

SAI Brochure-bio

Mou Banerjee is a third-year graduate student in the department of history at Harvard. Her research explores Indian intellectuals' encounters with Christianity in the nineteenth century. She charts the development of a complex relationship of overt repudiation and covert fascination that Indians developed with Christianity. This was facilitated by close contact with actors such as evangelical missionaries and the colonial administrative officers, over more than a century of British rule. During this time, Christianity was alternately perceived and analyzed as a religion and a philosophy, a discursive and dialectical category, a denominator of racial and social difference, and as a repository of Enlightenment ethos and modernity. Indians then used these encounters to creatively to define their own identities as modern colonial subjects, with steadily evolving political goals. For Mou, the boundaries that defined faith, communitarian affiliations and political aspirations became irrevocably changed during the nineteenth century in India due to these contestations in the Indian ecumene.

Mou intends to investigate how this examination of Christianity by Indian intellectuals represents a creative philosophical engagement, leading to contestations over the nature of faith's sociopolitical implications, and of the political responsibility of the colonized subjects. Her pre-dissertation research has been funded at different times by the Clive Fellowship of the Department of History, and through generous grants from the South Asia Institute and the Asia Center at Harvard. She is also the recipient of the SSRC-IDRF grant of 2013-2014.