

**VIVEKANANDA COLLEGE
THAKURPUKUR
KOLKATA-700063
NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE**



Topic: Biographies of significant women

Course Title: GE2

Paper: Women's Movement in colonial India

Unit: 3

Semester: ii

Name of the Teacher: Sonamoni Kunti

Name of the Department: Women's Studies

BIOGRAPHIES OF SIGNIFICANT WOMEN

PRITILATA WADDADAR

Pritilata Waddadar real embodiment of flaming devotion and dedication (for enchained Mother India), on 5th May 1911 was born in a much culturally advanced middle class family at Dhalghat Village in Chittagong (Chattogram) (a breeding place of a large number of heroic revolutionaries who believed in armed struggle to free India from the bondage of British Imperialism) in undivided Bengal in undivided India, now in South Samura in Subdistrict Patia in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Her parents were Sri Jagabandhu Waddadar and Smt.

She passed I. A. Examination from there. After that she came to Kolkata (the then Calcutta) for her graduation in English and was admitted in famous Bethune College and came out successful in B. A. examination. After completion of her graduation she was

appointed directly as the Headmistress of Aparna Charan Girls' School in Chittagong (Chattogram).

Her Career :

When she was a student of class - VIII she witnessed Masterda Surya Sen, unprisoned by the British Police on the charge of looting Railway money and her patriotic spirit flured up wintnessing the oppression unleashed by the British Police on the revolutionary activists. Gradually she is started collecting books on revolutionary philosophy and biographies of great revolutionary leaders. When she was in dhaka for her studies she associated herself with a secreat revolutionary women's organizaiton - Dipali Sangha and had direct contact with a number of revolutionary leaders which formed a firm spirit in her.

She directly took part in the anti-biritish movement when she was a student of Bethun College. During this period she made Ramkrishna Biswas, the great revolutionary activists awaiting his execution by hanging, in Alipore Jail introducing herself as his sister day after day for forty times and there long conversation cast a concrete foundation of revolutionary - mentality dormant in her - saturated her with revolutionary dreams which she believed the only way to earn freedom in true sense.

Secretly she arranged for collecting arms & amunation and sent those successful to Chittagong for boosting up the arms struggle there after her graduation she came permanently to her birth place and was waiting

with throbbing heart to meet her revolutionary idol – Masterda Surya Sen and that came true in a secret meeting held in the residence of Sabitri Devi ; but this proved to be catastrophic as the information of the meeting was somehow leaked to British Military Police who raided the house and Masterda and Pritilata escaped death narrowly that day though great revolutionary activists – Apurba Sen (Bhola, Nirmal Sen and Capt. Cameron (the notorious British police) of the force died in the direct encounter). As British Police started suspecting her after this incident, she went underground as directed by Masterda himself. After this Masterda initiated and attacked on hill side (Pahartoli) European Club which remain unsuccessful and Masterda Surya Sen offered Pritilata the baton of leadership to organized further attempt to attack the club.

She went to Kotowali Sea Side for arms training and chalking out plans to organized Guerilla attack on European Club at the hill side Chittagong. On the auspicious and eventful night 24th September 1932 she along with her Comrades plugged into attacking the club and stormed it. She succumbed bullet injury while fleeing away after the successful attack and embraced death by swallowing Cyanide capsule (that she always kept with her) in order not to be captured by ruthless British police and army personnel Then she was a mere youth of 21. The sacrifice of her's incited spirits in many women with patriotic revolutionary feeling which enriched the arm struggle in the following years.

PANDITA RAMABAI SARASVATI

Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati (23 April 1858 – 5 April 1922) was an Indian social reformer, a pioneer in the education and emancipation of women in India. She was the first woman to be accorded the titles of *Pandita* as a Sanskrit scholar and *Sarasvati* after being examined by the faculty of the University of Calcutta. She was one of the 10 women delegates of the Congress session of 1889. In the late 1890s, she founded Mukti Mission at Kedgaon village, forty miles east of the city of Pune. The mission was later named Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati was born as Rama Dongre on 23 April 1858 in a Marathi speaking Brahmin family but later she adopted Christianity in England. Her father, Anant Shastri Dongre, a Sanskrit scholar, taught her Sanskrit at home. Orphaned at the age of 16 during the [Great Famine of (1876–78), Dongre and her brother Srinivas traveled over India reciting Sanskrit scriptures. Ramabai's fame as a lecturer reached Calcutta, where the pandits invited her to speak. In 1878, Calcutta University, conferred on her the titles of Pandita and Sarasvati in recognition of her knowledge of various Sanskrit works.

The theistic reformer Keshab Chandra Sen gave her a copy of the Vedas, the most sacred of all Hindu literature, and encouraged her to read them. After the death of Srinivas in 1880, Ramabai married Bipin Behari

Medhvi, a Bengali lawyer, in a civil ceremony. The groom was a Bengali Kayastha, and so the marriage was inter-caste and inter-regional and therefore considered inappropriate for that age. They were married in a civil ceremony on 13 November 1880. The couple had a daughter whom they named Manorama. After Medhvi's death in 1882, Ramabai, who was only 23, moved to Pune and founded an organization to promote women's education.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM

After Medhvi's death (1882), Ramabai moved to Pune where she founded Arya Mahila Samaj (Arya Women's Society). The purpose of the society was to promote the cause of women's education and deliverance from the oppression of child marriage. When in 1882 a commission was appointed by Government of India to look into education, Ramabai gave evidence before it. In an address to Lord Ripon's Education Commission, she declared with fervor, "In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the educated men of this country are opposed to female education and the proper position of women. If they observe the slightest fault, they magnify the grain of mustard-seed into a mountain, and try to ruin the character of a woman."

