



SOCIAL REFORMER OF 19th CENTURY: DR. KADAMBINI GANGULY

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

At the beginning of the 20th century, Indian women were on the cusp of a new era. During this time, a social reform movement for women's education gained traction. Nonetheless, there were differences in the dissemination of higher education despite initiatives to support it by social reformers, Christian missionaries, Indian intelligentsia, and the British colonial authority. For most women, it remained beyond reach. Women were not allowed to attend college unless they were from well-educated households, meaning that their parents and other family members had to support the reforms in order for them to be able to continue their studies. Diverse perspectives are expressed by feminist scholars writing on this era about Indian reformers and their contributions to women's education.

Keywords: *Women, Reforms, Society, Education, Equality, Empowerment*

Introduction

British India in the 19th century was ruled by both contemporary ideals influenced by British thought and long-standing Indian religious and superstitious beliefs. During that time, the issues of women's empowerment and gender equality had no place. Men were not free, and since they were not free, they were not in a position to worry about women while the nation struggled for independence. Because of their illiteracy and adherence to old, conservative beliefs, women in the patriarchal society of the past turned against other women. One widely held notion was that women will become bereaved as a result of their education. In Indian society of the 19th century, this was one of the primary arguments against women going to school. The situation became even more appalling due to the practice of the horrible crime known as Sati, child marriage, polygamy, and the abuse of Hindu widows in the hopes of gaining favor with God. A few notable intellectuals and reformers entered Indian society at this time, including Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy, Sri Dwaraka Nath Ganguly, Durga Mohan Das and Kesab Chandra Sen, Anandi Bai Joshi, Shushila Naiyyer, Savitri Bai Phule, Rhukhma Bai and Kadambini Ganguly. They began promoting women's education and advocated for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Of all these brilliant intellectuals and social reformers in India at the time, Sri Dwaraka Nath Ganguly was the only one who not only advocated women's empowerment and gender equality in theory but also put them into practice in his own life. His spouse, Smt. Kadambini Ganguly, was the first female doctor from Calcutta Medical College and the first female graduate of the University of Calcutta. Her narrative of completing Calcutta Medical College served as a metaphor for the Indian society of the time, which denied women's empowerment and gender equality. She had fought hard to become Bengal's first female physician. Her rigorous performance emphasized the advancement of women's emancipation in Indian society throughout the 19th century.

Background

Kadambini was born in Bhagalpur, Bihar, on July 18, 1861. Her father, Braja Kishore Basu, was a teacher in Bhagalpur and she was born into a Brahmo family. Her studies took her to Calcutta, where she was accepted into the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya, which subsequently amalgamated with Bethune School. In 1878, she was successful in passing the University of Calcutta's entrance exam. She received her arts degree from the University of Calcutta in 1882.

The first female graduate of India

Dr. Ganguly began her studies at Bang Mahila Vidyalaya before earning a B.A from the University of Calcutta in 1883. A young Kadambini graduated from Banga Mahila Vidyalaya, which subsequently amalgamated with Bethune School, to complete her official education. She made history by being the first woman to pass the University of Calcutta entrance exam in 1878. She was the first candidate from the Bethune School to appear for the exam. Because of her achievement, Bethune College offered graduation and FA (First Arts) courses in 1883. Together with Chandramukhi Basu, Kadambini was one of the first two graduates in the entire British Raj. The graduation of Ganguly was described as "the most notable event in the history of female education in Bengal" by H.C. Reynolds, the director of public instruction. After enrolling at the University of Edinburgh in 1893, Ganguly obtained her LRCP certification, allowing her to start practicing medicine. Prejudice against female students had begun to lessen by the 1890s, when the Royal College of Physicians enjoyed immense international recognition.

She was one of the University of Calcutta's first two female graduates. She put her all into becoming a good doctor, and she did well on nearly every medical college exam. However, one professor had failed one topic on the final MB exam and was adamantly opposed to the idea of women becoming doctors alongside men. Despite Kadambini's application, the Medical Council denied her request for a five-year performance review. As a result, she only received the University of Calcutta's Certificate of First LMS examination. Successful applicants used to get the Graduate of Medical College of Bengal (GMCB) Diploma from the college principal prior to Calcutta Medical College coming under the purview of the University of Calcutta. Because of her satisfactory completion of the course, Dr. Coates, the Principal of Calcutta Medical College, awarded her the GMCB Diploma, which granted her the ability to practice privately. She was awarded a scholarship by the Dufferin Fund, worth Rs. 20, per month, to study medicine. After that, she was given a renowned salary of Rs. 300/-per month as a doctor at the Lady Dufferin Women's Hospital. However, despite her tremendous efforts, the hospital did not acknowledge her and made her perform menial tasks. Not even a single hospital department was given her autonomous leadership. However, she came across a number of unusual situations there. She then decided she wanted to continue her education in England. In 1893, she traveled to England and was accepted into the Scottish College of Edinburgh. Within three months, she was able to obtain three different diplomas: the Licentiate of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Dublin (LFPS), the Licentiate of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Edinburgh (LRCP), and the Licentiate of the College of Surgeons, Glasgow (LRCS). She obtained the Triple Diploma in medical studies. She once more became a senior physician at the Lady Dufferin Hospital following her return from England. She was acknowledged as the first female foreign-degree holder practicing western medicine in all of South Asia. She subsequently began working privately and achieved great success.

