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Anandibai Joshi

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Anandibai Joshi

Anandibai Joshi lost her infant son because no doctor was willing or able to save him. That loss set her on a path to a medical degree few Indian women even imagined at the time. She was appointed to practise it, but never lived to begin.

This lesson explains Anandibai Joshi in short steps, one card at a time.

The idea in brief

- Read about **Who she was**.
- Read about **The loss that drove her**.
- