing a profound captivation with notions of romantic heroism, valour, comradeship, and expedition. It is posited by scholars that Tod's proclivity toward romantic sensibilities can be ascribed, in part, to his ancestral Scottish lineage, which exposed him to literary luminaries such as Walter Scott, Lord Byron, and Percy Shelley. Despite a dearth of formal tutelage in these matters, Tod's apprehension of these themes was augmented by the juxtaposition of Enlightenment ideals and the prevalent currents of romanticism.

Upon arriving in Rajasthan, Colonel Tod assumed his position within the court of the Sindhian rulers, where he encountered the illustrious ethnic community under consideration. In his accounts, Tod characterized them with the following description:” what nation on earth could have maintained the semblance of civilization ,

the spirit or the customs of their forefathers, during so many centuries of overwhelming depression, but one of such singular character as the Rajput” (Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R, 1829)

His profound admiration for their illustrious lineage motivated him to meticulously study and cartographically delineate the 36 Rajkulas of Rajwara. Deconstructing the etymological origins of the term 'Rajput,' it reveals 'Raj,' signifying dominion or governance, and 'Poot,' connoting 'Putra' or 'Son.' Particularly noteworthy in Rajasthan's annals is the well-known episode of his encounter with the Rana at the Eklinga temple, a seminal occurrence that served as the cornerstone igniting his fascination with bardic chronicles exalting the resplendence of this martial caste. “Among the noble houses of the nations of this earth, there are none that can boast of a longer pedigree or of a more splendid history than the Rajputs of India.” Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R)

In his seminal work, "Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan," Colonel James Tod meticulously chronicled the valorous exploits of several prominent Rajput heroes. Chief among these noble figures is Prithviraj Chauhan, renowned for his gallant defence against the Ghauri invasions and his poetic prowess. Another notable Rajput luminary is Rana Kumbha of Mewar, celebrated for his architectural patronage and indomitable spirit against adversities. The heroic tale of Rana Sanga, who challenged the Mughal forces at the Battle of Khanwa, also finds prominence in Tod's narratives. Additionally, Maharana Pratap's relentless resistance against the Mughal dominion and Raja Man Singh's military acumen and loyalty are expounded upon. These Rajput heroes, emblematic of courage, honor, and resilience, exemplify Tod's enduring admiration for their contributions to Rajasthan's history and heritage.

Efforts to encapsulate the comprehensive content spanning Tod's dual volumes within the confines of a singular document prove a formidable task; however, this endeavour could be approached by employing the microcosm of Rana Pratap as a focal point and subsequently extrapolating its significance to encompass the broader macrocosm of Rajputana. Four hundred and eighty years subsequent to his birth within the bastioned precincts of Kumbhalgarh in the year 1540 CE, Maharana Pratap perseveres as a venerated exemplar of India's preeminent champions. The Battle of Haldighati, a pivotal engagement in 1576, saw Pratap confronting Mughal forces led by Akbar's general Man Singh. Despite valiant efforts, Pratap's forces faced defeat due to strategic disadvantages. The battle holds historical significance for its portrayal of valour and resistance in Rajputana's history. Earning widespread admiration and reverence across the nation, the biographical trajectory and accomplishments of Pratap have engendered parallels with the iconic persona of Lord Rama, the scion of Ayodhya. With even greater frequency, the Maharana is acknowledged as a trailblazing harbinger of India's struggle for autonomy. “There is not a pass in the Alpine Aravalli that is not sanctified by some deed of Partap, some brilliant victory or, oftener, more glorious defeat. Haldighati is the Thermopylae of Mewar; the field of Dawer her Marathon.” (Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R, 1829). Tod's active engagement with the Maharana's life is apparent through intricate portrayals of valiant endeavours, thus evoking a romanticized ethos emblematic of heroism and chivalry. This fascination is rendered palpable through meticulous delineation of the Maharana's unwavering resolve against Mughal adversity, rendering the ruler as a quintessential embodiment of romantic ideals. The resplendent narrative woven by Tod exudes an aura of grandeur, enshrining Maharana Pratap as a paragon of gallant virtue, emblematic of the romanticized ethos that permeated Tod's literary oeuvre and resonated with his era's predilection for narratives of ardour and adventure.

