

Evolution of Medical Education among Women in Tamil Nadu during the Colonial Period (India)

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Abstract: The late 19th and early 20th centuries were considered to be very important in the medical history and medical education in India. The government started opening civil dispensaries and introduced western medicine. It is to be remembered that in India even before the spread of general education among women, attempts were made to start medical education for women. It was sought as early as in the later part of the nineteenth century with the intention to afford relief to the ailing women who could not consult men doctors. The system of seclusion had not only been a hindrance to women's freedom but it made them suffer a great deal when they were ill, for there were no women Doctors to attend them. It had been estimated that in British India maternal deaths approximately were about two lakh. In fact it was this suffering that persuaded women doctors to take medical career and their service became invaluable. It is noteworthy to mention that a few progressive women were willing to study with men to receive medical training in Madras. In the year 1875, Madras Medical College admitted four women students. By 1944, there were 209 women and 651 men studying in Madras Medical College and Stanley Medical College. This paper highlights the progress of medical education among women and the efforts taken by the British Government, the native kings and women medical missionaries to promote medical education.

Keywords: Allopathy, Ayurvedic, Curriculum Gynaecology, Mid wife, Obstetrics.

I INTRODUCTION

Medical education in India has been in existence for many centuries and may be said to date back to the Post Vedic period (660B.C to 200A.D). The Universities of Taxila and Nalanda taught Medicine as a subject of study. There is a sufficient proof of the high ideals placed before the medical schools of those early times. They were taught and practiced under the Gurukula system. Susrutha and Saraka are names known the world over for their contributions to Indian system of medicine and the classical writings of those authors are still a perennial source of study for persons who wish to be trained in the Indian system of medicine. With the decline of this method of imparting education those system of medicine and their development also declined. The Unani system of medicine enjoyed great patronage during the Mughal rule. The Unani and the old Ayurvedic and Siddha systems of medicine were studied till the introduction of the western system of medicine in India. With the advent of the British in to India the system of medicine known as western medicine or modern

medicine or allopathy was introduced in this country. The East India Company brought their daughters with them. Ayurvedic and Unani system also continued. When serious famine occurred and continued for a decade resulted in diseases and deaths, traditional medicine was not sufficient. So western medicine became a necessity. From the passing of the Charter Act in 1813, efforts were made to impart western sciences to Indians. It was accelerated after the passing of the Charter Act of 1833 and Lord William Bentinck appointed a committee to formulate the principles on which the medical education should be based on. The committee recommended a comprehensive medical curriculum intended to be a moral engine of great utility and power. The first medical schools in India were established in Madras in 1835 and in Calcutta in 1845. These medical schools gave medical education below that which was required for a University degree. These medical schools were thrown open to women in Madras. Simultaneously efforts was made both the native states and by the medical missionaries to educate the indigenous midwives. The earliest effort was made by Miss Hewlet of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society at Amritsar by about 1866. She persuaded the midwives of the city to attend her classes and obtained stipends for them from the Amritsar Municipality. Traditional midwives were given training in the Civil Dispensaries of the Madras Presidency for dedicated service among the native population. The first Christian medical training school for women in south India was opened by Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder at Vellore in Tamilnadu in 1908. The government of Madras also took interest in improving women's health, not only by educating them, but also by starting dispensaries. The earliest hospital, specially meant for women was the government hospital for women and children at Madras started in 1844. Native kings and land lords contributed towards the construction of the Royal Victoria Caste and Gosha hospital at Madras in 1888. The Countess of Dufferin Fund created in 1885 and Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund created in 1903 were the earliest funds created for encouraging medical education among women as well as for providing training to the indigenous midwives.

II STUDY AREA

Tamilnadu is situated at the southern-eastern extremity of the Indian Peninsula bounded on the north by the State of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, on the south by the

Indian Ocean and on the east by the Bay of Bengal and on the west by the state of Kerala. During the colonial period Tamilnadu formed a major part of the Madras Presidency. Its head quarter is Madras presently known as Chennai.

