



Sovereignty and Social Reform in India: British Colonialism and the Campaign against Sati, 1830-1860 (Routledge/Edinburgh South Asian Studies Series)

Andrea Major

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The British prohibition of sati (the funeral practice of widow immolation) in 1829 has been considered an archetypal example of colonial social reform. It was not the end of the story, however, as between 1830 and 1860, British East India Company officials engaged in a debate with the Indian rulers of the Rajput and Maratha princely states of North West India about the prohibition and suppression of sati in their territories. This book examines the debates that brought about legislation in these areas, arguing that they were instrumental in setting the terms of post-colonial debates about sati, and more generally, in defining the parameters of British involvement in Indian social and religious issues.

This book provides a reinterpretation of the major themes of sovereignty, authority and social reform in colonial South Asian history by examining the shifting pragmatic, political, moral and ideological forces which underpinned British policies on and attitudes to sati. The author illuminates the complex ways in which East India Company officials negotiated the limits of their own authority in India, their conceptions of nature and the extent of Indian princely sovereignty, and argues that and the so-called 'civilising mission' was often dependent on local circumstances and political expediencies rather than overarching imperial principles; the book also evaluates Indian responses to the supposed modernising Enlightenment discourse.

This book will be of great interest to students and scholars of South Asian history as well as British colonial studies.

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