



KADAMBINI GANGULY

## Medical Pioneer in the Service of Humanity

by Zaheda Ahmad

URMILA, the young heroine of Rabindranath's novel 'Two Sisters' (first published in 1933), on being set free from bondage to her worthless yet pompous husband, went abroad to train for the medical profession. Although her elderly father, in mourning for the loss of his only son, did not find fault with her noble mission, the author found it queer on the part of an upper class woman, Rabindranath, to be sure, was only reflecting the prevailing climate of opinion which, even after half a century of the beginning of medical training for women in Bengal or for that matter in India, was still very much prejudiced against, if not downright hostile to such training. Our present day sisters-in-medicine could hardly imagine what tremendous odds their pioneers and predecessors had to face and fight in those bygone days. These fighters, however, were not confined to this land alone although the time frame may not be exactly similar in other countries. Nowhere was it easy for those brave women to venture into that forbidden male preserve. For example, in enlightened Europe and America, continents proud of and known for their achievements in socio-economic and cultural fields, women medical pioneers did not have an easy sailing. In the eyes of their disapproving society a lady doctor was neither a doctor nor a lady. What was she then? Either a woman of loose morals or a crackpot — that was the ready verdict of a frowning society.

And yet the need for her services was there for obvious reasons. As for India, the combination of poverty, puritanism, prejudice and parda was an intolerable mix which rendered the lives of our female patients extremely miserable indeed. Society would rather have seen a female patient dead than to allow her to have face-to-face services of a male doctor. To get a glimpse of the harrowing experiences that our suffering women had to endure in those days one needs only to go through some of the real life stories so movingly recorded by that noble lady Begum Rokeya in her literary works. In contrast with her, one conservative newspaper, writing in May 1887, commented, "Women have not been dying hopelessly for want of female doctors. In most countries the female population exceeds the male population, and the female population is daily increasing. This would not have been the case if women had died largely for want of good medical treatment."

But enlightened elements, though far fewer in numbers, were coming forward to fight and work for a change. One of them was Durgamohan Basu whose second daughter Abala (later married to Sir Jagadishchandra Basu) sought admission into Calcutta Medical College three times but was turned down. Unsuccessful,

she went to Madras but terminated her medical studies on getting married — a not very uncommon end. In those days, for aspiring female students. Such prospects, however, could not derail Kadambini Ganguly, our first female physician, from her chosen path.

Born into a middle class Brahmo family in May 1861, Kadambini was fortunate to have two pioneers of female education — Brajakeshore Basu and Dwarakanath Ganguly, as her father and husband respectively. Brajakeshore, a son of Barisal, spent his working life in Calcutta where he was actively involved in the growing women's movement. Even then Kadambini had to clear a special qualifying examination at Calcutta university till then closed to women, in order to secure permission to sit for the entrance examination of that university. Then in quick succession she became the first female matriculate (1878), one of the two female graduates (1883) and then the first female practising physician in India. This last one proved even more difficult to acquire since the Calcutta Medical College authorities, male teachers included, were vehemently opposed to the admission of female medical students. On special intervention from the Bengal Governor, the medical college accepted her in 1884 but one diehard male teacher, Rajendra Chandra Chandra, got his revenge by deliberately undermarking her examination script in Medicine. Realising the injustice done to her college Principal Coates awarded her, on

her own authority (for which he was eligible), the certificate of Graduate of Medical College of Bengal — a recognition which enabled her to work at the Eden hospital in Calcutta. That was 1887 when Kadambini, adorned with the fitting laurel of the first female physician in Calcutta, set up her private practice in a Calcutta suburb. In spite of regular advertisement in the local newspapers she could hardly get a call from any Indian family. This was because families which were used to seeking

that Annie Besant, the Englishwoman turned Indian nationalist leader, wrote "It is a symbol that India's freedom would uplift India's womanhood." A woman of indomitable courage, boundless enthusiasm and remarkable energy Kadambini readily participated in activities and movements that had Indian women as their target group. On behalf of the Coalminers Enquiry Committee set up by the Congress Party in 1922 Kadambini along with poet Kamini Roy, went on a fact finding tour of the coalminers of Eastern India to see for herself the working condition of the female miners. Deplorable as it was for all miners, that of the female workers was far worse, due again, as always, to their subordinate socio-economic status. Ready, as ever, to respond to what she considered to be the call of duty in the service of her motherland, she sat on the boards of many organisations, commissions and committees in one capacity or another. Amid all these activities she raised a family of eight children all of whom, if not equally wellknown, were successful in their respective fields.

