

## **Gender, Nation and Politics in Colonial South Asia (HIST 2326)**

**Credit Hours:** 3

**Course Pre-Requisites:** Not Applicable

**Instructor:** Aalene Mahum

**Schedule:** TBA

### **Course Description**

The political experience of colonisation left a deep impact on the ways in which attitudes towards gender altered and solidified in colonial India. Some of the most powerful political questions raised in this time period manifested in the controversies surrounding the 'women's question'. Deeply politicised, women's bodies became the battleground where debates between modernity and tradition, East and West, reform and revivalism, and ultimately, colonialism and nationalism were contested and negotiated. How then, was gender central to the construction of religious and national identities? And how does it contextualise gender related issues in present day South Asia?

To answer these questions, this course traces gender practices set in the history and politics of South Asia in the 18th and early 19th century. It shows how a study of gender, while crucial in its own right, is also deeply instructive of the socio-political milieu of colonial India. The course is divided into 4 modules. Module 1 begins by understanding the 'Age of Reform' period, and the ways in which various attempts by British and Indian reformers were made to address the Indian woman's condition. It also asks students to investigate how and why the concerns of British and Indian reformers differed among themselves. Module 2 explores the significance of gender in religious revivalism and in constructions of religious identities. It encourages students to question how women's bodies became symbolic markers of religion and culture, and how these attitudes manifested in criminally heightened ways during partition violence. Module 3 delves into gendered imaginings of the nation. It deconstructs ideas around

masculinity and femininity to understand the gendered ways in which different Indian imaginations sought to 'save' the 'ailing' nation. Finally, Module 4 looks at women's deep

involvement in the politics of anti-colonial nationalism. It exposes students to the debate around feminist aspirations and the extent to which these became subsumed in the nationalist movements. It ends by throwing open the question of 'freedom' and how far women were successful in advocating for their rights once independence was attained. During the course, students will be encouraged to not treat India as a homogenous category. The readings instead hope to bring out regional stories from Bengal, South India, North India, and the areas that eventually became Pakistan. The course will also incorporate multiple voices including British reformers, Indian reformers, and Indian revivalists. But most importantly, it will use the works of women themselves who, through their autobiographies and writings, fought for the space to write their own histories.