



## DISTINGUISHED WOMEN DOCTORS AS PIONEERS OF MEDICAL FIELD: CONTRIBUTION AND STRUGGLE

\* Mrs. Swati Deshpande

\* Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Sociology, S.N.D.T. Women's University, Mumbai 20.

### Introduction:

The medical field is an important aspect of social system. It is highly functional in society and also contributes to the working pattern of social system. Medical field was highly dominated by men for last

many centuries. Men were operative and highly functional in the field of medicine. Rather the functioning pattern of medical field is male oriented. From Vedic period to colonial period, it was highly dominated by male members.

**Copyright © 2022 The Author(s):** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

Retrospective analysis of the history of medicine reveals the fact that women's absence in the medical field was due to prevailing conditions of society upto late 19th century and also to some extent in the first part of 20th century. The established order of Indian society upto late 19th century did not allow women to take medical education. During 19th century of colonial period women entered into the field of medicine. Very few females made an attempt to enter into the medical field; some of them can be considered as distinguished women personalities in the medical field. They have struggled to establish themselves in the field of medicine. It is inspiring and motivational for many other women who entered into the medical field and established in their professions. In order to understand why women remained away from the field of medicine it is necessary to know the status and position of women right from the Vedic period upto colonial period.

The condition started changing during the colonial period. It was made possible during colonial period to go through formal education, that enabled women to enter the medical field.

### Status of Women in Indian Society: -

#### 1. Rigvedic Period: -

Women had respectful position in the society during Rigvedic period. Women were permitted to get actively involved in the various activities of society such as education, horse riding, gymnastics. Women were given the respect and high status in the society. Women could educate themselves till 16 years of their life. Upanayan ceremony was also performed before entering the educational field for boys as well as for girls. Thus, we find scholarly women during this period like Sulbha, Gargi and Maitreyi. By going through the educational training some of them had become the great poet and by studying theology and philosophy some of them had become the great scholars. Women could take the teaching profession.



Wife was given the respect. The practices of Sati and Purdah did not exist. the religious rights were enjoyed by women. They could also Perform the rituals, could also perform the religious rites, could utter the prayers. Women had an economic independence. She could get involved in economic activities. She was also permitted to do agriculture. Property was owned by husband and wife jointly.

## 2. Post-Vedic Period: -

Women enjoyed a high status and position during the Vedic period. This situation changed in the post Vedic period. Women's position was deteriorated in the post-Vedic period. Women were not permitted to get involved in various public activities. The educational right as it was given to women during Vedic period was stopped. Women were not allowed to pursue the higher studies. The main reason behind this was child marriage. Parents were more interested in arranging the marriage for their daughters in early age. It was becoming compulsory. Upanayana ceremony was not performed for girls. It was stopped. Religious rights were taken off. Women could not perform the religious rights during post Vedic period. Composition of hymns was stopped for girls. Girls were not allowed to say any Vedic prayers.

the age for marriage was lower down for girls. At the age of 13 or 14 girls got married. Girls did not have any freedom in selecting the partner for their life. Marriage was obligatory for the girls. Unmarried status of girl was criticized. It was considered risky for women but not for men. The practice of Sati was there in post Vedic period but widow remarriage was stopped. Unmarried daughter's right in father's property was taken off. The position of women declined during post Vedic period.

## 3. Medieval Period: -

Women's position during medieval period in India was in a more deteriorated stage. Men, were in dominant position in medieval period because they had more power but women had declined position. It was the period of Muslim entry into Indian society. Many changes had taken place during this period. Certain practices got established in society during this period such as Sati, Child marriage, Purdah system. Women position was further deteriorated in society. Women's freedom was curtailed. Women could not participate in public activities. Staying within the family become compulsory and taking interest in the family responsibilities was more compulsory for women. Women had to live restricted life during medieval period: Thus, the kind of life to be lived was decided by society.

There was a greater discrimination between men and women. The practices like female infanticide, Zenana and the practice of polygamy existed during medieval period. Dowry system was also prevalent during medieval time. All these social evils deteriorated women's status and position in society.

