

Calcutta Notebook

SKM

The year “1861” is “Anna Mirabalis” in the history of science in India. The first Nobel Laureate in Literature (1913) in the Afro-Asian continent—Rabindranath Thakur (1861-1941), the first female graduate (1882) of the University of Calcutta, the first female medical student (1883) of the Medical College, Bengal, the first Indian lady doctor and also the first Great Britain–returned lady doctor Kadambini Ganguly (1861-1923) and Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy (1861-1944) were born in the same year. Strangely enough women's liberation movement has no time to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Kadam-bini who broke many taboos and took bold initiatives in spreading women's education in those days of conservatism.

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 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.

Kadambini Ganguly (Gangopa-dhay–nee, Basu) was the daughter of Brajakishore Basu—an enthusiastic Brahamha 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 FA (First Arts) and BA (Batchelor 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. In a way Calcutta University's record is commendable, as the history of Rational Medicine (Hippocratic) shows:

First Women Doctors

13th CENTURY EUROPE:

* SALERNO (Nr. Naples), ITALY: First Women and Men Trained as Doctors of Medicine (M.D.).

USA:

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL (1821-1910)-English/American -New York, 1849.

UK:

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.

She was awarded GBMC (Graduate of Bengal Medical College) in 1886. Kadambini was one of the first lady doctors in the world. Kadambini was a 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 practised obstetrics and gynaecology in Calcutta. She was professionally very successful.

She actively participated in social reform movements of her time. 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.

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 Osier (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 a trade, a calling, not a business, a calling in which your heart will be used equally as much as your head." □□□