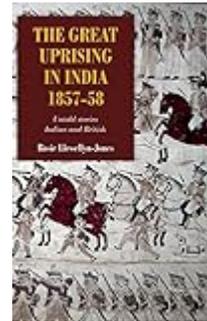


**Rosie Llewellyn-Jones.** *The Great Uprising in India, 1857–58: Untold Stories, Indian and British.* Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007. 258 S. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-304-8.



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## A Familiar Story, Retold

The events of 1857-58 in India were underway when the first narratives on the subject were composed, and the earliest histories appeared when those events were still vivid memories. This compulsion to explain was from the start—felt by both sides. Rebel leaders issued proclamations, and British officials and missionaries reports and letters, offering differing interpretations of the uprising as it unfolded. Historical accounts, memoirs, and analyses began appearing before the last skirmishes were over and continued for some time thereafter. Examples of the genre include Harriet Martineau's *British Rule in India; A Historical Sketch* (1857); Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *History of the Bijnor Rebellion* (composed, 1857-58); T. F. Wilson's *The Defence of Lucknow* (1858); Charles Ball's *The History of the Indian Mutiny* (1858); J. W. Kaye's *A History of the Sepoy War in India* (1864-76); and Charles H. H. Wright's *Memoir of John Lovering Cooke* (1873). The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw more works on the subject, many colored by the differing lenses through which Indian nationalists and British officials viewed the current colonial situation.

Typical of such efforts were *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (1909) by V. D. Savarkar and *History of the Indian Mutiny, 1857-1858* (1878-1880) by G. B. Malleson, although some broke ranks, such as Edward J. Thompson with *The Other Side of the Medal* (1925). The centennial anniversary of the outbreak of events led to a slew of studies, many of a nuanced and critical nature, such as S. N. Sen's *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* (1957) and R. C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and Revolt of 1857* (1957). Military histories and republished or newly discovered memoirs by participants continue to find a publishing market to this day.

Into this thicket of contending narratives Rosie Llewellyn-Jones has waded with characteristic concern for neglected stories. She eschews the fashion for theory, finding inspiration instead the way historians used to do so, digging through the archives for revealing nuggets of information. To be sure, she keeps an eye on the larger questions that animate scholars: Was 1857-58 a revolt or mutiny? Did the uprising have national or only local support? And why did it fail? But her focus is on forgotten

episodes that add nuance and complicate received opinions. The result is a worthy companion to any good collection of scholarly works on this subject.

The book begins with a fine introduction. Llewellyn-Jones briskly traverses the general course of events and outlines some key interpretations, nudging along her own view that the uprising was localized, drawing support from many different groups and individuals with sundry motives for joining the revolt. She also examines the factors behind the failure of 1857-58, including lack of political leadership, failure to follow basic military strategy and precautions, and insufficient funds on the part of the rebels. Initial perceptions also catch her attention. Mostly from the West—because few narratives and visual images survive from the Indian side—these reveal an interesting range of responses, including blind fury in Britain, *schadenfreude* in France, a toast to the rebels at a German dinner party, and sympathy for the mutineers among Irish New Yorkers. Of the few surviving Indian narratives are folk songs first written down only a half-century later. These suggest popular support for the idea of driving the English out of India and yet indicate a surprisingly sympathetic view of the British besieged in the Lucknow Residency (p. 23).

A good deal of the volume is devoted to proving the point that diverse agendas and local grievances drove the events of 1857-58. Some of these get only brief mention here, such as the Gujars of the Delhi region, petty thieves and cattle rustlers who took advantage of the uprising to maraud brazenly. Llewellyn-Jones uses their nearly forgotten story to remind us that some of the early turmoil in May 1857 came at the hands of those who impartially robbed both rebels and Britons. European renegades and Eurasians also make cameo appearances here. What little is known of these men and at least one woman indicates that individuals could be swept up by events, joining the rebels out of compulsion or for private reasons never to be fully known.

Llewellyn-Jones grants some cases more careful attention. Mangal Pande's reasons for mutiny were common among sepoys who suspected the British were out to convert Indians to Christianity and massacre those regimental members who refused to use the new greased cartridge. The local troops who murdered the East India Company's political agent (defacto ambassador) at the court of Kota were participants in a court intrigue, one of whose participants reasoned that eliminating the agent would advance his cause. In Pande's case, personal motives were shared by others across north India. The

mutiny in Kota, however, was driven by private agendas only remotely connected to events elsewhere.

Other forgotten stories get told here. Several involve Lucknow, which became one of the legendary sites of the empire because of the many books written by British survivors of the six-month siege of the Residency. As usual, Llewellyn-Jones teases out new information, much of it revealing of the Indian experience during the siege and defense of Lucknow. An eyewitness report by one Gujral Brahmin—printed first in Calcutta and then in London—tells of mutineers commandeering resources, of local rajas joining the rebels, of sepoys plundering and leaving the city, and of the disposal of the bodies of mutineers in the river. The three-month period between the lifting of the siege and the recapture of the city by British forces is explored too. During that period Indians erected around Lucknow a huge earthen defensive wall, complete with loopholes and embrasures. The Irish reporter covering the recapture of the city for the *Times* was astounded by the immensity of the structure, describing it as "a great railway-looking embankment" (p. 121). Llewellyn-Jones also uses the staged photographs produced by Felice Beato to confirm the massive size of the earthen wall.

There are also excellent chapters on the aftermath of revolt. The British military tradition of awarding prizes to victorious military forces degenerated into wide-scale looting in Delhi and Lucknow. Llewellyn-Jones uses near contemporary sketches to illustrate the point, including a drawing of a British officer holding a pistol to the head of a merchant while his Sikh sepoys gather up the plunder. The thirst for revenge by Britons is well known, thanks to Thompson's *The Other Side of the Medal* and other works, but Llewellyn-Jones adds more gory details, including the sporting language used in hunting down rebels. "To bag a nigger" became a common phrase, while another saying alluded to Mangal Pande: "Pea-fowls, partridges, and Pandies rose together, but the latter gave the best sport" (p. 156). A final chapter on mutiny memorials notes the delicate language used in inscriptions, as the colonial authorities sought to honor the memory of those who fell to rebel forces without inflaming Indian sentiments. Fittingly, Llewellyn-Jones reports how today some British gravesites from 1857-58 have become holy sites revered by local villagers who treat these as if they were the tombs of *pirs* (Sufi saints).

Such stories fill this book. The author's patient work in the archives has shed new light on a familiar subject. Her persistent effort to recover the multiple mean-

ings and lost stories of 1857-58 is a reminder that even with the great uprising in India will discover in this book the best-known subjects can repay careful investigation. how wrong they are. Many readers who deem themselves sufficiently familiar

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