## 4. During British Period: -

At the time of arrival of Britishers in India women were having subordinate position. Women were going through many difficulties. All the social evil practices deteriorating women's position were existing in India. These social evils had affected many areas of women's life. This situation lowered down the status and position of women in society.

The traditional order of society remained as it is when British people entered India. Women were going through social and economic backwardness. The arrival of British people in Indian society had changed certain aspects. Some changes were introduced in society by British people. The introduction of Western education for Indians was



responsible for the enlightened Indians in the country. A group of social reformers emerged from this enlightened group. This group of social reformers was fighting against the social evils existing in 19th century in Indian society. One of the aspects was to change the status and position of women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy as the pillar of the social reform movement strongly opposed social evils in the society.

Women's education was another change taking place during colonial period. women were not permitted to take education in traditional society but the educational system was opened for women during the British people. Schools and colleges were opened for the women during colonial period. Social reformer supported women's education. This was basically to change women's subordinate Positions. This stage opened the gates to higher education for women. This is one of the responsible factors for entry into medical education for girls.

#### **Status of women in Post-independent India:**

In the post-independence period women's position started changing. This was due to implementation of some schemes and policies as responsible for changing women 's position. In independent India some laws were passed in favour of women to change their position, such as the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 also the Orphanage and Widow Home Act of 1960. The constitutional rights also changed women's position in Indian society. Thus, it is necessary to understand women 's entry into the field of medicine.

#### **Women's Entry into the Medical Field: -**

Women's entry in the field of medicine during colonial period is the starting point for the development of medical field among women. The efforts made by Britishers in the second half of the 19th Century and in early part of 20th century are responsible for women's entry into the field of medicine. There were no women

doctors to treat women patients. So, women were not going to the hospitals for treatment. So, the British government had decided to give medical training to the Indian women. Indian women were trained in western medical field and also for Indian medical practice of midwifery.

Missionaries in the late 19th century helped Indian women to get training for nursing, to become mid-wives and also for hospital related matters. Trained women in medicine from England and USA had come to India to train the Indian women. Edith Meri Brown (1864-1956) and Ida Scudder (1870-1960) Arrived in India to train the Indian women. Remarkable efforts were made by missionaries and the British rulers to train Indian women in medical field. Thus, the number of women working in the field of medicine started increasing. Indian women started working in the hospitals of India. Some of them went abroad for higher education.

#### **Women in Medicine in 20th Century: -**

The number of women entering into medical profession was increasing in 20th century. Medical schools were opened in Ludhiana in 1950 and also in Delhi the Lady Hardinge Medical College was established in Delhi in 1916. Girls started enrolling for medical field was increasing. In 1960-61 girls enrolled for medical faculty was 20.4% and in 2003-04 the enrolment went up to 46.3%.

On the basis of historical facts about women's participation in medical field it is necessary to understand the contribution of women doctors as pioneers to the medical field.

#### **Methodology:**

- **Statement of the Research Problem: -**

Distinguished women doctors as pioneers of medical field: Contribution and Struggle

- **Objectives of the Study: -**



- To understand the status and role of Indian women.
- To study the contribution of distinguished women doctors in India.
- **Data Collection: -**
  - This paper is purely based on secondary data available in the scholarly articles and books, with special reference to women doctors' contribution.
- **Data Analysis and Conclusions: -**

Data related to the topic will be collected through secondary source and will be analysed it in the proper manner manually and conclusion will be based on collected available data.

#### **Content and Discussion:**

#### **Struggle and contribution of women doctors to the medical field: -**

The distinguish personalities are the Pioneer women doctors in the field of medicine. Their struggle and contribution to the field of medicine is remarkable.

- **Anandibai Joshi**

Anandibai Joshi is the first woman doctor in India of 19th century. She studied Western medicine for which she was motivated by her husband. She went to America to study medicine. It was her husband's strong will that she should study medicine. In the late 19th century going abroad to study western medicine was against the established order of society. Rather it should be stated that Gopalrao, her husband agreed to marry her on the condition that he would teach her. The condition was said that nobody would interfere in the matter. Gopalrao, her husband had taken all the efforts to teach her. education of Anandibai was strongly opposed by her father-in-law because it was opposed by the society at that time. Anandibai had also attended missionary School. This was not

socially accepted by the society in letter part of 19th century.