After that, she treated a lot of seriously ill patients at the Dufferin Hospital and in her private practice. She made an effort to impart her knowledge to the impoverished women in order to help them become self-sufficient. She even assisted a few women in being accepted into medical school to study midwifery and pursue jobs as midwives. She also provided several underprivileged individuals with free medical care. Her abilities and contributions to the advancement of Indian civilization in the 19th century, particularly for women, were unceasing. She actually studied medicine in order to serve female patients in the community. During her era, women adhered to the purdah regime, and it was socially taboo for male doctors to treat female patients. That was the primary cause of the high rate of female death in that society at the time. By promoting awareness of the importance of hygiene during childbirth and managing delivery situations as a physician more skillfully than midwives, Dr. Kadambini began to alter the situation. She made an effort to defend women's health and right to life in this way because, in her day, women's illnesses were never given any thought. Not even the women had any claim to life. The significant death rate of women during childbirth had gone unnoticed. When a wife died giving birth, the husband would usually take another wife. In a society where polygamy was accepted, males would abandon their wives if they were ill or unable to bear children. At this point, Kadambini battled to defend the rights of the female population in society.

Battling for societal reforms

Kadambini juggled her political involvement, social philanthropy, and medical practice. In addition to aggressively advocating for women's rights in the traditional society that opposed change, she went to India to resume her medical career. She organized the Women's Conference in Calcutta in 1906 following the division of Bengal, and she was one of the six female delegates to the Indian National Congress's fifth session in 1889. "Breaking social norms was not easy. Her profession demanded visiting patients at night and she attracted criticism from many corners. One popular vernacular newspaper even called her a whore but she and her husband fought a legal battle to win compensation and got the editor jailed for six months," Rajib Ganguly, 58, Kadambini's great grandson.

Just a few months had passed since Kadambini began her medical career when an article in a fundamentalist Hindu news magazine cast doubt on her doctoral credentials and derogatorily described her. After an extensive legal battle, Kadambini took the matter to court, and the editor of the piece was found guilty of libel and given a six-month jail sentence. Never one to be deterred by conservative criticism of women's emancipation, Kadambini decided to go for the greatest medical degree

available. In 1892, she went to the UK and obtained three more doctorates. She started her own private practice after working as a gynecologist at the Lady Dufferin Hospital when she returned to India.

She had also presided over a conference in Calcutta in 1908 where she expressed support for the Satyagraha being carried out by Indian laborers in the Transvaal, South Africa. She established an organization to gather funds for the workers' needs through fundraisers. She presided over the Sadharan Brahma Samaj assembly in 1914, which was organized in Calcutta to honor Mohandas Gandhi during his visit. Ganguly faced a lot of criticism for her decision to pursue her degree even after getting married. She was a mother of eight children in addition to her professional job. She worked for a government commission until a year before her death, when she was joined by the Bengali poet Kamini Roy, to find out about the working circumstances of women miners in Bihar and Orissa. Kadambini was an advocate for women's rights and education too, and she participated in a number of social and liberation movements. She encouraged people to donate money in support of the Satyagraha movement in 1908 and supported it herself. Ganguly participated in the first-ever female delegation to the Indian National Congress's Fifth Session, where women were allowed to cast ballots. She traveled to Bihar and Odisha in 1922 to assist female miners. She never refused to show up for any of her doctor's appointments until the day of her death. The last breath was taken by Kadambini Ganguly on October 7, 1923. She was a real trailblazer who inspired a lot of people.

She also tried to help women in Eastern India who worked as coal miners have better working conditions. She was also a part of the first female delegation of the Indian National Congress during its fifth session. In an effort to demonstrate solidarity during Bengal's partition, Kadambini called the Women's Conference to Calcutta in 1906, and she served as its president in 1908. Throughout the same year, she recruited people to raise money for the workers' assistance and actively supported satyagraha.

First female physicians in India

However, becoming a doctor was not an easy path. Despite Kadambini's merits, Calcutta Medical College declined to accept her as a candidate because no Indian women had ever studied there. For the longest time, Dwarakanath had also been advocating for the admission and housing of female students at Calcutta Medical College. Kadambini was only permitted to pursue her studies after the couple issued a formal threat to the authorities. She was the first Indian woman physician, after Anandi Gopal Joshi, to be licensed to practice western medicine in 1886. She became a licensed practitioner after earning her GBMC (Graduate of Bengal Medical College) degree. In order to gain more experience in her industry, she even traveled to the United Kingdom in 1892. She returned to Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dublin with a number of diplomas. She began her solo business later after working briefly in Lady Dufferin Hospital upon her return to India.

