

## Milestones

# Indian contribution to Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Purandare C N<sup>1</sup>, Patel Madhuri<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Ex Prof. of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Grant Medical College, Mumbai, India*

<sup>2</sup>*Prof. & HOD, ESI-PGIMS, M G M Hospital, Parel, Mumbai, India.*

In 1893, one of the evenings, there was a knock at the door. Twenty two year old frail girl opened the door. She saw three men begging for medical help for their wives who were critically ill in labour. Her father who was a doctor came out of the bungalow to help them but they refused to take help because they never wanted their wives to be treated by the male doctor. The young girl was helpless as she was not a doctor. This incident had a profound effect on her and she spontaneously decided to study medicine in America and return to India to serve those women. This young girl was non other than Dr. Ida S. Scudder (Fig. 1)

She was born on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1870 to a doctor father in Ranipet. She had five brothers. She was the only daughter of Dr. John Scudder, missionaries of the Arcot Mission of America. After completing her schooling in America she returned to India in 1890 to nurse her ailing mother.

In 1895, Ida Scudder enrolled at the Women's Medical College, Philadelphia. However, she completed her final year at Cornell University Medical School, New York, as the college for the first time opened admission for women to the medical course in the year 1898.

In 1900, she started her medical practice in a small room of her father's bungalow at Vellore. Her hard work and sincerity gave her lot of respect from the locals. In 1902, the Mary Tabor Schell Hospital having 40 beds was opened. For those needy patients in villages who could not visit her hospital, she did not hesitate in reaching out to them. Therefore, in 1906 she started twice a week clinic in the surrounding villages by using a car.



**Fig 1. Dr. Ida S. Scudder**  
M.D, D.SC.,K-i-H

With the immense increase in work her need for trained nurses also increased. In 1909, a lower grade Nurses training school was established. Keeping in mind the necessity of female doctors in improving women's health, Dr. Scudder started a lower grade medical school for women in 1918 at Vellore.

In 1920, Dr. Scudder was awarded the 'Kaiser-Hind Gold Medal' for her dedicated services to the women of India. With increasing number of patients she realized that The Mary Tabor Schell Hospital was inadequate and



One bedded hospital



CMC Vellore as stand today



New wing

**Fig 2**

hence, 267 bedded new hospital was opened in 1924 which is the present site of Christian Medical College and Hospital. In this new hospital, Dr. Scudder helped to established Madras Maternity and Child Welfare Association, the Vellore Branch with the aim to raise money and to provide a Mother and Child Welfare Centre. Later on she was elected as the Branch's first President. In 1927, Mahatma Gandhi's visit made Dr. Scudder's, hospital and town of Vellore recognized all over India. Fig.2

She was famous for the vaginal fistula operation techniques. In 1934, an article written for the American College of Surgeon reports that she had performed more than 1000 such operations. She was very meticulous in her surgery. For her, the surgery would begin before the patient is taken to the operation theatre and ended when the patient is discharged with a healthy wound.

In 1931, she was made member of the American College of Surgeons and received the degree of Doctor of Science from Rutgers.

Dr. Scudder crusaded to upgrade her women's Medical School to full university status for which in 1934 it was

shifted to a site four miles out of Vellore. Her women's Medical School was granted full affiliation to Madras University in 1947.

She had campaigned for women's cause, their upliftment and well being. But she realized the need of the hour and opened the doors of the hospital to male patients and students as well.

Dr. Scudder was not only good clinician but also good academician, hence in 1936 she was honoured as the President of the first 'All India Conference of Obstetrics & Gynecology' held at Madras.

Even after her retirement in 1946, she continued to take active interest in the hospital, patients, doctors and students. On her 89<sup>th</sup> Birthday people of Vellore presented her with a Ponnadai, cloth of Gold, as a mark of respect and honour for her relentless, selfless services to the community. She really lived to benefit human kind and to alleviate human suffering.

She left for heavenly abode in May 1960. Her soul is still in India. We all salute Dr. Ida Scudder for her selfless services to the women of India.