III SOURCE MATERIALS

This article is written based on the primary sources collected from the Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai

IV, THE FIRST STEP: MADRAS MEDICAL COLLEGE

Madras Medical College had opened its portals to women as early as 1875. Dr. Balfour, the Surgeon General of Madras advocated medical education for women in 1872. He proposed two courses, first, a two year's training programme at the women and Children's Hospital and the second was a separate class for girls at the Men's Medical College. The Director of Public Instruction turned down the proposal thinking that it was entirely premature. However after a couple of years he brought up the question again and this time it was strongly supported by Dr. Furnell, the Principal of the Madras Medical College. In 1875 the Government of Madras sanctioned the admission of women students in to the medical college. In the same year for the first time four women students of European and Anglo-Indian decent were admitted in the Madras Medical College. They were Ms. Mary Scharlieb, Ms. Mitchell, Miss. D. White and Miss. M. Beale. They would qualify for the degree of the Madras University or for a certificate subject themselves to training at the college and at the hospitals for a period of three years, the first of which to be pre-collegiate and other two academic with clinical instruction at the hospitals. Since the Bengal Government had not permitted the women to study medicine, two women Ellen D. Abreu and Abala Das who had passed the first Arts and the entrance examinations respectively joined the Madras Medical College in 1881 with the scholarships from the Bengal Government. It is to be noted that Madras is a pioneer in imparting medical education to women. In Madras and Bombay up to 1884 - 85, no native woman passed the entrance examination of the University. There was also no institution in which they could be taught to that standard. In his report for the year 1884-85, the Director H.B. Grigg observed with reference to the absence of any provision for training female students to the entrance examination standard as follows: "this defect is much to be regarded and if not remedied will probably result in the natives of India being supplemented in the advanced institutions by mistresses imported from Europe having higher qualifications." Till 1883 the Calcutta Medical College refused admission to women students to study medicine there. Hence the women students from Bengal who had passed the qualifying examination of the University were compelled to pursue their medical studies in Madras. In a resolution passed on 2nd June 1883, women candidates who had duly passed the First Arts examination as required in the case of men were

declared admissible to the Medical College of Calcutta. The Lieutenant Governor also sanctioned a special scholarship of Rs.20/- per month tenable for five years, for all women candidates without restriction, who after passing the First Arts examination elected to join the Medical College. In May 1883 the Government of Bombay decided to open a class in the Grant Medical College at first for non-University women students and after five years for those alone who had passed the licentiate examination.

There were five women students in the Madras Medical College, seventeen in the Grant Medical College in Bombay and three in the Calcutta medical College during the year 1884-85. A.M. Van Ingen, a student of the Madras Medical College passed the L.M.S. degree of the Madras University in 1885. She was the first woman graduate of the Madras University. Mary Scharlieb, an alumnus of the Madras Medical College, became the first woman to take the M.D. degree of the London University (1888). She was appointed as the Lecturer to teach Midwifery and Diseases of Women and Children in the Madras Medical College, the first woman to hold that post. In 1902 she got appointment as Physician in the Royal Free Hospital, London. Krupabai Sathianadhan was the first south Indian woman to join the Medical College. Though she stood first she had to discontinue her studies on account of her ill-health. Ayachiammal was awarded the degree of L.M.S. in the year 1890. She passed in second class and became the Civil Surgeon in the Maternity Hospital, Bangalore. Probably she would have been the first South Indian woman to take that degree.

V SCHOLARSHIPS

To encourage women students to join the medical course, numerous scholarships were made available for them by the Government, philanthropists and the native kings. Foremost among them was the Countess Dufferin Fund created in 1885. From that Fund, scholarships were given to eligible women. Women of any nationality were eligible and it carried a monthly stipend of Rs.25/- tenable for four years. The students had to produce certificates of age and qualification and satisfactory testimonial of character. The successful students had to serve when qualified the boards for a term of five years. The Madras Branch of the Countess Dufferin Fund Committee had the power to suspend or withdraw a scholarship if the holder of it misbehaved in any way or was likely to prove ineffective. In 1886 the Fund supported six women students in Madras Medical College, eighteen in Bombay's Grant Medical College and three in Calcutta Medical College. The Fund had thirty female students studying in the Madras Medical College in 1904. Of them eleven were in the college classes and others in the Apothecary department. Of the total number, twelve were Dufferin scholars; eight held other scholarships and ten were private scholars. The Fund also had four midwifery pupils in training. Women stipend holders were given jobs wherever needed by the Dufferin Fund.

Krupabai Sathianadhan Medical Scholarship was also instituted for women to perceive medical education. This scholarship was given only to native women who were willing to qualify for the medical profession in the Apothecary or higher grades. The amount of scholarship was Rs. 25/- per month for the entire course period for which the candidate was selected.