In spite of the strong opposition from society Dr Anandibai's husband Gopalrao strongly decided to send his wife to America for her higher education. His decision was followed by the correspondence with Rav. Wilder of Princeton of New Jersey. Gopalrao had projected his strong will to send his wife to America to study further in the field of medicine. Anandibai had to struggle to take the basic education in India. She was educating herself against the strong opposition of Indian society.

The real development had taken place after the correspondence done by Gopalrao. B. F. Carpenter of New Jersey had come across the correspondence and had decided to support Anandibai. Anandibai left India and went to Philadelphia in 1883. B. F. Carpenter helped her to take admission in American medical college. She went to America by ship alone. She went from Calcutta to America on 7th April 1883. Anandibai had to struggle on health ground. Due to unsuitable weather for her and intake of food was not proper, she could not maintain her health. She was struggling on the health issue and was trying to complete her education in America.

She studied in Women's Medical college of Pennsylvania. She lived for 3 years as the student of medicine in America. She got her degree in medicine in 1886. She returned back to India. She could not practice after returning back to India as a doctor due to her ill health. She suffered from tuberculosis. She passed away early. So she could not serve the women of her nation. Anandibai could complete her medical education because she was granted the individual freedom by her husband. This treatment included intellectual aspect.

After coming back her health did not support her and she passed away on 29th February 1887.



Gopalrao remains best known as Anandibai's husband. Anandibai was the first woman doctor of India.

- **Kadambini Ganguli: -**

Dr. Kadambini Ganguly's Contribution to the field of medicine and her struggle is noteworthy. Doctor Kadambini was first woman to graduate from Calcutta University in 1882. She comes from such a family background in which her father encouraged higher education for girls. He wanted his daughter to be educated. Dr. Kadambini Ganguly applied to Calcutta Medical College and she was given the admission to go ahead and pursue her medical education. In 1884 scholarship was given by the government of India to Dr. Kadambini Ganguly of Rs.20. which she got till she completed her medical education. Kadambini was graduated in 1886 from Bengal medical college, called as GBMC. Her graduation in the medical field gave her the right to practice privately. Dr. Kadambini made further progress in the medical field. She was highly interested to go ahead in the field of medicine. In 1888 Dr. Kadambini had taken up the job as a doctor in the Lady Dufferin Women's Hospital. She earned Rs.300 from this job. She was also earning well from her private practice.

The graph of her medical education was rising further. Her hardship and efforts had taken her up to the high level in medical field. Dr. Kadambini went to Edinburgh for further studies. On the basis of the progress that she made, it can be stated that she had to face many problems and difficulties in her career. Prevailing situations and conditions were responsible to go through many difficulties. She had to face the gender bias in her career. Her entry into the world of male dominated medical field was not appreciated and accepted by the society.

She was equally competitive and a successful doctor. Society was not accepting Dr. Kadambini's success in the medical field because it was motivating and inspiring for other women to enter in the field of medicine. She was criticized by society for the greater extent. Society did not want the other women to enter the field of medicine. In 1891 in the journal called 'Bangabas' Dr. Kadambini Ganguli was criticized in which the author called her "Whore". The action was taken for whatever was said against her and author was punished.

Male members of society in the late 19th century were against educating women and women's social mobility because they wanted to keep women under their authority and control. Despite the situation Kadambini could make the progress because she was supported by her husband and the members of Brahmo Samaj. Her independent minded approach helped her to make further progress in her medical field.

Apart from male resistance Dr. Kadambini also faced the problem of racist bias and male domination. She had experienced the racist bias in the medical field. As an employee of Zenana hospital of Calcutta, she was not given the permanent post but was given only the temporary post. She had strongly raised her voice against this. She stated that, this situation would not allow to make the progress in the medical field.

