SATI DEBATE: THE AMBIGUOUS AND CONTRADICTORY IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL REFORM IN COLONIAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT

‘Sati’ is an antiquated Hindu ritual, an eccentric and one of its kind funerary practice where a widow immolated herself on her husband’s funeral pyre. Three weeks prior to the abolition of ‘Sati’ in British India in 1829, Charles Metcalfe, a government official in the Calcutta Presidency, confidently declared that the ban would ‘be universally acknowledged by the people of India as the best act performed by the British government’ (Fisch 2005). While not contesting the effectiveness of the ban, recent historiography has frequently criticised the debate on sati as being utterly unconcerned with the fortunes of Indian widows. This paper will try to highlight this complex debate over sati using secondary sources such as books, journals, articles etc, thereby agreeing to the orthodox historiography insofar as the fate of Indian widows was undoubtedly not the primary concern of those involved in the debate. Furthermore, this essay will also highlight some of the ambiguities, hypocrisy and limitations of the colonial state which made the debate on sati immensely complex and explore some of the wider ramifications of the colonial state’s decision to enact such reform.

KEYWORDS: Sati, sati debate, abolition of sati, unconcerned with widows, colonial ambiguity.

REFERENCES
