"Infants, Medical Women and Madras Municipal Politics, 1917-1947"

a public talk by Barbara N. Ramusack
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Wed, Apr 30, 4:30 PM
Morgan Hall 110, Amherst College

To reduce appalling rates of infant and maternal mortality, in 1917 the Madras Municipal Council opened its first child welfare center to provide ante and post-natal care for poor women in slum areas. This lecture will illuminate how Indian politicians and medical women sought to produce healthy citizens for the future Indian nation from at least the 1910s. These centers were one of the first health institutions where Indian medical women, physicians, nurse-midwives and health visitors—would work without any British medical supervisors. Although some Indian men and the few women Councilors were sympathetic to challenges their employees confronted in their work, others revealed negative gender and class stereotypes and professional jealousy in their critiques of their Indian women employees. Still these women and their supporters in the Council and the Municipal Health Department laid the groundwork for a significant reduction in infant and maternal mortality in late colonial and post colonial Madras city, now known as Chennai.

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