- **Haimabati Sen: -**

Haimabati Sen became widow at very early age. Haimabati had joined educational field. Haimabati was the literate women in the age when illiteracy was prevailing in the society. She was a child widow. She remarried. Haimabati Sen to educate herself joined the Campbell Medical School in 1891. Women could educate themselves in



Campbell Medical School through Vernacular medium. Indian teachers thought in Campbell medical school. Some basic knowledge of medicine and surgery was given to student.

Haimabati could study very well in this Campbell medical school. She stood first among all men and women students of Campbell medical school. She secured gold medal as the topper. The boys of the same batch who completed their medical education with her had taken objection. The boys rejected and resisted this decision of giving gold medal to her. Even the general public opinion was against giving gold medal to Haimabati.

Thus, gender issue had taken place. Haimabati had faced the gender discrimination as established issue in the society. Haimabati had given up her gold medal. She had made the progress further in her career. Dr. Haimabati joined the Hooghly Lady Dufferin Women's Hospital. She worked there as a lady doctor. She could also do her private practice. This was basically the earning source for her. In spite of earning well and bread winner for the family she had to depend on her husband. The husband was controlling the finance. It shows that the principle of patriarchy persisted. Haimabati had to go through sexual harassment at her workplace. It was done by her senior doctor. For making complaints against this she was harassed. In spite of warning the senior person, he continued harassing her. He was taking the revenge on her by continuing to harass her in different ways. She was troubled in different ways. She was also against the malpractices taking place in the hospital.

- **Rukhmabai Raut: -**

Rukhmabai as a doctor contributed her service to society. Rukhmabai had to face many difficulties in her personal life. Her marriage was settled with Dadaji Bhikaji, turned into the disturbed

relationships. Later she wanted to restore back their marital relationships. The relationship never settled back and the Separation had taken place in 1887.

Rukhmabai later decided to study medicine. Two years after her separation she went to London to pursue her medical education. She completed her MD in 1894. Pechy Phipson Encouraged her to take this medical education. After returning back to India she contributed to the medical field in India. She worked as house surgeon at Cama Hospital. She had given her service to Cama Hospital very selflessly. She had also given her service to hospital at Surat it was Morabhai Vajrabhushandas Hospital. This was between 1895 to 1917 and between 1918 to 1930. She had given her services to princely state of Saurashtra. She helped society when there was plague and influenza.

Rukhmabai worked with Arya Samaj for 40 years. she was the inspiring personality for many women as doctor. She also worked as a mentor for many women who needed some help, when they were in distress. Rukhmabai Encouraged women to join nursing. She struggled to established nursing in society for which she used her property.

- **Jerusha Jhirad**

Jerusha Jhirad finished her medical graduation from Grant Medical College in 1912. For the further studies in medicine, she went to London. She studied in London School of medicines. She completed her MD in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in London School of Medicine. She received her scholarship of 200 pounds every year for 5 years from the government. She also worked in Anderson Hospital London as house surgeon.

After coming back to India with her training in medical education she had given her service to people in India. She started working at Lady Harding Medical College and Hospitals. She also



worked at Bangalore in Maternity Hospital as senior surgeon. She started her private practice in Mumbai. Her contribution to Cama hospital is remarkable. She worked in, hospital as honorary surgeon between 1925 to 1928. She worked as Medical officer between 1928 to 1947. She was the first Indian women to work as Medical officer. She had always favoured for providing medical facilities and education to girls. She had given her true service to Cama hospital. She was the contributing personality as a women doctor to the expansion and development of Cama hospital. She had given guidance to undergraduate and postgraduate students.

- **Rani Rajwade**

Rani Rajwade's position in the history of medicine is remarkable. Rani Rajwade was the daughter of reformers Sir Moropant Joshi. He was also a nationalist. Rani Rajwade was a medical student. She earned gold medal at Grant Medical College. She went to England for her further studies. After returning back to India in 1912 she started working in the field of medicine. She was providing her service in medicine to Indian women. She had set up for nursing home, operation theatre and consulting room for people in India.

