

Social History of Medicine in Colonial India

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Week 07

Lecture 02b

Role of Missionaries Part 2

Another outstanding and enduring example is the Christian Medical College, Vellore - more famously called CMC Vellore - in the south - which in fact attracts streams of people even today from all over India and even abroad to its hospital in Vellore and also, students to its college, from India and all over the world. It was started in 1900 in collaboration with the Arcot mission which was already there. Dr. Ida Scudder an American missionary started the missionary work there and even managed to construct hospital by 1902. The main hospital, after it moved to the location where it is there even now, in 1994, started extending treatment to men also. It is very interesting as it was something which was exclusively started first for women. Similarly we will see the same kind of trend with the college also. But here, the hospital started first for women and then only extended to men. Considering its growth (not only did the hospital receive patients within its walls but the personnel extended the service to nearby rural areas also) - considering all this expansion there was an acute need felt for training women locally itself. Thus came the Union Mission Medical School for Women which was started in 1918. It offered a Licenciate Medical Practitioner course to train women physicians. And in 1938, there was a change in government policy - the policy which said that medical degrees could be granted only by universities. The Medical School was upgraded to a Medical College with its current name the Christian Medical College and it was affiliated to the Madras University (which came into being in the 1850s). From 1942 it started offering a MBBS course and then in 1947 - the year of independence -only then - it started actually admitting men - till then it was only for women.

Similarly missionaries contributed substantially to the nursing profession also which meant even more direct contact with the sick and people needing attention. Then they contributed to the training also there in terms of nursing education for building a local corps of nurses. Several groups of missionary groups such as the London Missionary

Society, (LMS), the CMS (Church Mission Society), the Church of England, Zenana Missionary Society, American Baptist Mission and Lutheran Mission - they all initially brought in fully-trained and professional nurses from Europe. But later on they started promoting nursing education in a big way locally. Now we will see some examples of the various contributions towards nursing. In Calcutta when the Eden Hospital introduced a scheme of training government pupil nurses in 1882, the Sisters of the Community of St. John the Baptist of Clewer, offered their services both for the training of the nurses and also supervising of the nursing staff there. In 1908, St. Stephen's Hospital in Delhi, run by the medical missionaries, started its own nurse training programme. Coming again to Vellore, Ida Scudder who started the hospital, started training women as compounders as early as 1903 and then set up a nursing school in 1909. In 1946 it became a college - a nursing college - the first exclusive nursing college in India.

Then we have something called the Christian Medical Association of India. Given the kind of enormous presence - both at the doctor level, nursing level and in between - prompted the formation of this kind of an association, Christian Medical Association of India. Quite naturally, given the way in which they had broadened, in which they had grown and extended their branches, they sought to bring some kind of standardization in training and examination in mission centers of nursing training. Then in 1931, the Nursing Auxiliary of CMAI was founded which promoted nursing as a particularly Christian vocation. Apart from their contribution as nurses, we also get some ideas about nursing and related conditions through the life of the missionaries and through their writings. For instance, we come to know of some of the problems that were encountered by them in the early period of the training of the nurses. For instance, they were worried about the dearth of educated native girls and the difficulty of teaching the local girls in the vernacular languages and also the problem of disciplining some of them according to the kinds of yardstick of discipline that they would have expected. It also allows us to get a glimpse of the conditions through the writings of individual nurses. For instance, here is an excerpt from the *American Journal of Nursing* from the year 1924. This is from Jennie Reilly, a Red Cross nurse working under the American Baptist Telugu Mission in the Madras Presidency. This particular sentence, one sentence itself shows, brings out, several problems: "The teaching is entirely in the vernacular, that makes it a bit more difficult for those who teach. As yet it is not possible to find nurses who can take over the teaching work, so that must be done by the two American nurses and this, only after you have secured enough of the language to get the thoughts over to them".

So it is not just about nursing that they had to teach. Before that, they had to also learn the local language, and in such a way that they were able to not just put those terms and all those, but also their thoughts across. Similarly, one more quotation from the same

journal, this is from Agatha Tatye, another American Red Cross nurse in a hospital run by the American Lutheran Mission in the Madras Presidency. This is what she had to say: "As for nursing, , well I have really no material to draw from yet, even to begin a training school. There are but a few women who have been educated up to fifth standard, (equivalent to the fifth grade grammar school - of England) and these are mostly married women. Two are employed as teachers. So, before I can have a nurses training school, I must educate some girls. If I continue here for some years, I shall hope to build up a training school in time. Pioneer work is a bit discouraging at times but truly a work of faith". That last sentence is very important, that takes us back to the beginning. This particular excerpt was just to show how we can get an idea of a general situation through the writings of the nurses But that last sentence is something which captures the spirit of this entire lecture where the missionaries in fact, did pioneering work - and that was driven truly by the kind of faith and that special kind of zeal, of the missionary zeal, and which have left their fruits enduring, which we see continuing to this day.

On that note, we will close this lecture. Thank you.