

WOMEN HEALTH CHALLENGES AND ENDEAVOUR OF AMERICAN WOMEN MISSIONARIES IN TAMIL NADU 1870-1930

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Abstract: The growing importance of medical work was one of the marked features of American Missionary activities in India between 1870 and 1930. Mrs. Capron of the American Madura Mission, a trained nurse initiated the medical work for women at Madurai. Dr. M. Pauline Root was the first lady physician. Dr. Harriet Eliza Parker MD came in 1895 and offered her dedicated medical service. Dr. Ida Scudder medical missionary of American Arcot Mission had a great vision of trained the Indian Women in the medical field. Medical missionaries cured and restored health to thousands of persons.

Keywords: American Women Missionaries, Health, Medical Services, Tamil Nadu.

Introduction: Health is the result of living in accordance with natural laws pertaining to the body, mind and environment. It is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. During the first half of the eighteenth century people in Indian suffered a lot due to lack of medical facilities. The Christian missionaries realized the need of medical treatment and in Madurai and Arcot regions, the American Missionaries started their medical mission. This was one of the marked features of American Missionary activities in India between 1870 and 1930. Dr. Steele, the first physician of American Madura Mission saved the people from cholera. Dr. Shelton, Dr. Cherry, Dr. Chester and Dr. Van Allen were the significant physicians of the American Madura Mission. Dr. Henry Martin Scudder of American Arcot Mission opened a dispensary at Walajapet in 1850. This was followed by the inception of a hospital at Ranipet. The women in India hesitated to get treatment from a male physician. They preferred death than the treatment from a male doctor. Realizing the situation women medical missionaries initiated the medical work for women and children.

Mrs. Capron and Dr. M. Pauline Root: Medical work for women was separated from the general medical work in 1877. Mrs. Capron of the American Madura Mission, a trained nurse started the medical work for women at Madurai. In 1875 she underwent training for six weeks in the Government Maternity Hospital, Madras and started medical work at Manamadurai for two Years. In 1877 she began her work at Madurai and the Madurai Municipality gave a grant of Rs. 300 every year for this medical service. Mrs. Capron was able to treat the cases of women and young children who visited the dispensary. She had a separate room in which she treated the patients with the help of two intelligent and efficient native Christian women. From seven to ten in the morning she treated the patients in her room in the dispensary. She spent five mornings a week in the dispensary and many women of the respectable families of Brahmins and Muslims could receive her

treatment. Due to her efforts, the Mission Hospital for women and children was organized at Madurai in 1885.

Dr. M. Pauline Root was the first lady physician of the American Madura Mission. She arrived at Madurai in 1886 and immediately after her arrival at Madurai; she spent much time to study Tamil for doing most efficient medical work among the natives. The room reserved for the cases of women and children was kept opened throughout the year. The native assistants who had diploma assisted Dr. Root. The houses of the native high castes were freely opened for her. Daily she visited the houses and treated the caste and Gosha women. The hospital building was without beds but was patronized by the Brahmins and Muslims. It could accommodate eight to twelve patients and in this hospital, the Bible women and Christian teachers talked with these women daily about God and His love. As the medical work was rapidly expanding, it resulted in the need of hospitals. In view of the great need of separate buildings for the dispensary of Dr. Root for the medical treatment of women, and in view of the fact that very suitable land and buildings were available at a reasonable price, Dr. Pauline Root came before the Mission with the need of more money and the mission permitted her to send request to the Women Board for a supplementary grant and it was granted. With this amount and some generous donations a new hospital building was erected with small wards. The new building was opened on 28 July 1893 and was presided and addressed by the Maharajah of Ramnad. In the same year Dr. Root was returned to her homeland.