“He demonstrated both a systematic understanding of Rajputs and a desire to fit them into a universalist concept of human society which to a certain extent contrasts with the harder, more hierarchical, ideas of the later nineteenth century.” (Florance D'Souza, Knowledge, meditation and Empire)

Furthermore, not merely limited to the aforementioned facets, Lieutenant-Colonel Tod's writings distinctly concentrate on and accentuate a myriad of dimensions pertaining to their intricate cultural tapestry, vibrant chromatic spectrum, deeply ingrained convictions, time-honoured traditions, celebratory observances, distinctive lifestyle, architectural expressions, the societal status of their womenfolk, the valorous spirit embodied by a Rajputani, modes of devotion, veneration of deities, assertions of lineage tracing back to 'Agni,' 'Surya' and 'Chandra', the intricate substratum of extended familial structures, the significance of 'Bapota', denoting hereditary land entitlements, the profound pride evoked by a Rajput in his meticulously groomed Mustache, his equine companion, and his blade, along with noteworthy practices such as 'Sati Partha', the importance of 'Tej' festival, , 'Rakhi' 'Shravan Mas'(monsoon) Diwali, Dusshera, Holi and related festivities.

Tod writes: "If devotion to the fair sex be admitted as a criterion of civilization, the Rajput must rank high. His susceptibility is extreme, and fires at the slightest offense to female delicacy which he never forgives." (Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R).

Importance of 'Pitratapan' and 'Dhabhai' (brother by shared friendship) are some of the important concepts brought forth by him on global canvas. As he delineates the exploits of these warriors, the profound esteem and fervour evoked in the reader by his prose transcend the realm of mere romantic exoticism. He assumes the role of an orientalist, not in a derogatory connotation, but as a zealous advocate for the novelty, foreignness, and exhilaration encapsulated within the subjects of his discourse. It is thanks to Colonel James Tod that the contemporary association between Rajasthan and the Rajput community has become synonymous.

Tod's representation of Rajputs as honourable warriors and custodians of a culturally affluent legacy has effectively ingrained a robust sentiment of cultural affinity and self-esteem within contemporary Rajasthanis. The artistic depiction he crafted, resonating with images of majestic fortifications, tales of heroism, and an animated cultural milieu, has magnetized tourists in pursuit of an immersive encounter within a realm imbued with historical enigma and mysticism. The persistent portrayal of Rajputs as distinguished warriors continues to exert influence upon prevailing social perceptions and hierarchies within modern Rajasthani societal dynamics. The Rajput identity, renowned for its embodiment of valour and integrity, remains a salient fixture, influencing the introspective self-conception of Rajputs and their reception by external observers.

FEUDAL PARALLEL OF RAJASTHAN AND EUROPE

"The Rajput race is the noblest and proudest in India, they are of highest antiquity and purest descent, they have a military autocracy of a feudal type, and 'brave and chivalrous, keenly sensitive to an affront, and especially jealous of the honour of their women.'" (Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R)

Feudalism constitutes a socio-economic and political framework distinguished by its hierarchical arrangements and mutual obligations within discrete societal strata. Often denoted as "fiefdom," this construct is primarily marked by the bestowal of land and entitlements in return for specified services. Notably, the Encyclopaedia of India attributes the initial methodical recognition of this phenomenon within an Indian context to Tod through his insightful apprehension of the dynamics in Rajasthan. The Rajputs assumed the role of territorial custodians, presiding over a feudal structure in which they were granted land by the sovereign authority. This arrangement stipulated their obligation to offer military service and allegiance. The Rajput chieftains maintained a mutually beneficial association with their reigning monarchs, characterized by the bestowal of military assistance and safeguarding in exchange for land tenure and associated privileges. Tod underscored their ethical code of conduct, accentuating virtues like valour, honesty, and fidelity. Such portrayal substantially contributed to the romanticized archetype of Rajputs as exemplars of noble warriors, who held honour in the highest regard. Elaborately, Tod expounded upon the resplendent citadels and bastions, tangible embodiments of Rajput might and authority. But interestingly enough, both Rudolph and Sreenivasan have pointed out the Europe inspired feudal outlook in Tod's understanding.