Few, if any, of today's professional women of Bengal could know what social prohibitions and prejudices a pioneer like Kadambini had to encounter, endure and eventually overcome in her not too long a life. Just one incident, not too untypical, narrated by Leela Majumdar, the noted Bengali author (a grand daughter of Kadambini and sister of Sukumar Ray) would be enough to give an indication of the contemporary social milieu that Kadambini came from and had to deal with. On a desperate medical call from a rich Bengali family of Calcutta Kadambini saved the lives of the 'expecting mother' and her yet to be born child. But that act of philanthropy could not endear her to the family where the attending doctor was served her meal in the servants' quarter in the company of its inmates. But that was not the end of the story. At the end of the meal, Kadambini had to clear the table and wash the dishes herself because that task was considered to be too polluting even for the servants of the house. Obviously, gynecologists and midwives in those days had to be endowed with specially thick skin so as to be able not to show the scars left by such treatment in the hands of an unkind taboo ridden society.

Kadambini Ganguly died in October 1923 in Calcutta. She practised what she preached all her life — that one lives by and dies for the ideals one believes in. No doubt, her husband enthusiastically helped and supported her in the pursuit of an active, successful life but she had to have the right stuff in herself. Otherwise no amount of external push could, by itself, have made her what she became — a pioneer in her own right.

work of the female's. Her private maintenance and household production for family use is considered secondary to her husband's work. She no longer contributes to a whole community but instead, works for her husband and her family. His ownership of private property makes him the ruler of the household. Woman's work is necessary but subordinate. Thus, with the birth of private property, and of the family, woman's position falls. She is no longer considered a public laborer, and hence no longer considered a social adult. From here onwards, woman becomes a wifely dependent.

## The Subordination of Woman

### How Did it Possibly Come Along?

by Anita Aparna Mueyed

WOMAN has not always been secondary in relation to man. After the birth of private property, many claim that a chain reaction took place, transforming the role of woman from an equal productive partner into a subordinate and dependent wife, daughter or ward. Fredrich Engels, the German socialist philosopher, one of the two founders of modern communism, strongly devotes his interests in an ethnographic and historical field. He lays out an evolutionary trend by which woman's role and status develops through a change of perspective: from an egalitarian to a hierarchical division of labor. He addresses the issue of the causes of the origin of the family and how it transforms woman's life in society. In the early times, in pre-class societies, productive resources were owned by the commune to meet subsistence. Communities, lived in 'gens' where the division of labor between man and woman was present. According to Engels, man carried out productive work whereas woman did household work. Yet, man and woman were equally valued, because, together, they made crucial economic and political contributions and decisions for the community, they were

considered social adults because both genders were public labourers. Before the ownership of private property, productive resources were used through commune. Private property, first originated as domesticated animals and cultivated lands. As people began to see its convenience, private ownership multiplied. The increase of private property inevitably, had a reverse effect on the political economy of the 'gens', and led to its degeneration. Instead of sharing all resources and work with their

partners, individual families now began to secure work and resources for themselves. Soon after this development, the spirit of the 'gens' broke down and disappeared. Now, the family became the most important unit of the community. With advancement of the time, production by males for exchange purposes became exclusively outside of the family. He had to go away from the family and barter for goods found elsewhere. His role grew more and more important and gradually raises his status higher than the overshadowed

#### Rising death to give life

Twelve nations have estimated maternal mortality rates of 800 or more. The average rate for Western Europe is 6.

Nation	Maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births)	Lifetime chance of dying in pregnancy or childbirth
Guinea	800	1 in 15
Nigeria	800	1 in 16
Zaire	800	1 in 16
Burkina Faso	810	1 in 16
Nepal	830	1 in 18
Congo	900	1 in 15
Papua N. Guinea	900	1 in 19
Chad	960	1 in 15
Ghana	1000	1 in 14
Somalia	1100	1 in 11
Bhutan	1310	1 in 11
Mali	2000	1 in 6

#### Maternal deaths

Maternal death rates for the 10 most populous nations of the developing world

Nation	Maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births)	Lifetime chance of dying in pregnancy or childbirth
China	95	1 in 400
Philippines	100	1 in 210
Mexico	110	1 in 240
Viet Nam	120	1 in 180
Brazil	200	1 in 150
Indonesia	450	1 in 60
India	460	1 in 45
Pakistan	500	1 in 30
Bangladesh	600	1 in 30
Nigeria	800	1 in 16

