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## **English and Cultural Studies 4881G Section 550** **Courtesan Stories**

### Course Description

Female performing artists have figured powerfully in the paintings, photographs, histories, stories, poetry, and film that have emerged from the Indian subcontinent in the last 300 years or so. Known by various names – most often as ‘devadasi’ in South India and ‘tawaif’ in the north – and practising their public art in diverse regions of India, these girls and women have been objects of fascination in popular as well as high culture during both the British imperialist and Indian nationalist eras. This course will give students the opportunity to examine representations of these dancers and singers, who might jointly be called ‘courtesans,’ though that term doesn’t effectively capture the distinctive functions that they served in their societies, functions which included creating and preserving many of the performing arts for which India is now famous. We will study films and literature about them from key historical moments and poetry, letters, and petitions by them in order to come to some way to grasp the profound difference that they embodied in terms of their performance of gender, caste, class, and sexuality.