The Travancore Government introduced a scholarship in 1892 for a period of nine years to enable young women born and educated in Travancore to study for the Certificate of Apothecary or Medical Degree and two scholarships to enable young women being the native of and educated in Travancore to study for the Certificate of Hospital Assistant in the Madras Medical College. The Cochin Government also started a scholarship for the women born in Cochin to study in the Madras Medical College.

Bharati Lakshmi Scholarship of Rs.15/- monthly stipend was instituted by the H.H. the Maharajah of Travancore for the purpose of encouraging female medical education in South India. It was open to all females of any nation or creed who pursued medical studies in the Madras Medical College to obtain a degree of the University or the college certificate and who had passed the university educational test or the higher examination for women. Five Government stipends of Rs.50/- each per month for MB & CM course tenable for five years were awarded to women candidates who passed the Intermediate examinations and who were under 25 years. The Lane Scholarships of Rs.30/- each per month for five years were given to one male and one female student. Anne Isabella Subramaniam. Scholarship of Rs.20/- per month for five years was given to Indian Christian male or female of the Madras Presidency or the States of Mysore, Travancore, Cochin or Pudukottai studying for the LMP (Dip).

Bharati Lakshmi Gold Medal was founded in 1884 by the H. H. the Maharajah of Travancore to the female students who displayed proficiency in the subjects of Midwifery and diseases special to women and the children. Rajah Sir Savalay Ramaswamy Gold Medal founded in 1884 was awarded to the female candidates who in passing the final MB & CM. examination secured the highest marks in Midwifery and diseases special to women and the children including Clinical Midwifery. The Balfour Memorial Gold Medal instituted in 1890 was awarded to the female candidate who in passing the final LMS examination scoring not less than 75% marks in Midwifery and diseases special to women and the children. The Queen Empress Gold Medal instituted in 1886 was awarded to the female students obtaining the highest marks in passing either the LMS or MB & CM examination of the University of Madras with first class. The Viceroy's Silver Medal was available each year for female medical student who qualify as medical practitioner by securing the highest place in the first class at the final examination. All these scholarships were given through the Madras Branch of the Countess of Dufferin Fund. All students receiving scholarships from the Fund on the expiration of the term of

medical study were bound to serve the Association for at least five years if called upon to do so.

Since the formation of the Fund the Madras Medical College had taken a leading part in educating the women practitioners who practice and were appointed to Hospitals and Dispensaries under the auspices of the Fund. Excellent clinical education and instruction was afforded to students in the General and other Hospitals in Madras which they had to walk to complete their education. During the year 1916 – 17 the control of the government grants made hitherto to the Countess Dufferin Fund was transferred to the Surgeon – General and the selection of the candidates for the award of scholarships had also been transferred to him. The Government also directly introduced stipends to women medical students. In the year 1917 the Government sanctioned free supply of book and instruments to the Dufferin Fund scholars studying in the Intermediate class of the Queen Mary's College preliminary to their joining the medical college. The books would by rule remain the property of the Government. A woman tutor was appointed in 1926 at the Medical College Madras to teach women students who were backward in their studies.

The curriculum was also designed to equip the women students in the diseases special to women and children. For the third year there was a paper on Midwifery and Diseases special to women and children for both MB & CM and LMS courses. It was meant only for female students. In the fourth year there was a similar paper common to both the sexes under the respective teachers. All other papers were common to both the sexes. Another credit to be noted is that the Madras Presidency continued to be the only province of India in which women were given medical education free of cost. As a result gradually the strength of women in the medical colleges increased. In the year 1908 –9, there were 220 students under instruction in the Madras Medical College. Among them thirteen were women. In the same year in the school department of the medical college there were fifty-nine apothecary students including nineteen women. During the year 1916 there were fourteen women students in the medical college, within five years in 1921, the number of women students in the medical college increased to twenty five and in 1923 it was thirty eight. It showed a gradual progress and in 1926 there were forty six women students in the medical colleges. In the year 1937-38, there were 937 students in the Madras Medical College, of them 748 including 109 women were studying for the MBBS. Of the 985 students in the Madras Medical College during the year 1939-40, 764 including 141 women were studying for the MBBS, and forty one for the LMP including five women. Others were Sanitary Inspectors, Chemists, and Druggists. Of the sixty six students joined the Stanley Medical College sixteen were women. By 1945 Madras Medical College had on its roll 1014 students, of whom 788 including 194 women were in the MBBS course. In the year 1945, seventy two students including fifteen were women were admitted in the Stanley Medical College. In the same year, there were 346 students including forty four

women studied in the schools of Indian Medicine. In 1947 there were 1099 students on roll in the Madras Medical College, of whom 872 including 193 women were in the MBBS classes. In the Stanley Medical College, there were seventy two students of whom sixteen were women. In the Guntur Medical College in the second year of its existence there were ninety six students of whom twenty were women. By 1947 there were five Government Medical Colleges and one Christian Medical College at Vellore that continued to receive financial aid from the Government. The fee concession granted to women medical students were stopped from July 1947.

