

HISTORICAL NOTES

KADAMBINI GANGULY (1861-1923): FIRST LADY MEDICAL GRADUATE IN INDIA*

Sisir K Majumdar**

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The Medical College, Bengal, was established in 1835 (January 28) in Calcutta (now Kolkata) – the then capital of British India. It was the first modern medical institution (Hippocratic Medicine) in the Afro-Asian continent. Admission of female students started in 1883.

Mrs. Kadambini Ganguly (1861-1923) and Miss Bidhumuki Bose (Fig. 1) were the first lady medical students (1884) of the Medical College, Bengal. This was the era (second half of the 19th century flowing into the 20th) of India's intellectual renaissance. It was the beginning of modern India. It was within this renaissance that Western science took root and flourished to a remarkable extent. Three great Indian celebrities – Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray (1861-1944) and last, but not least, first Indian lady doctor – Kadambini – were born in the same year.



Fig. 1. Miss Bidhumuki Bose and Mrs. Kadambini Ganguly

*A tribute in her 150th birth anniversary.

**“Hariniketan” 200, Summerhouse Drive, Wilmington, Dartford Road, Kent, DA2 7PB, England, UK; e-mail: majumdarorama@googlemail.com

Kadambini: A Profile (Annex- I)

Kadambini Ganguly (Gangopadhyay- nee, Basu) was the daughter of Brajakishore Basu- an enthusiastic *Brahmo* leader and a pioneer of women's liberation movement.

Kadambini started her schooling in Ballyganj Girls' school, and in 1878, she and Sarala Das were allowed to sit for the Entrance Examination of the University of Calcutta (Estd. 1857). Before that, girls were not allowed to sit for this examination. Kadambini passed her F.A. (First Arts) and B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) examination. Kadambini and Chandramukhi Basu were the first two lady graduates of the University of Calcutta in 1882 and took their degrees at the Convocation of 1883. Even the University of London (Estd. 1826) started awarding degrees to women only five years before Calcutta University in 1878. Oxford University started admitting women in 1879 — one year after the admission of female students in Calcutta University. Cambridge opened Tripos to women in 1881. Calcutta's record is commendable¹. Kadambini got married sometime after graduation to Dwarkanath Ganguly (Gangopadhyay) – a school teacher and an ardent supporter of female education. Her husband encouraged her to enter Medical College in 1884. She was awarded G.B.M.C. (Graduate of Bengal Medical College) in 1886. Kadambini was one of the first lady doctors in world (Annex II). Kadambini was devoted wife and mother. She had five children. Leaving her five children to the care of her elder sister, she sailed for Great Britain in 1892. She returned shortly with three Licentiate post-graduate medical diplomas in medicine and surgery from three Colleges (Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dublin). She was attached to Lady Dufferin Hospital in Calcutta for some time. She practiced obstetrics and gynaecology in Calcutta. She was professionally very successful.

She actively participated in social reform movements. In 1890, she became the first woman to address an open session of Indian National Congress (Estd. 1885). She died on October 3 at the age of 62.

Epilogue

Kadambini was a caring mother, dedicated wife and social activist in spite of her busy schedule as a lady doctor. She is a model of today's working woman. In her profession, she followed what the physician –philosopher, Sir William Osler (1849-1919), said in his seminal book (*The Evolution of Medicine*, New

Haven, Yale University, 1921- Reprinted by Kaplan Publishers, New York, 2009, P. IX):

“Medicine is an art, not trade, a calling, not a business, a calling in which your heart will be used equally as much as your head.”

Reference

1. Ray, Niharranjan, Hundred years of the University of Calcutta (1857-1956): “The Formative Years (1857- 82)”, Ch. 3, p. 122.

Annex – I

Kadambini Ganguly (1861-1923) (A Personal Profile)

- Family- Originally from Barisal district in East Bengal (now Bangladesh).
- Then Family settled at Bhagalpur, Bihar.
- Educated at Bhagalpur Bang Mahila Vidyalaya- then Bethune School, Calcutta and Bethune College, Calcutta.
- First graduate of the University of Calcutta (along with Chandramukhi Basu in 1883).
- First Female Doctor of British India to be trained in Modern Medicine of Hippocrates (c. 460- c. 377 BC) of Greece.

Medical Degrees/Diplomas

- Graduate of Medical College (GBMC), 1886.
- Licentiate of Royal College of Physicians (LRCP), Edinburgh, U.K.
- Licentiate of Royal College of Surgeons (LRCS), Glasgow, U.K.
- Graduate of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Dublin (Ireland).
- Worked in lady Dufferin Hospital, Calcutta.
- Specialist Practitioner in Gynaecology and Obstetrics.

Social Activist

- Addressed the Indian National Congress in 1890 as one of six female delegates (First Woman in India to address the Congress).
- Organized Women’s Conference in Calcutta in 1906 on the aftermath of the partition of Bengal in 1905.

- Pioneer in Women's Liberation movements in Bengal.

Personal

- Married a widower – Dwarakanath Ganguly – a school teacher and an ardent supporter of female education. Had five children.

Annex – II

First Women Doctors in Rational Medicine (Hippocratic)

13th Century Europe

- Salerno (Nr. Naples), Italy: First Women and Men trained as Doctors of Medicine (M.D.).

U.S.A.

- Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910) – English/American – New York, 1849.

U.K.

- Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836-1917) – Licensed by the Society of Apothecaries (Est. 1617), London, in 1865; M.D. (Paris, 1870).
- Sophia Jex-Blake (1840-1913) – First Medical Graduate (Edinburgh University). Admitted to Medical Register (General Medical Council – GMC), U.K. in 1876.

India

- Kadambini Ganguly (1861-1923) – First Indian Lady Graduate of Calcutta University, 1882; First Lady Student of the Medical College, Bengal (Estd. 1835), LMS 1886, Later Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery, Edinburgh/Glasgow/Dublin.