#### Low birth weight

Prevalence of low birth weight in the 10 nations with the largest numbers of births each year (representing almost 60% of all the world's births)

Nation	% babies born below 2.5 kg
United States	7
China	9
Brazil	11
Mexico	12
Indonesia	14
Ethiopia	16
Nigeria	16
Pakistan	25
India	33
Bangladesh	50

\* Adapted by permission from WHO, Division of Family Health, *Maternal mortality: a global burden*, 1991. <sup>†</sup> Total fertility rate: United Nations Population Division, *World population prospects: the 1992 revision*, 1993. <sup>‡</sup> Low birth weight: WHO, *Maternal Health and Safe Motherhood Programme*, low birth weight: a tabulation of available information, 1992.

WHEN a bomb blew up Sri Lankan opposition leader Gamini Dissanayake and killed 50 others at a political rally here in October, his widow Sirima soon replaced him as the presidential candidate.

Sririma Dissanayake was following a tradition that has become a trend in South Asia's gory politics since the region's countries gained independence from Britain nearly 50 years ago. Since then, nearly every national leader of stature has been killed.

Mahatma Gandhi: shot by Hindu fanatic, Solomon Bandaranaike: shot by Buddhist fanatic, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: shot by angry generals, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto: hanged, Gen Zia-ul-Haq: killed in airplane sabotage, Indira Gandhi: shot by angry Sikhs, Rajiv Gandhi: blown up by angry Tamils. The list goes on.... And even if the man in the political family was not killed, like Jawaharlal Nehru who died of ripe old age in 1964, his daughter Indira Gandhi rose up the ranks to become prime minister. When she was killed, her son Rajiv succeeded her. When he was killed, there was talk of his wife Sonia or daughter Priyanka taking his place.

In Sri Lanka this month, Dissanayake battled another political widow, Chandrika Kumaratunga, in presidential elections. When Kumaratunga was elected Sri Lanka's prime minister in August, it brought the number of women leaders in the South Asian sub-continent to three.

It is the second time in recent history that the country was being led by a woman. Twenty five years ago, Kumaratunga's mother, Sirima Bandaranaike, became the world's first woman prime minister.

Political pundits in the region find it ironic that a part of the world where the status of women is regarded as among the lowest should suddenly have so many women leaders. They debate whether this represents a quantum leap in gender equality, or is just a reflection of the region's slide toward dynastic democracies.

"Dynastic politics seek to reconcile the feudal and imperialistic legacy of South Asia and modern democratic politics," says Neelan Tiruchelvam, a member of the Sri Lankan parliament and a constitutional expert. "This has been a distinctive feature of South Asia in contrast to any other region in the world."

In Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto was re-elected prime minister

## Widows and Daughters

South Asian women leaders are replacing their assassinated husbands and fathers. But is this a sign of gender equality or dynasty politics? Rita Sebastian of Inter Press Service looks for answers.

In last year's elections after being ousted in military-backed constitutional coup in 1990.

Benazir is the daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who became Pakistan's first elected prime minister in 1971 and was overthrown in a military coup in 1977 and hanged two years later. Benazir was imprisoned and spent several years in exile before returning to Pakistan in 1986.

assassinated by suspected leftist extremists in 1988.

Bangladesh prime minister Begum Zia is the widow of former ruler, Ziaur Rahman who was assassinated in 1981. Her political foe, Hasina, is the daughter of Mujibur Rahman was Bangladesh's founding father and the country's first prime minister when the co-party broke away from Pakistan in 1971. Mujibur Rahman was killed by the military



She was elected prime minister in the 1988 elections, but was ousted 18 months later. She again contested elections in 1990 and lost, but returned to power in 1993.

In Bangladesh, Begum Khaleida Zia was elected prime minister in 1991. Even the opposition in Bangladesh is led by a woman: the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina Wajed.

What all the women leaders have in common is that they are either widows or daughters of assassinated or executed political leaders in their countries.

Kumaratunga is the daughter of Sri Lankan prime minister Solomon Bandaranaike who was shot dead by a Buddhist monk in 1959. Sirima, his wife and Chandrika's mother, was elected prime minister a decade later and ruled till 1978.

Kumaratunga's husband, film star-politician Vigaya Kumaratunga, was himself as-

in 1973.