Dr. Harriet Eliza Parker: Dr. Harriet Eliza Parker MD who came in 1895 offered her dedicated medical service and helped the neglected, uncared and poorest women of Madurai and Ramnad districts. In her war against illiteracy, superstitions, suppressions and customary and traditional oppressions, she was helped by Rev. Vaughan, her husband. She passed the Tamil Examination before taking charge of the Women's Hospital. She trained a young married

woman as compounder. The newly appointed woman learned much and was very much helpful to Dr. Parker. In 1904, Miss. Pitchaimuttu, daughter of one of the pastors connected with the Mission, who had been trained as a hospital medical assistant in the Madras Medical School, took her place in the hospital, and had become a most valued assistant. A young widow studied Pharmacy and took the place of a male compounder. Dr. Parker and nurses visited the patients' houses, because the native women were with the fear, superstition and ignorance. But the educated men in their families wished the European treatment for their families.

In 1902, the hospital was in need of enlargement, new roof, instruments, improved modern appliances, furniture and linen and more efficient helpers. At the end of this year, the hospital was in the charge of Dr. Annie Young and her services both in the hospital and outside were of great value. An effort was made by her to secure funds for repairs and improvements in the hospital. Two single rooms *Greenfield Gift* and *Smith 89* were prepared and equipped by the aid received from friends in Greenfield mass and from former classmates in Smith College. The equipments were also improved by the Mission grant. In the upper floor of the hospital, five rooms were constructed for patients and nurses. Most of the rooms of the nurses were availed to the patients because of the crowd in the wards. In 1906, Zamindar of Ettiapuram donated Rs. 1,000 towards the new quarters for the employees. The hospital needed small rooms for the patients of contagious diseases and they were in the general ward, which was discomfort for other patients. Because of the rapid growth in the number of patients, the demand for trained nurses was also increased. Hence two young women from the mission were trained as compounders and three nurses completed their two years of training in Madras Medical School.

Dr. Parker visited the nearby stations like Aruppukottai by bullock cart and she lodged in the mission building. It was a small village and from early to morning to the night, nearly 215 patients came for consultation and most of them walked miles to see the doctor. The mission medical group gave the patients best remedies and certain cases were referred to the Madurai hospital for further treatment. In some of the villages leprosy prevailed. A Brahmin woman was brought in with a foot badly crushed by falling into a well. At first it seemed a case for amputation, but a persistent effort was made to save the foot. She had a dream, in which Jesus came and touched her foot. She woke and said confidently that He had healed her. After a long care she recovered. Dr. Parker arranged for a medical itinerant in Melur station. She visited two villages near Melur where mission work was well established

and she visited a Hindu town of thousand houses. The medical camp was arranged in the market place. Dr. Parker received news from their home land that they were going to be provided a new dispensary building near the hospital and in which everything was arranged conveniently for the out-patients. The new building contained a suitable operation room and this new building was called as "Harriet Newell Hospital Annex". It was donated by Miss. Helen S. Lathrop and her family and the hospital was named for the pioneered missionary girl. The new building had waiting, consulting, treatment and drug rooms on the lower floor for the use of out-patients. The chloroforming and operating rooms were in the upstairs and it had six small rooms among them one for the compounders and nurses. Dr. Parker introduced the Bird's Nest for the new born orphan babies. The eldest daughter of the Birds' Nest went to Madras to study medicine. In the middle of the year 1914, a five month old baby was gifted through the Birds' Nest. In the year 1928, the Hospital for Women and Children applied for the government grant of Rs. 9,815 and the full amount was sanctioned which was utilized for the construction work.

