

## **Anandi Gopal Joshi (or Anandibai)**

(March 31, 1865 - February 26, 1887)

Anandi Joshi was the first Indian woman to obtain a medical degree in the Western hemisphere. She was one of the first Indian women to be trained in Western system of medicine (the first Indian woman physician *per se* was Kadambini Ganguly).



### **Early life**

Joshi was born as **Yamuna Joshi** (Yamunabai) at Thane near Mumbai, in an orthodox wealthy Brahmin family. She suffered from pockmarks. Aged 9, she was married to a postal clerk, Gopalrao Joshi. Gopalrao, also a Brahmin, was a widower and almost twenty years her senior. After the marriage, Yamuna was renamed as Anandi, according to Maharashtrian traditions.

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Gopalrao worked as a postal clerk in Kalyan. Later, he was transferred to Alibag, and finally to Calcutta (now Kolkata). He was a progressive thinker, and supported the education of women - then not very prevalent in India.

It was common for Brahmins to learn Sanskrit, but Lokhitawadi's *Shat Patre* had convinced Gopalrao that Sanskrit was no longer of much use<sup>[1]</sup>. He considered English to be more important. He noticed his wife's interest in learning and helped her to learn English.

At the age of 14, Joshi gave birth to a boy. The child survived only for ten days, owing to the paucity of medical care available. This incident was a turning point in Joshi's life and inspired her to become a doctor.

### **Towards a medical career**

Gopalrao encouraged his wife to study medicine. In 1880, he sent a letter to Royal Wilder, a well-known American missionary, expressing Anandi's interest in studying medicine in the United States, and inquiring about a suitable post there for himself. Wilder offered to help if the couple converted to Christianity<sup>[1]</sup>. This was not acceptable to the Joshis.

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Wilder published the correspondence in his publication, Princeton's Missionary Review. It was read by Theodicia E. Carpenter, a resident of Roselle, New Jersey, while waiting to see her dentist. She was impressed by Joshi's desire to learn medicine, and by Gopalrao's support for his wife. She wrote to them, offering accommodation to Joshi in America. This began a series of letters between Joshi and Carpenter, in which they discussed Hindu culture and religion, among other things.

While Gopalrao and Joshi were in Calcutta, Joshi's general health was declining. She suffered from weakness, constant headaches, occasional fever, and sometimes breathlessness. Carpenter sent her medicines from America, without results. In 1883, Gopalrao was transferred to Serampore. It was here that he decided to send Joshi to America alone. Joshi was apprehensive, but Gopalrao convinced her by saying that she should set an example for other women.

A Dr Thorborn and his wife, who was also a doctor, suggested Joshi apply to the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. When Joshi's decision became known, she was rejected by Hindu society. She was spat at in public and had stones thrown at her. Many Christians supported her decision, but they wanted her to convert to Christianity<sup>[1]</sup>.

Eventually, Joshi addressed the community at Serampore College Hall, explaining her decision to go to America and obtain a medical degree. She discussed the persecution she and her husband had endured. She stressed the need for Hindu female doctors in India, and talked about her goal of opening a medical college for women in India. She also pledged that she would not convert from Hinduism. After her speech was published, financial contributions started coming in from all over India. The Viceroy of India contributed 200 rupees towards funds for her education. However, the money was not enough, and Joshi had to sell her gold bangles to fund her travel and education.

## **In America**

Joshi travelled to New York from Calcutta by ship, chaperoned by two English female acquaintances of Dr Thorborn. In New York, Carpenter received her in June 1883. Joshi wrote to the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, asking to be admitted to their medical program<sup>[5]</sup>, which was the first women's medical program in the world. Rachel L. Bodley, the dean of the college, enrolled her.

Joshi began her medical education at the age of 19. In America, her already declining health was worsened by the cold weather and unfamiliar diet. She contracted tuberculosis. Her friends sent her to Colorado Springs for her health, but it failed to improve her condition.

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She also submitted a thesis on "Obstetrics among the Aryan Hindoos". When she graduated with an M.D. on March 11, 1886, Queen Victoria sent a congratulatory message.

### **Return to India**

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Joshi's husband and her friends advised her to settle in the United States, but she insisted on returning to India. Before she returned to India, the princely state of Kolhapur, appointed her the Physician-in-charge of the female ward of the Albert Edward Hospital. On October 9, 1886, she sailed from New York. She returned to India, and was met with a hero's welcome. The newspapers closely monitored her health.

Joshi died in Pune at any early age of 22, in her mother's arms. Her death was mourned throughout India. Her ashes were sent to Carpenter, who placed them in her family cemetery in Poughkeepsie, New York.