VI, MEDICAL SCHOOLS

Medical Schools were also thrown open to women. The Auxiliary Medical School was established at Royapuram in Madras in 1877 to meet the deficiency in the strength of the subordinate Medical establishment during the Madras famine. It was affiliated to the Medical College in 1879. In 1883 the government abolished the Junior Department in the college and established the school as a permanent institution for the education of Hospital Assistants. His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales Medical School was established at Tanjore in 1883. The number of medical schools in the Madras Presidency in the year 1883 – 84 was three and the attendance was 75. On the whole in India in the year 1886 there were fifteen medical schools. Like the medical schools in the Madras Presidency other medical schools were also thrown open to women. By 1890 there were 36 women and 225 men studying in the three medical schools in the Madras Presidency. It increased to 89 women and 683 men in 1930 in the four medical schools, apart from that, a considerable number of women studied in the private missionary medical school for women at Vellore. In the school department of the Madras Medical College there were 308 students under instruction in the year 1893 –94.

Before the College Board of Examination eighteen students including twelve women appeared for the final examination and eleven students including six women appeared for the primary examination of the diploma of Apothecary and all passed. In the medical college there were eighty two students in the MB & CM section and there were forty-nine including five women in the LMS section in the same year. In the next year the students' strength in the medical college fell from 82 to 72. Twenty including one woman student were in the MB & CM section and thirty two including three women students were in the LMS section. Nine students including a native Christian woman obtained British diplomas.

There had been a long felt want for the separate medical school for women. This had been met by the establishment of the Lady Willington Medical School for Women at Madras in July 1923. In the year 1934 in that school alone there were ninety eight women studying and it increased to 105 in the year 1936. The Apothecary class for women students ceased from 1st July 1923. LMS degree was abolished in 1925. In the year 1928 –29, there were 161

women students in the medical schools and seventy four women in the medical college.

Stanley Medical College was also started as a Military Medical school. A five year course of training for LMP was introduced in 1933 by George Fredrick Stanley, the then Governor of Madras. Consequent to the abolition of the Lady Willington Medical School, the lady students were admitted in this school. The School was raised as college in 1938 to bring about uniformity in the standard of medical education.

VII, WOMEN PIONEERS

There were a few notable women pioneers in the field whose efforts should forever to be remembered. Miss V.V. Janaki, a Malabar young woman passed LMS from the Madras Medical College, in 1909. Her enterprise and her success reflected the community to which she belonged. On her success the medical professionals and the lay community wished her a grand success in her career. She was the recipient of the medical scholarship for year 1903-4. Mrs. Kamalakar, LMS of Madras was given a scholarship of the value of Rs.4000/- by the Rajah of Pittapore in 1907 to continue her medical studies in Europe. She had applied for the same on the suggestions of the Hon'ble J.N, Atkinson of the Board of Revenue.

S.Muthulakshmi Reddy of Pudukottai joined the Madras Medical College in 1907. She was inspired by the photograph of two women dressed in the graduate gown appeared in a magazine. She too longed to become a graduate. At that time there was no hostel for girls other than Christian hostels and her parents were not prepared to admit her there. So they rented a house where she could stay and pursue her medical studies. She was an excellent student and always stood first in the examination and passed the MB & CM the highest medical degree in 1912. She earned so many medals and honours that Col. Giffard, the famous Gynec Surgeon who presided over the college day celebration related that it was a red letter day in the annals of the Madras Medical College that a Hindu woman had taken the highest University medical degree with distinction, medal and honours.

Mrs. Rathamma Isaac was the first appointed woman Doctor in the Government Maternity Hospital of women. Her school and college careers were successful ones. She was educated in the Sarah Tucker College, Palayamcottah and passed the First Arts in 1907. She stood first in the LMS Degree examination of the Madras University passing successfully every year through the five years course and winning the Midwifery medal of the college.