The article is an attempt to understand the historical facts of women doctor's participation in the field of medicine. It represents the struggle of women doctor for taking medical education and their contribution to the field. The later part of 19th century is taken into account to discuss the struggle and contribution of distinguished women personalities in the field of medicine. The medical field of 19th century was male dominated. During this colonial period the efforts made by British rulers and missionaries motivated Indian women to enter the field of medicine. An efforts are made to

understand how women entered the medical field and how they grappled to settle down in the field.

The analysis of the social conditions of 19th century presents the fact that women were not allowed to enter the field of medicine. The norms of traditional Indian society did not give freedom to women. They could not get involved in public life. Their life was restricted to only four walls of their house. During this colonial period the efforts were made by British ruler and missionaries to educate women and also encourage them to join medical field. Retrospectively Speaking, it can be stated that women's status and position was in derogatory manner.

During Vedic period Women were given the respect and they were treated in a right manner. They enjoyed freedom to very large extent. It started deteriorating during the post Vedic period, medieval period, right up to colonial period. The efforts were made during colonial period to educate them and also motivated them to go for medical education. The efforts made by British ruler and missionaries were in positive direction.

Thus, women joined the western medical education to serve Indian women. Some of them can be called as distinguish personalities. They have not only struggled but contributed to the history of medicine. The distinguished personalities as women doctors in 19th century are Dr. Anandibai Joshi, Dr. Kadambini Ganguly, Dr. Haimabati Sen, Dr. Jerusha Jhirad, Dr. Rukhmabai Raut and Dr. Rani Rajwade. It is mentioned and discussed in the history of medicine that some of them have struggled to get the degree in the medical field and get established as medical practitioners where as some of them have contributed to the medical field. Dr. Anandibai Joshi and Dr. Kadambini Ganguly had to face the social criticism for joining the



profession. The existing social conditions in India of late 19th century and early part of 20th century did not support women's education. In spite of these conditions of late 19th century and early 20th century Dr. Anandibai and Dr. Kadambini Ganguly joined the medical profession. Historical facts represent that the struggle of Dr. Anandibai Joshi and Dr. Kadambini Ganguly who joined medical profession and made progress in their medical career.

Dr. Anandibai Joshi could make the progress because she got the support of her husband and B. F. Carpenter to complete her medical education. She was strongly opposed by society in late 19th century and also by her father-in-law. In spite of this resistance she completed her medical education in America and returned back to India. She had to struggle to get adjusted to food and weather of America to complete her medical education. Dr. Anandibai is the first women doctor in India.

The conservative approach of late 19th century was also faced by Dr. Kadambini Ganguly to enter the medical profession. In spite of pervasive orthodox approach of society she entered the medical profession. Gender issues was functional in the late 19th century to the highest degree, which affected Dr. Kadambini Ganguly. Though she was equally successful medical practitioner it was not accepted by the society. Being a woman, she was rejected by the society.

Dr. Kadambini's success and achievement was also rejected on the ground that it was inspiring and motivating for other women to enter the medical field. Society did not want more and more women doctors to join medical field. The conservative approach of society towards women's progress gets rejected in her case. The gender issue and male resistance was equally faced by Dr. Haimabati Sen.

She was refused to be given the gold medal when she achieved it because she was a woman and the authority was pressurised to be given to male members. Dr. Haimabati Sen had also gone through the sexual harassment at her workplace, done by the senior doctor. It is the representation of male member towards society.

These three pioneers of the history of medicine present the fact that there was a strong resistance to establish themselves as medical practitioners in the male dominated medical field in conservative society of nineteenth century.

Some other distinguished personalities from the medical field have contributed to the medical field. Their contribution helped the further generations of women to join the medical field of medicine and to function successfully. Dr. Jerusha Jhirad can be taken in this context. Dr. Jerusha Jhirad after completing her medical education in London School of Medicine returned back to India and joined Cama Hospital is remarkable. She worked in the field of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. She is known as important personality for contributing to the development of Gynaecology department of Cama hospital.