Lepre Asylum: The Medical Mission also considered serving the leprosy patients as a special field of work. Missionaries set the example in leprosy work, and that it remained a model to others in India. The American Madura Mission started this work under the personal care of the women missionary doctors and nurses. In 1887, Dr. Root felt the need for the separate ward for the lepers. But due to her early departure from Madurai, her plan for the segregated people did not materialize. The medical missionaries used to visit the Leper Hospital they established at Manamadurai which had about 180 patients. Understanding the problems, difficulties and the helpless condition of the people infected with leprosy, the missionaries established the Leprosy hospital at Manamadurai specially and treated them. In the year 1909, permission was granted to Dr. Parker to open work for lepers. Dr. Parker purchased twenty acres of land lying from a mile from the Manamadurai Mission Compound to start a leper village. A well was dug at the centre of the plot and they could find good water. She planned a building of eight rooms designed for two patients each. This building was completed in July 1913 and in the same year the first patient arrived in Manamadurai. At the close of the year, ten patients occupied the home and two untainted children of the patients were cared for the Mission Boarding School. Dr. Parker received \$17,000 from the Mission to Lepers. This mission expressed its willingness to take full financial charge, so the Madura Mission appointed a committee on Work of Lepers. Patients were received into the

institution free of charge and were supplied with food, clothing, medicine and other necessary things at the cost of the institution. This place was named as Dayapuram, the place of mercy. This hospital gave a treatment which was similar to what the U.S Government adopted in the Philippine islands, i.e., administration for a regular hypodermic injection for every patient. This institution grew rapidly and by 1916, there were 160 patients. The parents of these patients here admitted both their tainted and untainted children along with them. During the war, the mission faced the difficulty of feeding these patients; yet it continued the service. For many years in Tamil Nadu there were two leprosy mission hospitals started by the Danish Mission and American Madura Mission. Women's work was given importance and by 1900, the women missionaries, including the wives of missionaries exceeded the male missionaries. Through their medical service, they were able to heal the native women and gain foothold to preach the gospel among the natives especially the women who came for treatment and childbirth.

American Arcot Mission-Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder:

Dr. Ida S. Scudder was born on 9 December 1870 in India. She was a third-generation American Medical Missionary of American Arcot Mission. She dedicated her life to the difficulties of Indian women and the struggle against plague, cholera and leprosy. During her early age she wanted to get a married life and settle down in United States. In 1890 when she was with her mother in the mission bungalow at Tindivanam, she came to know a woman in childbirth died needlessly. During one night, three different men, a Brahmin, a high-caste Hindu and a Muslim came pleading for her help during the childbirth of their wives. They refused the help of Ida's father because they were not willing to get treatment from a male physician. With that incident she was convinced that God called her to be a medical missionary. She went to America and joined at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia in 1895. In 1898 she transferred her studies to the Cornell Medical College and there she got her M.D degree. She returned to India with ten thousand dollar cheque for a new hospital and was accompanied by Annie Hancock. She was a good friend of Dr. Ida and she came to work with her.

Mary Taber Schell Hospital: When she returned to India her father died of cancer unexpectedly and this was a great shock to Dr. Ida and the people were not ready to get medical treatment from her. But she did her best efforts to treat the people who were in the superstitious practices. During the feast days, the people prohibited the medicine and they moved from place to place to escape from evil spirits. On this situation she started a clinic at Vellore and she

treated over 5,000 patients at the bungalow besides caring for a growing practice in the town. She made 177 professional visits to high caste homes. She met with many difficulties and discouragements because of the ignorance of the people and their blind obedience to the laws of custom. These caused them to disobey the notions of healing the sick. The corner stone of the Mary Taber Schell Memorial Hospital was laid on 9 September 1901. Dr. Loba of Chicago presided and laid the stone. The expenditure was estimated around \$10,000 and Mr. Robert Schell donated the entire amount and so the hospital was built in memory of his wife Mary Taber Schell. The hospital was opened on 16 September 1902.

Ida started the medical work in the Mary Taber Schell hospital and she was assisted by a trained native nurse and a compounder. Miss. Louisa H. Hart, Medical Officer of Arcot Mission and Ida served at Vellore with absolute dedication and the mission grew up. Ms. Lillian Hart and Ms. Dalia M. Houghton were the trained nurses and the later was in charge of the nursing department. Doctor and nurses learnt Hindustani language to help the women patients at Arcot where the majority were Urdu speaking Muslims. In 1911, there were eighteen nurses and four compounders. Dr. Ida wrote to government asking for a grant of Rs. 25,000 to extend the hospital building. She said that the hospital was the one thoroughly deserving of support and had not hitherto been aided by government. The government granted Rs. 3,668 in 1912, which was later used for the purchase of equipments as the hospital was not extended.