She suggested that teachers be trained and women school inspectors be appointed. Further, she said that as the situation in India was that women's conditions were such that women could only medically treat them, Indian women should be admitted to medical colleges. Ramabai's evidence created a great sensation and reached

Queen Victoria. It bore fruit later in starting of the Women's Medical Movement by Lord Dufferin.

Ramabai went to Britain in 1883 to start medical training. During her stay she converted to Christianity. From Britain she traveled to the United States in 1886 to attend the graduation of the first female Indian doctor, Anandibai Joshi, staying for two years. During this time she also translated textbooks and gave lectures throughout the United States and Canada. She had also published one of her most important book, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*. This was also the first book that she wrote in English. Ramabai dedicated this book to Dr. Joshi, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman-to be specific a Brahmin woman* which showed the darkest aspects of the life of Hindu women, including child brides and child widows, sought to expose the oppression of women in Hindu-dominated British India. In 1896, during a severe famine, Ramabai toured the villages of Maharashtra with a caravan of bullock carts and rescued thousands of outcast children, child widows, orphans, and other destitute women and brought them to the shelter of Mukti and Sharada Sadan. A learned woman knowing seven languages, she also translated the Bible into her mother tongue—Marathi—from the original Hebrew and Greek.

ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain wrote *Sultana's Dream*, one of the earliest depictions of a feminist utopia, in 1905. It is surprising that such a depiction came from the pen of a young Muslim woman from colonial Bengal. An activist and

an educator, she also wrote several other groundbreaking novels and short stories. She believed that women in her society were held back because of ignorance about their own rights and responsibilities.

In 1909, she set up the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School – the first school in Bengal for Muslim women – with five students. She went from door to door persuading Muslim families to allow their daughters to attend school. Many of the women of my grandmother's generation attended the school, becoming the first women in their families to become literate.

In 1916, Sakhawat Hossain founded the Muslim Women's Society, an organization that was at the forefront of the fight for women's education and employment. Its members advocated women's legal and political rights, sponsored girls to attend school, gave shelter to orphans, and offered legal and financial assistance to widows. It was the cornerstone of the women's movement in Bengal, and paved the way for the vibrant and politically progressive feminist movement in contemporary Bangladesh.

Sakhawat Hossain often used humour and satire to criticise the role of women in Muslim societies. When she was asked, in 1926, to chair the Bengal women's educational conference, she said: "Although I am grateful to you for the respect that you have expressed towards me by inviting me to preside over the conference, I am forced to say that you have not made the right choice. I have been locked up in the socially oppressive iron casket of 'porda' for all my

life. I have not been able to mix very well with people – as a matter of fact, I do not even know what is expected of a chairperson. I do not know if one is supposed to laugh, or to cry."

KADAMBINI GANGULY

Kadambini Ganguly was one of the first female graduates in the entire British Empire (along with Chandramukhi Bose) and became the first female practitioner of western medicine not just in India, but in the whole of South Asia. Born Kadambini Bose, to an emancipated father and headmaster Brajakishore Bose who was also an ardent follower of the Brahma Samaj ideals, Kadambini was always pushing against the glass ceiling set on women's freedom at a time when ill practices such as child marriage and sati were strife.

She was born in Chandsi, in Bengal's Barisal district (now in Bangladesh) and even at that time received English education - first at the Brahma Eden Female School, Dacca, and then at Hindu Mahila Vidyalay, Ballygunj, Calcutta. The second school was later renamed as Banga Mahila Bidyalay in 1876; two years later, it merged with Bethune School.

It was at Bethune School that Kadambini met her future husband who probably had the biggest role in helping her realize her full human potential. Her mentor Dwarakanath Ganguly was 17 years her senior and an ardent supporter of Brahma Samaj and women's emancipation.

Kadambini's struggle as a woman who wanted to study medicine. Kadambini wanted to appear for the entrance exam at the University of Calcutta (CU), and so did a Bengali Christian girl from Dehra Dun - Chandramukhi Basu. But the varsity was still not admitting female students.

Kadambini's further studies in England

Finally Kadambini decided to go for further medical studies in England. Breaking all conventions, the Bengali woman left her children to the care of her elder sister and travelled to England in 1893.

Empowered by her incredible will power, Dwarakanath's unfailing support, and the help of her cousin Monomohan Ghosh who was a London-based barrister, Kadambini took the decision to appear for triple diploma courses in medical sciences at the Scottish College at Edinburgh.

Since she already had a BA degree from CU and a GMCB from CMC, she completed her triple diploma in a very short time and only had to appear in the last exam.

She was the only female among the 14 successful candidates that year and definitely the first Indian woman to achieve such a rare feat. Moreover, she also specialised in paediatrics and gynaecology.

The three diplomas she obtained were: Licentiate of the College of Physicians, Edinburgh (LRCP), Licentiate of the College of Surgeons, Glasgow (LRCS), and Licentiate of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Dublin (LFPS).

Kadambini's social work to empower India

Apart from being a doctor, Kadambini was a powerhouse who symbolised the voice of women. Though the Indian National Congress (INC) was founded in 1885, it didn't allow women to participate - something Dwarakanath was voicing against ever since. But in 1889, Kadambini and five other women were allowed to participate and India's first female doctor even moved a vote of thanks.

[Source: Google](#)