

A Historical Study On The Contribution Of Dr. Ida Scudder – 1870-1960

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Abstract

The history of medical work in India would not be complete without the mention of a young American lady who blazed a pathway of pioneering medical service and education in south India in the early 20th century. Born to Dr. John Scudder the second and his wife Sophia, Ida Scudder was a third generation medical missionary of the Reformed Church in America. Her grandfather Dr. John Scudder was the first American medical missionary in India and his son (her father) continued the medical work in Ranipet (in the state of Tamilnadu). Ida Scudder, his youngest child was born on December 9th 1870. The only girl among five brothers, young Ida watched her parents battle against sickness and famine in their medical ministry and learnt to face the grim facts of life and death even at a very early age.

Keywords: *Dr. Ida, Secudder, CMC, Vellur, Medical College.*

Introduction

In 1890, a twenty-year-old American named Ida Sophia Scudder traveled to India to be with her ailing mother, and experienced a life-changing event. On a night that is now part of CMC's story, three different men, a Muslim and two Hindus, arrived at her family's home seeking emergency help for their wives who were having labor complications. The three young husbands refused the assistance of Ida's father, who was a Christian missionary doctor, because of prevailing caste and gender customs. Without any medical training, Ida was powerless to help. The next day she

discovered that all three women had died. After reflection and prayer, Ida felt that God was calling her to serve the women of India. She returned to the U.S. to become a doctor, graduating in the first class that accepted women at Cornell Medical College in 1899.

Early Life

Born in India, Scudder was a granddaughter of the first American medical missionary, Dr. John Scudder, who with his seven sons all became missionaries. Graduating from Northfield Seminary in Massachusetts, she returned to visit her parents in India, determined never to become one of “those missionary Scudders.” Here in 1894 she received her call, that famous “three knocks in the night,” when three young women died in childbirth because there had been no woman doctor to treat them. Graduating from Cornell University Medical School in the first class open to women, for two years she treated woman patients in her father’s bungalow in Vellore, South India; then in 1902 she moved into Schell Hospital, built with money she herself raised in America. She performed her first operation with no helper but the butler’s wife, yet in time she became noted as a surgeon. By 1906 the number of patients she treated annually had risen to 40,000.

Scudder began training nurses, an almost unheard-of procedure in Asia. Her nursing school grew to become the first graduate school of nursing in India, affiliated with Madras University. In 1909 she started her famous roadside dispensaries, a ministry to patients in surrounding villages that expanded throughout the years to treat thousands each week, developing finally into Vellore’s Rural Unit for Health and Social Affairs, administering public health service to a vast area.

Never satisfied, in 1918, with the help of women of many denominations, she founded a college to train women doctors. Beginning with seventeen girls, all taught by herself, it grew into a great complex of buildings in a beautiful valley, graduating thousands of skilled, dedicated doctors. In 1923, again with the support of many denominations, she built a larger hospital in the center of Vellore. Faced with new regulations by the Indian government that threatened to end her work, in 1941 she traveled the length and breadth of the United States raising money, enlisting new leadership with advanced degrees, securing the necessary upgrading of both college and hospital. Both were now open to men as well as women.

Vellore - Medical College

Ida Scudder started her work in Vellore by using a room in her bungalow, as a dispensary. Little did she know that this single bedded dispensary would slowly grow to a 2500 bedded hospital that would go on to become a premier institute for medical service, education and research in India, impacting the lives of millions within and outside the country.

During her lifetime she saw her medical center become one of the largest in all Asia, the departments multiply to include radiation-oncology under her niece and name sake, Dr. Ida B. Scudder, thoracic surgery, nephrology, leprosy surgery and rehabilitation under Dr. Paul Brand, microbiology, rural work, mental health, ophthalmology, and many others — a list of “firsts” in India commensurate with her abounding energy, indomitable will, and consecrated purpose. She died in Vellore.

Conclusion

Dr. Ida lived her ninety years to the tune of trumpet calls, and they always sounded reveille, never taps. The last and clearest, for which she had waited long with faith and expectancy, was no exception for never has she been more alive. Her skilled hands and brisk feet are multiplied by thousands, all dedicated to the sublime task of healing. Her energy flows through the pulsing arteries of a great subcontinent, creating new life, both physical and spiritual. Almost ninety years have passed since she returned to India to meet the challenge of those three knocks in the night. The one bed for healing in her father's bungalow has become more than 1,000. Instead of the class of fourteen girls there is now a student body of more than 1,100 men and women each year. The staff of two, herself and the butler's wife, Salome, has multiplied to include some 380 doctors, 400 nurses, 270 paramedical workers, serving nearly 2,500 patients each single day. Dr. Ida lighted a small candle. In her hands it became a blazing torch. Her successors have taken up that torch of life, passed it from hand to hand, multiplied it by thousands until its light illumines not only the land of India but many other countries of the world.

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