Hilda Lazarus joined the Madras Medical College in 1911. Born in Vizagapatnam in 1890 she was one of the most successful women doctors in India. She did her primary education in the London Mission High School for Boys under her father D. Lazarus B.A, its principal. Although she had to compete with boys in the school who were much older to her, she succeeded in winning the first prize in every class and

obtained a Government scholarship which was continued to her till she completed her B.A. Degree examination in 1911. Then the Madras University awarded her the Anne Isabella Subramanian scholarship to pursue her medical studies. She passed with credit many examinations of the college and of the university and in 1915 she obtained the Bharati Lakshmi Gold Medal for excellence in Midwifery. In July 1916 she passed the final MB & CM examination taking the third place in the Presidency. After completing her medical studies in the Madras Medical College, she obtained the Wadia Scholarship of Rs.3000/- for one year and had gone to England in Aug. 1917 to obtain higher degree and learn practical work in the leading hospitals of London. She obtained the degrees of DGO in London and FRCS in Edinburgh. Then she joined as the Lecturer in Gynaecology and Obstetrics in Madras.

Lakshmi Sahgal studied at the Madras Medical College and took her MBBS degree in 1938. A year later she got a diploma in Obstetrics and Gynaecology (DGO) and worked in the Government Kasturba Gandhi Hospital, Triplicane, Chennai. She went to Singapore in 1940 established a clinic for the poor, most of whom were migrant laborers from India. Then she joined the Indian National Army and became captain of the Rani Lakshmbai Regiment of Indian National Army with the blessings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. She aided wounded prisoners of war.

T.V.S.Soundaram joined the Lady Hardinge Medical College, Delhi and got her MBBS in 1936. In 1947, she started the Kasturba Hospital as a two-bed clinic in a house in Chinnalapatti, a small town on the Madurai Dindigul highway. Under the visionary leadership of Dr Soundaram, the hospital made several inroads into rural health and family welfare which is now a 220-bed hospital. Perhaps these were a few of the native girls who were able to break the academic as well as social barriers against women's entry in medical profession and created a record for themselves.

VIII, DR.IDA SOPHIA SCUDDER

The first Christian medical training school for women in South India was opened by Dr.Ida Sophia Scudder. The Christian Medical College and Hospital today is the outcome of the effort of this single woman. Born in 1870, Ida visited her missionary parents at Ranipet in South India in 1890. One night her help was sought for three young women from different families struggling in difficult childbirth. Being without training at that time Ida herself could do nothing. She advised them to get the help of her missionary father who was also a medical doctor. However to her surprise, the men responded saying "what! take a man into my house to care for my wife? It is better that she should die than another man should look upon her face". Custom prevented them from accepting the help of a male doctor. To her shock Ida found out that all the three women had died. She believed that it was a calling and a challenge set before her by God to begin a ministry to the health needs of the people of India, particularly women and children.

She went to America, joined medical training and graduated from Cornell University Medical College as one of the first group of women students in 1899. She specialized in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and returned to India in 1900 and opened one bed clinic in her father's bungalow at Vellore. Women patients began to multiply everyday and over 5000 patients were treated in the year 1901. Then a new hospital for women and children with forty beds was opened in 1902 with the help of the generous donation of \$ 10,000 offered by Mr.Schell, the president of the New York Metropolitan Bank in memory of his wife Mary Taber Schell. The hospital was named as Mary Tabel Schell hospital after the name of its donor. Then she realized that the women of India themselves should be trained to help in medical work. She started a School of Nursing for women in 1909 which was upgraded to a College of Nursing in 1945. In 1918 she established the Medical School for Women at Vellore, which was raised to MBBS standard in 1942 and became the great co-operative Christian enterprise, the Christian Medical College, Vellore (CMC). In 1947, this exclusively women's college was thrown open to men students also. Today CMC offers nearly hundred recognized training programs for men and women in allied health, nursing and medical field.

IX, CONCLUSION

With the achievement of independence, the health of the nation became a matter of fundamental importance common to the government and the people. If the nation is to produce strong and healthy citizens special attention must be paid to the care of mothers and children and bring down the maternal and infant mortality. Accordingly every encouragement had been given to the starting and maintenance of maternity and child welfare centres by local bodies as well private associations with the help of the liberal, non-recurring, and recurring grants. To improve the health status of women and to reduce the birth rate the Madras government introduced family planning propaganda among all the married couples. Family planning clinics were opened and facilities for undergoing sterilization operation had been provided in almost all the government hospitals in the state. Contraceptives were distributed free to fathers and mothers. The state also implemented the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act in 1972.

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