"Inspired by Henry Hallam's recently published, History of the Middle Ages, Tod argued that the Rajputs of India had a system of 'pure feuds' analogous to those of medieval Europe. For Tod, this was the case because the Rajputs, being of 'Scythian' racial stock, were descended from the same Central Asian peoples who formed the fore-bears of the tribes in early Europe." (P.70)

Feudalism holds pivotal importance in comprehending civilizations by elucidating intricate power dynamics, socio-economic structures, and cultural norms. Colonel James Tod's inclination to juxtapose the governance systems and notions of prestige between Europeans and Rajputs prompted him to venture beyond conventional boundaries, extending his comparative analysis to include the Hellenic and Rajput civilizations. This resulted in his assertion of a shared lineage between the Greek and Rajput cultures.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Hallem's comprehension of Europe resonates remarkably with Tod's comprehension of the Mewar region. In addition to this, Colonel Tod undertook a comparison between the Mewari resistance against the Mughal forces and the historical Grecian uprising against the Persian dominion.

This confluence of narratives raises questions about his proclivity for constructing parallels and seeking harmonious alignments. In *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, he writes, "There is not a petty state in Rajputana that has not had its Thermopylae, and scarcely a city that has not produced its Leonidas." However, for a discerning scholar, delving into his perspective on the trajectory of civilizations reveals discernible traces of the influence wielded by thinkers such as Hume and Miller. It becomes imperative to acknowledge the significant contribution of McLaren in illuminating the paradigm of universal human framework fostered by the intellectual endeavours of Scottish thinkers. Norbert Peabody directed a critique towards Tod, seizing upon these assertions, "Tod Followed contemporaries such as Henry Halle, to rank Nations differently against a continuous gradient of advancement and perfection." Comprehending Tod's rationale for equating Greeks, Europeans, and Rajputs presents a challenge; however, Peabody's scholarly investigations unveil distinct facets that warrant the reader's meticulous contemplation.

TOD'S ALLEGED COLONIAL-ORIENTAL INTENT

Tod presented a series of twelve essays before the erudite assembly of the Western learned society upon his return, spanning the years 1825 to 1835. Within this collection, a discernible endeavor emerges, aimed at delineating correspondences among remnants gleaned from diverse ancient and medieval cultures. This stratagem underscores his aspiration to redirect scholarly focus toward the annals of Rajput history. Tod actively constructed an epistemic framework that challenged entrenched dichotomies concerning race and power. His efforts were directed towards cultivating a heightened regard for the Rajput ethos of honour within the circles of his contemporary intellects.

Upon closer examination, we observe, at the dawn of the 19th century, East India Company (EIC) embarked on a trajectory toward ascendant colonial supremacy within the South Asian milieu. However, this ascendancy was beset by a confluence of intrinsic challenges and external frontiers. Notably, the EIC confronted intricate regional complexities posed by entities like the Marathas, Mughals, and Pindaris. Additionally, the possibility of a prospective Russian incursion via the Afghan border cast a formidable specter. The exigencies of these circumstances necessitated comprehensive readiness on the fronts of military prowess, political acumen, and ideological sagacity on the part of the EIC.

During that temporal epoch, Rajasthan found itself immersed in a transformative historical milieu, marked by the sway of Rajput dominion within the broader ambit of the East India Company's (EIC) expansionist stratagems. This conjuncture engendered a palpable clash of interests between indigenous and colonial governance entities. Amid this complex backdrop, Tod's authentic fascination with the Rajput domain converged with the EIC's incentives, impelling him to comprehensively explore the region's geographical and ethnographic dimensions. The wealth of insights garnered during this endeavor subsequently facilitated Tod's construction of a substantiated argument advocating the potential alignment of Rajput forces as strategic allies to the EIC's designs.

