

ABSTRACT
DR. IDA SCUDDER AND THE REVOLUTION IN
INDIAN MEDICAL EDUCATION

Isaiah Azariah
Albany State College

Scholars generally agree that the European colonial rulers brought their own political and social institutions along with their literary, scientific, and medical traditions to the colonies. Adequate recognition, however, has not been given to the revolutionary role played by numerous medical missionaries, including the Scudders, in marking the advent of India's transition from the medieval to the modern period. Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder, "the greatest of them all" belonged to the third and fourth generation of the Scudder missionaries who "spent years in India as missionaries, educators and doctors."

Three separate incidents which she confronted on the night of 1894, transformed Ida Scudder, a blooming potential debutante in the hothouse of American high society, to a feminist revolutionary in the superstition-ridden field of Indian medical education.

A woman of 30 and a doctor in her own right, Ida Scudder spent 60 years in Vellore, South India, after completing her medical education in 1900 at the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia and later at Cornell. She embodied a rare combination of dream and reality. Ida, assisted by a group of trained Indian women, got involved in a spectrum of activities: attending surgical and obstetrical cases, responding to plague epidemics, treating enteric and malarial fevers and even devising new techniques in surgery such as VVF or vesico-vaginal fistula. The crowning glory of her selfless work, however, was the establishment of the Christian Medical College and Hospital in Vellore, which at present ranks one of the best in Asia.

Dr. Ida's relentless fight against diseases, prejudices and incredible superstitions on the one hand, and her devotion to her medical work among the rich and poor and her faith in the abilities of Indian women, on the other, opened a new and decisive chapter in the medical history of India.