

**Title: Anandi Joshi: Breaking the Glass Ceiling**

Student's name: Swara Prabhune

School: Zydus School for Excellence, Vejalpur.

Grade: IX

Category: Senior

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### **Abstract**

Close your eyes and picture this. Imagine a woman in a traditional nine-yard(nauvari) saree, a typical Maharashtrian nose pin(nath) and a tightly secured bun with jasmine (mogra) flowers wrapped around it. Now look at her legs-she wears long white socks with formal black polished shoes like a school-going student. Now let me tell you who this woman is. She is “Anandi Gopal Joshi”, the first female doctor of Indian origin.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1865, a legendary personality named Yamuna was born in Kalyan, near Thane, a district in Maharashtra in an orthodox Hindu family of landlords(Thakar 1). Her family was one of Chitpavan Brahmins. She was named “Yamuna” by her father, Ganpatrao Amriteshwar Joshi. Following prevalent practices of the Indian society during those times and under parental pressure, at the age of just nine years Yamuna was married to Gopalrao Joshi and after her marriage she was renamed Anandi. Gopalrao Joshi was a widower who worked as a postal clerk and was twenty years senior to Anandi (The Economic Times 2). He was one of the rare people during those times who was a staunch believer in women’s education and a progressive thinker. In Fact, he married Anandi on the condition that he would educate her.

**Keywords:** prevalent, parental pressure, staunch, progressive, orthodox

### **Introduction**

In those times it was common for Brahmins to be able to speak and write Sanskrit. However, Gopalrao was influenced by Lokhitawadi’s Shat Patre which was written by Gopal Hari Deshmukh in the weekly known as Prabhakar and thought that learning English was more impactful than learning Sanskrit. After their marriage Gopalrao started teaching Anandi basic English along with basic Mathematics. Initially, like any nine-year-old school-going student Anandi found studies boring. Gopalrao was also short tempered and strict and often rebuked Anandi when she did not complete her given studies on time. He also hit his wife with pieces of wood and threw chairs and books at her in strong fits of anger (Thakar 2). Gopalrao also threatened to leave Anandi when she was twelve years old. Due to Gopalrao’s transferable

After marriage Anandi and Gopalrao lived in Alibaug (Kosambi and Mukherji 3). Eventually, Anandi started enjoying studies and started completing her work sincerely.

At the age of fourteen, Anandi gave birth to a son. However, the boy did not live for more than ten days due to lack of enough medical care and attention. This proved to be a turning point in Anandi's life as the death of her child motivated Anandi to become a doctor and she made up her mind that she would study hard. During the course of her checkups Anandi had found it difficult to share her medical concerns with male doctors. This was another reason why Anandi wanted to start a trend of female doctors in India.

## **Discussion**

Gopalrao, supporting Anandi's decision, admitted her into a missionary school in Alibaug. Gopalrao even started cooking and working in the house so that Anandi could study which no man did in those days. The decision of sending Anandi to a Christian school brought about a lot of resentment from the villagers. They threatened Gopalrao to throw his family out of the village. The villagers even resorted to throwing garbage at Anandi's house. At the school, Anandi faced harassment from her fellow-students who pushed her around and teased her. Stones were pelted at the postal office where Gopalrao worked and abusive comments were hurled at the Joshi couple.

A student from the school falsely accused Anandi of hitting her and Anandi was dismissed from the school. Yet, Anandi never let these people pull her down and continued to study hard. In Alibaug, Anandi decided that she would go to The States to study. However, advisors told Gopalrao that to study in America an important need was to convert to Christianity. However, Anandi vehemently opposed a change in her religion. Even after a lot of persuasion from Gopalrao, Anandi remained glued to her decision. Due to the increasing resentment from the villagers and due to the fact that Anandi was removed from the school, Anandi and Gopalrao shifted to Kolkata (Calcutta).