"Yes, women are oppressed, and they have come into power in South Asia because of their affiliation with male relatives. But that's the only way they can," says Asma Jahangir of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

"Look at Benazir, she's not the only child. But she took the lead over her brothers because she made the right political decisions. She did not gain power as a sole heir," she adds.

Many South Asian activists are heartened that there are so many women leaders, and say mainstream electoral politics is now going to change for the better since more women get involved.

"Women are better equipped to push for reforms. They have been outsiders and are not a party to the deal-making that has been going on for a long time," says Rounaq Jahan of the South Asian Institute at New York's Columbia Uni-

versity. That may be, but what about the late Indian premier Indira Gandhi? She was seen as an example of a woman leader who outdid her male peers in wheeling and dealing — even imposing state of emergency and suspending political freedoms in 1975 when she felt nagged by the opposition.

"Women leaders have to be gender conscious women. There are, we know, anti-women women," says Irene Santiago, who was till recently with the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Many activists in the region say there is nothing wrong with South Asia's new women leaders coming to power in the coat-tails of their male relatives since the gender playing field is not level anyway.

Jahan says there are special cultural factors that block the avenues to power for women because of their aversion to political patronage that is essential to getting ahead.

She says women remain outsiders in Asia's political systems and assume power (if some male relative has not died) because the male relative has engineered it. Rarely are their careers shaped from the beginning by their own choices.

Sri Lanka's Kumaratunga faces an uphill task in dealing with the island's intractable Tamil separatist war in the north-east, but showed much more a determination to achieve peace than her male predecessors — until Dissanayake's assassination derailed talks.

Concludes Jahangir: "My personal feeling is that only a woman can bring peace. She has the courage to take it head-on."

## Trafficking of Women and Children

### Need for Govt Policies

by Rashida Ahmed



Sumi, age 11, abducted and sold into the flesh trade.



Kohinoor, age 13, starved and tortured by a brothel owner, rescued by police.



Rita, age 15, abducted and forced to work in a brothel for two years.

are still reluctant to recognise and to address these issues, and therefore to include them in their political agenda. However it is in South Asia, in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, where a large number of women and children — the poorest of the poor — who have been left out of the development process are the most adversely affected by, and subject to, exploitation. Furthermore, in terms of social attitudes, in most developing countries, there tends to be strong tolerance to the suppression and abuse of women's and girls' rights.

But information, state intervention and regulatory legislation are lacking. In some cases domestic legislator has resulted in the liability of victims, rather than traffickers, to penalisation. Moreover women who are arrested, placed in custody or sent to prison are often further abused and maltreated by those in authority.

Although an end to the trafficking of women and children cannot be realised until the root causes — poverty, unemployment and discrimination — are addressed, there is an urgent need to act now in the interests of this vulnerable and exploited group. There is much that can be implemented, without delay, to help

the women that are forced into this most exploitative of situations.

Adequate research is lacking. Regulations, legislation, and legal aid are necessary to protect these women children from the worst consequences of trafficking. Social services, such as rehabilitation, shelter, health care and relocation of families for repatriation, are also vital requirements. The problems encountered in the countries of destination are often worse than those that caused these individuals to leave their countries of origin. The abuse and mistreatment faced by such women and children must be limited through state intervention.

Grassroots NGOs can do a lot to address many of the issues involved, by providing support services and creating general awareness of the magnitude of the problem. But governments must get involved in order to create any effective change in the situation.

The Coalition for Women and Children Migrants and Victims of Trafficking in South Asia has among others, made, the following recommendations in a Memorandum to SAARC governments.

1. SAARC governments should consider the issue of migration and trafficking as a

regional agenda. 2. A high level commission should be set up to identify the problems from the perspective of human rights and the economic needs of the people. (3) SAARC countries should recognise the existence of migrating workers and victims of trafficking so that receiving governments may provide legal protection and work permits. (4) In Pakistan Women migrant workers are charged under the Zina Ordinance (Enforcement of Hudood). We demand that these women not be tried under the Zina Law and further demand the repeal of the Zina Ordinance. We demand that the real culprits, the pimps and their influential backers, be caught and punished, and strong action be taken against police who are found guilty of collusion.

5. Women and children who want to return to their countries should be allowed to do so. We urge that the SAARC governments simplify procedures for their repatriation.

6. We urge greater monitoring and collection of information and increased collaboration between NGOs and governments at all levels to enable them to arrive at a plan of action for the women migrant workers and victims of migration.