In the maternity hospital, regular diet was given from Oliver Mothers Mission fund, U.S.A donated liberally for the regular diet of the patients in the maternity hospital. This enabled patients to get admitted in the hospital a few days sooner in order to improve their health condition. To encourage the women patients to make use of the hospital, they extended the allowances and free food. Milk, eggs, broth, gruels and bread were provided to the patients. The doctors and nurses tried and adopted various methods to help the women to pay attention to their health at the right time.

In 1906, Dr. Ida and Dr. Hart started their work along the roadside. Dr. Ida was gifted a motor car from her homeland. It was a tiny French Peugeot. Making weekly trips to a small dispensary in a churchyard twenty-five miles away and finding people all along the way who needed help, she appointed stations where she would stop each week at the edge of the village, under a tamarind or banyan tree and gave treatments to all who wished to come. The motor car made a medical visit by taking a team of doctors, nurses, students, pharmacists, public health workers, a leprosy specialist and an evangelist.

Nursing School: From the day to day experiences of Dr. Ida in the villages, she was convinced to start a medical school for the natives. The following two incidents kindled her to start a medical school. A disgusted patient told her on the road side that he had taken a handful of flies from his ear, but still had heard it's buzzing and asked Dr. Ida to see if there were any more flies in it. Another man came with the front of his scalp eaten away. They had been treated with native medicine. Though it was a Women and Children's hospital, Dr. Ida gave him a proper treatment and skin grafting. Dr. Ida felt that the only solution to this formidable problem was that to train the Indian Women for the task of treating the Indians. So, in 1909 Dr. Ida started a small nursing school. It was the first graduate school of nursing in all India, affiliated with Madras University and giving a B.Sc degree. In July 1937, there were sixty-eight nurses in training, seven post-graduate, three Western and ten Indian staff nurses. The School of Pharmacy was also run by the Arcot Mission and one of its graduates went to Poona. The first compounder and nurse combined was Salome, whom Dr. Scudder selected and she was a butler's wife. She was trained by Dr. Scudder in the mission bungalow and she assisted Dr. Scudder in the dispensary work. Gnanammal was another trained Indian compounder from Palayamkottai. She was versatile in her talents, serving from time to time as midwife, matron and Bible-woman in addition to her special role as compounder. More than 400 students were awarded nursing certificates in 1946 and it became the first graduate school of nursing in all India. Dr. Ida became a lady with a lamp as, year after year on the evening of her nurses' graduation, she stood in the

darkened chapel of the great medical center holding the little silver lamp and watched it kindle into flame.

Medical College for Women, Vellore: From 1913 to 1918, Dr. Ida talked and thought and dreamed of a medical college for women in Vellore. In 1918 she received the consent of the Surgeon General to have a try at it. She received one hundred and fifty one applications and it was more than doubled in the second year. Dr. Ida erected a shed for the dissection room and sent the girls to Voorhees College for lectures in chemistry. She undertook the teaching of Anatomy and this was in addition to her hospital work. She had begun the classes in a rental building. But she dreamed of more permanent undertakings. In 1928, two hundred acres of land was purchased for the medical school campus at Bagayam, Vellore. In the same year Mahatma Gandhi visited the medical school. Dr. Ida travelled a number of times to the United States to raise the funds for the college and hospital and in 1945; the college was opened to men as well as women also.

Conclusion: The medical work of American women Missionaries was one of the most commendable aspects of their activity. It spread sound scientific principles about causes and remedies of disease. Women Medical missionaries cured and restored health to thousands of persons and medical work broke down prejudice and dissipated opposition. Women missionaries endeared themselves to the people where they worked. They were highly honored by the Government of India. Thus the medical activities of the American women missionaries contributed a great deal for the development of a sustainable society.

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