



Fellows' Lecture Series 2016

Date: November 18th 2.30 – 4.30 pm

Venue: CSDS Seminar Hall



Unaided by Men, They Will Discover their Own Strength.

Women's Associations and the formulation of new norms in late colonial India" (1917-1947)

[Dr. Elena Borghi](#)

From the beginning of the twentieth century, elite Indian women increasingly organised to enter the social and political arena as subjects, claiming a voice in matters that had so far been the domain of male actors wishing to reform Indian mores. The paper explores the emotional and intimate dimensions of this early feminist activism, focusing in particular on the first two pan-Indian women's associations, the Women's Indian Association (1917) and the All-India Women's Conference (1927).

Drawing on concepts developed within the historiography on emotions, it suggests, firstly, that the community shaped by these associations can be analysed as an "emotional refuge"—a separate space within which women forged their own gendered emotional norms, designed not necessarily in opposition with prevailing ones, but certainly reworking them and integrating them with other notions. Secondly, the paper suggests that through a diachronic analysis taking into account a broad time frame, an intimate history of the "emotional community" of feminist activists can be traced, to assess the changes and evolutions of the feelings and emotional notions related to feminist participation in India.

Elena Borghi has recently completed her Ph.D. from the Department of History and Civilization at the European University Institute (Florence, Italy). Interested in History of South Asia and in Women's and Gender History, she focused her research on the origins of feminism in India during the early twentieth century and on the experience of the Nehru women. Her publications include 'The time has now come for women to review and reform thus system', and "Women's movements, Indian anti-colonial struggle".

She has been a Fellow of TM 5 (Performing Gender) at ICAS:MP for three months, from 1.9. to 30.11.2016). She will join then join the Max Weber Kolleg at Erfurt university for a two-months fellowship.