Dr. Kadambini Bose Ganguly, Who Revolutionized Indian Medical Practices

In British India, Dr. Kadambini Bose Ganguly paved the way for women to be empowered in the medical industry. For the majority at the time, her journey of resisting society standards and overcoming preconceptions was relatively novel. To become the first female medical student, she had to battle Calcutta Medical College. With a strong desire to practice medicine, Dr. Kadambini Bose Ganguly overcame strong opposition from educators and staff in 1886 to become the first female doctor of Indian descent, defying all expectations. During a period when it was nearly unfathomable for a woman to become a doctor, her medical career was impacted by conservative opposition. She even had to engage in court battles to demonstrate to the world that she was qualified for a PhD. However, Dr. Kadambini's ambition for achievement was unquenchable. After relocating to the UK, she obtained three further degrees: GPS (Dublin), LRCS (Glasgow), and LRCP (Edinburgh).

With an emphasis to enhance maternal healthcare and reducing infant mortality, Dr. Kadambini dedicated her career to addressing challenges related to women's health. She managed the responsibilities of a busy physician and an eight-child mother simultaneously, and she was prominent in the Indian women's rights movement. Generations to come will undoubtedly be inspired by Dr. Kadambini's legacy, which gives women in medicine and other fields hope.

Women Empowerment

A fundamental and dynamic shift in how society views women, what is expected of them, and a rational and scientific understanding of the issues and requirements that affect women are all necessary for empowering women. Any nation's sustainable development depends on the empowerment of women. The most effective way to empower women in any community is through education, and when women are empowered, they may contribute significantly to the labor force of their nation. However it was not so easy journey for Bengali women because patriarchal social norm and fear of seclusion from family made them unable to become a medical student. Initially they appeared ones and two. On the other hand, women belonging to Native Christian, European, and Eurasian community of Bengal were in a favourable situation. Around 1893-94 out of a total of thirty one female students at Campbell (Now known as NRS Medical College & Hospital) there were only seven Hindus, seven Brahmas, two Muslims and ten native Christians. This trend persisted till 1930. During this challenging period, women's medical education advanced very slowly, and the majority of them did not pursue their medical careers. This scenario underwent a small alteration between 1935 and 1940, during which the proportion of female members of the Muslim

and Hindu communities increased while the number of Anglo-Indian students fell. However, due to widely held middle class beliefs, not all segments of society supported encouraging Bengali women to pursue careers in medicine. But the necessity for qualified medical women was increased due to a strong logic of health requirements. Thus, despite all societal, governmental, and colonial barriers meant to prevent women from pursuing medical education, the field of medicine in Bengal continued to grow and thrive in the middle of the 20th century.

Table1: Showing inclusion of female in Medical Education belonging to different religious group) (between 1935-1940)

Category of Female Students	1936-1937	1937-1938	1938-1939	1939-40
Hindu Brahmin	2	6	3	5
Hindu Non Brahmin	24	27	37	38
Muslims	3	4	6	6
Indian Christians	--	--	1	3
Anglo-Indian Christians	2	1	--	--
Others	8	7	7	5
Total	39	45	54	57

Source- <https://www.ensemledrms.in>

Rethinking the thorny journey: medical women in colonial India, khondeker dilshad haque

Kadambini began to advocate for women's advancement via education, improvement, and equal opportunity. The high fatality rate among women giving delivery had gone unreported. Typically, a husband would take a new wife when his current one died giving birth. Men would desert their wives in a society that tolerated polygamy if they were unwell or incapable of having children. This was the turning point in Kadambini's fight for women's rights in society. There, she had discussed the necessity of women's political participation in the affairs of a nation such as India. She has also shared her opinions on the necessity of Indian women actively participating in Indian National Congress sessions. In 1906, following Bengal's partition, she organized the Women's Conference in Calcutta. Annie Besant commended her for being a symbol of the advancement of Indian womanhood and for significantly contributing to the emancipation of women in that country.

Conclusion

Dr. Kadambini Ganguly left behind a legacy of bravery, tenacity, and success. Her work has had a long-lasting effect on women's lives in India and around the world. She was a pioneer in the field of Indian women's empowerment. For women living in urban and semi-urban areas in colonial India, medical education had an emancipatory influence. For those who were given the chance, it guaranteed empowerment via work, a professional identity, financial security, social mobility, and freedom. On the other hand, her successes made room for those who wanted to become medical educators. Despite this, society assigned her to the role of caregiver rather than leader of the medical field. With her ground-breaking achievements and contributions, she openly challenged the societal norm yet adhering to the traditional trend. she disregarded Indian society's customs, preconceptions, and ideas regarding the social standing of women.

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