"If a Tatar or a Russian invasion threatened our eastern empire, fifty thousand Rajputs would be no despicable allies." (-Tod, *Romanticism's Child* by Rudolph and Rudolph)

Within Tod's explication of the Pindaris and Mughals, one discerns nomenclatures such as "Predators" and "Despots" employed. Evidently, Tod's cartographic endeavors yielded the inaugural precise map of Rajasthan, affording the East India Company (EIC) valuable support in their campaign against the Pindaris. Notably, Tod juxtaposed the semantic connotation of "Pindari" with the epithet 'robber,' a lexical choice indicative of Western antipathy and promoted the application of indigenous remedies to address region-specific problems. The challenge of eschewing recognition of Tod's political underpinnings arises when scrutinizing his written discourse: "The possession of what we got by sword is not durable but the obligation of good office is external. If we have a mind to keep Asia and not simply pass through it, our clemency must extend to them[Rajputs] also and their identity will make our empire everlasting." (-Tod, *Romanticism's Child* by Rudolph and Rudolph)

This assertion gains reinforcement through an empirical observation delineating Tod's discernment of Rajput figures, which, in turn, aligned with the strategic imperatives and ambitions of colonial agenda. Jhala Zalim Singh, a commanding authority within the administrative sphere of Kota and the broader southern expanse of Rajasthan spanning 1770 to 1834, elicited a portrayal of intricate nuances within Tod's literary corpus. Notably, Zalim Singh's adroit diplomatic proficiency, serving as a bulwark against Maratha incursions during the concluding decades of the 18th century, led to his characterization as a pivotal influencer in the safeguarding of Kota, with descriptive labels such as "National Saviour", "The most celebrated Rajput of modern times, Zalim Singh of Kota" and "wonder of his age". However, an incremental transformation in Tod's assessment of Zalim becomes evident as the latter's authority burgeons. Subsequently, the narrative undergoes a shift, depicting Zalim Singh as a **despot** (subtly placed on equal footing as Mughals and Pindaris) who undermined nationalistic sentiments, thereby incurring British mistrust: "Zalim Singh was a denationalizing despot and not to be trusted by the British."

"The continued presence of Zalim Singh however also left in the field a powerful leader who could potentially become an adversary to the British" (-Tod, Romanticism's Child by Rudolph and Rudolph)

The evolving attitudes vis-à-vis Zalim Singh serve as an illustrative instance of how Western agents engaged in the utilization and manipulation of the Rajput identity, thereby shaping a tripartite imagery. The eulogizing of Rajput valour was strategically deployed to amass a military force during exigent periods, while subsequent disavowal manifested when the established British dominance faced potential jeopardy. Prominent among Western authors, Tod emerges as a principal agent, fabricating a construct of ideological, political, and martial unity—a form of Rajput nationalism—meticulously harnessed to advance the objectives of colonial enterprise.

Apart from engendering a sense of Rajput nationality, Colonel James Tod also designated the Marathas as agents of denationalization. His classification of contemporaneous Rajput political dynamics as being in decline further exacerbated the prevailing tensions. His intricate delineation of the "36 Rajkulas" served not only to provide a genealogical account but also served to accentuate the preexisting schisms within the community. This emphasis on fragmentation ultimately reinforced the notion that the newly emerging Rajput nationalism could only endure under British rule, thus crystallizing an intricate perspective.

TOD'S IMPACT, OTHERING OF RAJASTHANI COMMUNITIES, AND WAY FORWARD

Tod has earned the moniker of the "Herodotus of Rajasthan's history", a testament to his monumental contribution. Today, he is revered as the 'Ghode wale Baba', symbolizing his profound impact in unearthing and celebrating the equestrian heritage and history of Rajasthan. Tod's idealized narratives have exerted a pivotal influence on the configuration of Rajasthan's tourism sector. The evocative depiction he crafted, characterized by majestic fortifications, tales of heroism, and a vibrant cultural milieu, has magnetized tourists desiring to engage in an immersive exploration of a realm laden with historical resonance and mystique. Consequently, tourism has emerged as a substantive economic catalyst for the state, with Tod's impact constituting a notable contributory factor in this regard.