Dr. Rukhmabai had also contributed to the development of medical field. She had given her service as surgeon to Cama Hospital. She worked for 40 years with Arya Samaj as inspiring for other woman doctor. Dr. Rani Rajwade should also be mentioned as an inspiring women doctor for women. She worked hard for the society by establishing her consulting room, operation theatre and Nursing Home.

All these distinguished personalities as female doctors have not only struggled and contributed to the medical field but have inspired and motivated the further generations of women doctors.



**Conclusions:**

1. British rulers and missionaries are responsible for women's entry into the medical field during colonial period.
  2. Women's Entry into the medical field was criticized and resisted by the established order of traditional society. This resistance and criticism are based on Talcott Parsons theory of biology and expressive female roles of bearing the child and nursing. The established order of traditional society is based on Parsons expressive role of a women. Parson's principle justifies the resistance by society in late 19th century for entry of women into the medical field.
  3. Women who entered the field of medicine had to face many difficulties to acquire medical education and get established as practitioners in the society. Sherry Ortner's Theory of the devaluation of women, suggest the fact of difficulties faced by distinguished women doctors. Ortner's analysis of culture as superior, controlled by men and nature as inferior to which women are closer. Thus, females are devaluated in society.
  4. Anandibai Joshi, Kadambini Ganguly, Hahimabati and Rukhmabai had to face gender discrimination and male domination of women doctors. This situation can be supported by Ernestine Friedl's analysis of male dominance and the sexual Division of labour. According to Ernestine Friedl certain task in society are defined as male roles, carries higher values. Friedl stated that male dominance exists in all societies. Since medical field is a male dominated the women faced gender discrimination and also experienced male dominance.
  5. The struggle of distinguished women in the medical field motivated further generations of women to join the medical field.
  6. Dr. Jerusha Jhirad's achievement in medical education is distinguishable.
  7. Dr. Jerusha Jhirad's contribution to Cama hospital is remarkable and Dr. Rani Rajwade's service to medical field is to be recognised.
  8. Distinguished women doctors contributed to the history of medical field.
  9. The distinguished women doctors have played their role by opposing the orthodox views of Indian society.
  10. They are the inspirational force for women doctors.
- In the light of above-mentioned contributions of distinguished women doctors, if we are judging or reviewing contemporary women doctors, we should say there is no remarkable change since last two centuries on the grounds of gender discrimination, male dominance, social and working conditions in the medical field.

**References And Webliography:**

- A.S., Altekar. (1938). The position of women in Hindu civilization. Rawat publication house.
- Bhadra, M. (2011, January - June). Indian Women in Medicine: An Enquiry Since 1880. Indian Anthropologist, 41(1), 17-34.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41921931>
- Gurjarpadhye, P. (2014, August 16). Through a Changing Feminist Lens. Economic and Political weekly, 49(33), 37-40.  
<https://www.epw.in/journal/2014/33/perspectives/through-changing-feminist-lens.html>
- Haralambos M.(2015). Sociology Themes and Perspectives. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Mukherjee, S. (2005-2006). WOMEN AND MEDICINE IN COLONIAL INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF THREE WOMEN DOCTORS. Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 66, 1183-1193.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/44145930>



Ramanna, M. (2008, March 22). Women Physicians as Vital Intermediaries in Colonial Bombay. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(12/13), 71-78.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41921931>

Ray, S. (2014). Women Doctors' Masterful Manoeuverings: Colonial Bengal, Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.

*Social Scientist*, 42(3/4), 59–76.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24372948>

Sen, I. (2012, March 24). Resisting Patriarchy : Complexities and Conflicts in the Memoir of Haimabati Sen. *Economic and Political weekly*, 47(12), 55-62.

<https://www.epw.in/journal/2012/12/special-articles/resisting-patriarchy.html>

#### **Cite This Article:**

\* *Mrs. Deshpande S. (2023). Distinguished Women Doctors as Pioneers of Medical Field: Contribution And Struggle, Aarhat Multidisciplinary International Education Research Journal, XII (IV) July-Aug, 21-30.*