In 1880, Gopalrao wrote a letter to Royal Wilder who was a well-known American missionary. He wrote about his wife's interest in pursuing education from the US. Wilder published the letter in his "Princeton's Missionary Review" (Kosambi). Theodocia Carpenter who was a resident of Roselle, New Jersey, read the letter while waiting for an appointment at

a dentist's office and was impressed by Anandi's immense desire to study and also by her husband's encouragement (Thakar 2). Carpenter wrote letters to Anandi and they developed a close friendship. Anandi referred to Ms. Carpenter as her own aunt(mavshi). Carpenter helped Anandi offered accommodation for Anandi in America. Unfortunately, in Serampore (West Bengal) which is a part of Greater Kolkata, Gopalrao lost his job. Initially, Anandi did not agree to go to The States alone but after some convincing from Gopalrao, although hesitant, Anandi agreed on going all by herself.

During her journey Anandi's health started deteriorating and she started suffering from weakness, headaches and huge bouts of cough but the doctors on the ship refused to treat Hindu women. On finally reaching New York in 1883, Anandi was welcomed by her beloved Aunt Theodicia (Indiaspora-Sri Lanka Based Journalist 2).

From Miss Carpenter's home, Anandi wrote a letter to the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia which was one of the world's first medical colleges. Impressed by her purpose to study medicine which was to make it easier for fellow Indian women to share their concerns with female doctors, Anandi got an admission in the institution. The Superintendent and secretary of the institution were very kind to Anandi and offered her a scholarship of six hundred dollars for the three years Anandi would spend in the college(Thakar 2). Anandi was a sincere and curious student who was always looking forward to learning more. She even impressed her teacher by being the only student brave enough to sit through the autopsy of an infant while his cadaver was being dissected (Indiaspora Sri Lanka Based journalist 2).

Anandi felt cold in America's winters as her nine-yard saree kept the calves and forearms uncovered but she did not switch to frocks or gowns but simply made a transition from the nauvari saree to the Gujarati saree, refusing to change her country's clothes which were a symbol of her nationality to American garments which showed her immense love towards her roots and her own country. Anandi's room did not have a proper fireplace. It emitted a lot of smoke when lit and her health condition worsened during her stay there. The subject that Anandi picked for her thesis was "Obstetrics among Aryan Hindus"(Thakar 2). The thesis included both information from traditional Ayurvedic texts and from American medicine.

On 11<sup>th</sup> March 1889 Anandi graduated with a degree in western medicine. Gopalrao announced her success proudly as he saw his wife's journey towards becoming the first female doctor of Indian origin. Gopalrao even informed Queen Victoria who was the Empress of India during

those days. The Queen even sent a congratulatory message. At her graduation Pandita Ramabai was present too and Anandi received a standing ovation.

After coming back to India, Anandi received a grand welcome. She was offered a post as physician-in-charge of the women's ward in the Albert Edward Hospital in princely Indian state of Kolhapur. They also wanted Anandi to train female students to become general practitioners.

Before Anandi returned to India her health was diagnosed as tuberculosis which in those days was a fatal disease without a cure. The disease further worsened in America's strong winters and during the return journey on the ship.

Just two months after her return to India and just a month before turning twenty-two Anandi breathed her last on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1867, and died in her mother's arms (Desikan).

The whole of India mourned the young doctor's death. Miss Carpenter was extremely distressed upon getting the news. Miss Carpenter or as Anandi called her, "Carpenter Mavshi" placed Anandi's ashes in the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery which was her family's cemetery in New York.

## **Conclusion**

Anandi- the name brings goosebumps on one's body and she is the woman who inspired thousands of little girls with big dreams to do what their heart says and to not be submissive to the strict norms of Indian society. She was a strong woman with an even stronger dream. Although she suffered an early death everybody still remembers her as a woman who fought everything and everybody to be a doctor.

In Anandi's honor, a 34.3 diameter crater on Venus has been named "Joshee" and a Marathi movie named "Anandi Gopal" was released too. IRDS NGO in Lucknow awards the "Anandibai Joshi Award for Medicine" every year. (Chakraborty 5).

Anandi always said "No man or woman should depend upon another for maintenance and necessities. Family discord and social degradation will never end till each depends upon herself".

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