"The information age has also anointed Tod as the spokesman for Rajasthan, and the glories of India in general, as attested by the prominent quotation from him that appears in tourism-related websites." - (Jason Freitag)

But this state encompasses a tapestry of diverse communities, each contributing distinct cultural hues to the state's social fabric. The Jats, an agriculturally rooted community, form a substantial demographic. Renowned for their valor and agricultural expertise, they have historically held influence in both rural and political spheres. The Bhils and Meenas, indigenous tribal groups, trace their origins to the region's ancient inhabitants. With rich traditions and unique customs, they contribute to Rajasthan's cultural diversity. The Marwaris, a thriving mercantile community, have played a pivotal role in trade and commerce, contributing to Rajasthan's economic vibrancy. As per the official records of the Election Commission of the Government of Rajasthan (2013), there exist 27 (further sub-divided) Scheduled Casts, 12 (further divided) Scheduled tribes, and 82 other backward castes.

Colonel James Tod's portrayal of the rest of the communities in Rajasthan constitutes a multifaceted facet within his writings. While his predominant focus centers on the Rajput clans, historical trajectories, and valorous sagas, there exists a perceptive engagement with the presence and contributions of tribal communities within the region. Nonetheless, it is discernible that his approach towards these tribal minorities is relatively circumscribed and frequently refracted through the prism of their interactions with the Rajput populace and the broader socio-cultural dynamics prevailing in Rajasthan.

“In all the ancient catalogues of the thirty-six royal races of India the Jat has a place, though by none is he ever styled ‘Rajput’, nor am I aware of any instance of a Rajput’s intermarriage with a Jat. It is a name widely disseminated over India, though it does not now occupy a very elevated place amongst the inhabitants, belonging chiefly to the agricultural classes.” (Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R)

Among the tribal groups, the Bhils and Meenas are prime. Tod does acknowledge their existence, incorporating them into the broader historical narratives of the region. This integration often showcases their interplay with Rajput rulers and sporadically acknowledges their roles in various battles and alliances.

“The Bhils were the free lords of the jungle, original owners of the soil, and though they practiced rites and followed customs repulsive to orthodox Hindus, they did not share in the impurity which attached to foul outcastes like the Dom or Chandala”. (Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R)

He acknowledges their historical significance and contributions within Rajasthan, simultaneously drawing attention to perceptions of their involvement in unlawful activities. The misinterpretation and societal marginalization of the Bhil community precipitated the Bhil uprising of 1818 (this uprising, primarily led by the Bhil community, represented a vehement protest against the oppressive colonial policies and socioeconomic exploitation, underscoring their resilience in resisting subjugation). This portrayal also resonates with the overarching context of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (a legislation designed to manage and categorize specific communities as predisposed to criminal conduct. It classified those communities as "criminal tribes," assuming an inherent predisposition toward criminal activities. This act not only exacerbated existing social stigmatization but also perpetuated the marginalization of these communities). Their confluence stands as a testament to the intricate interplay between colonial legislation and indigenous resistance within the complex sociopolitical landscape of colonial India.

Tod's literary corpus provides a window into the manner in which colonial ideologies and policies influenced his comprehension and depiction of these tribal communities. This enriches our understanding of the intricate socio-political dynamics of that period.

“As the Bhils were believed to be autochthonous and thus understood the methods of controlling or conciliating the local spirits, by this form of inauguration they passed on their knowledge to the Rajputs whom they accepted as their lords.” (Lt. Col. James Tod, A.A.R.)

It is apparent that while he does delineate certain distinctions in their cultural customs, traditions, and ways of life, these descriptions occasionally lack the depth and nuance that a comprehensive understanding of these communities warrants. Inadvertently, Tod's overarching emphasis on Rajput-centric narratives may potentially contribute to the inadvertent oversimplification or marginalization of the intricate and diverse narratives of these tribal populations.

Examining the demographic landscape through the lens of the 2011 census data, it becomes evident that the Rajput population in the state of Rajasthan, comprising 37.04 lakhs of the 6.86 crore residents, surpasses mere numerical representation, exerting a socio-cultural prominence that transcends these statistics.

In contemporary discourse, the focus gravitates towards the realm of museums, recognized as conduits bridging the chasm between historical legacies and contemporary realities. A conspicuous observation within the museum exhibitions of Rajasthan is the pronounced centrality afforded to the Rajput heritage, positioning it as the *primus civitates* while relegating other communities to peripheral narratives. Several potential factors contribute to this phenomenon, notably:

- a) Favourable historical interaction of Rajputs with British colonial forces.
- b) Prevalent donations of artifacts to museums by affluent Royal Rajput families.

This assertion is substantiated through instances such as the Albert Hall Museum in Jaipur, Danmal Mathur Museum (Jhalawar House, Mayo College, Ajmer), Jaisalmer War Museum, and The Palace Museum, which exemplify this selective representation.

The erosion of cultural heritage becomes palpable through the acculturation tendencies emerging among marginalized communities. Traditionally, Meena women adorned the "Peela Pomcha," yet the adoption of the "Bes" has gained popularity among them. Similarly, festivals like "Teej" and "Gangaur" have superseded indigenous celebrations like "Saptami" and "Pitra-Tarpan" during Govardhan, thereby underscoring the influence of external cultural forces.

This colonialist shaping of history by the British has further led to waning enthusiasm for indigenous practices such as "Pad-Dangal" and "Saang," with contemporary dance forms like "Ghumar" and "Kalbeliya" now dominating the cultural landscape. The ubiquitous presence of the "Pachranga" Flag of Kachwaha Rajputs on Jaipur's temples can be interpreted as both a symbol of longevity and dominance, encapsulating the complexities of cultural symbolism.

A recent feud relating to Amagadh near Jaipur in July 2021 exemplifies the consequences of historical ambiguities and the absence of a comprehensive written history for tribal communities in Rajasthan. For an in-depth understanding of this matter, the Times of India report authored by Deep Mukherjee serves as a valuable resource.

The overarching interpretation of Colonel James Tod's accounts, combined with the stigmatization associated with the Criminal Tribes Act, compounds the challenges faced by tribal communities in securing rental accommodations within urban centers. The preexisting caste hierarchy, coupled with popularized interpretations, exacerbates the marginalization of these communities. While Tod's monumental work sought to document ethnography, history, anthropology, and geography, its neglect of significant demographic facets has inadvertently contributed to a less favourable historical narrative for non-Rajput populations.

Prominent historians such as Dr. Rima Hooja, the Director of the Swami Maan Singh Museum in Jaipur, emphasize the imperative need for marginalized communities to assert their own historical narratives. Recognizing this representational void, visionaries like Komal Kothari have championed the revolutionary concept of "Arna Jharna: The Thar Desert Museum of Rajasthan," situated in Jodhpur, which fosters public engagement with folk culture and oral history. Additionally, initiatives such as "The Broom Project," directed by Rustom Bharucha and supported by the Ford Foundation, reignite optimism for a more inclusive and harmonious portrayal of the state's cultural mosaic.

The absence of inclusive representation has sparked a renewed discourse regarding community identity. Rajasthan has endured a history of caste-based discrimination, marginalization, and social bias. However, contemporary scholars are revisiting Tod's works to redefine the dominant narrative and establish an autonomous identity for Rajasthan as a dynamic hub of diverse communities. While this endeavor is still in its infancy, it holds the promise of substantial transformative implications for the state's trajectory in the future.

CONCLUSION

Colonel James Tod's opus, "Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan," has catalyzed discerning assessments and fresh reinterpretations among contemporary scholars. These endeavors ardently strive to illuminate a more even-handed and precise comprehension of Rajasthan's historical tapestry, acknowledging the nuanced intricacies that may have been distilled within Tod's evocative narratives. Fundamentally, the compositions of Colonel James Tod continue to intricately thread into the contemporary tapestry of Rajasthani society, influencing not only the internal self-perception of the populace but also shaping external perceptions of the region. This enduring legacy is palpable in the vibrant cultural milieu of the state, its heightened historical awareness, and its stature as an alluring haven for tourists. While subjected to scholarly critique and constant challenges, Tod's romanticized chronicles incontrovertibly retain a substantial foothold within the collective identity of Rajasthan, though there seems a scope for futuristic scholarly pursuit in reinterpretation, deconstruction and reconstruction of his narrative.

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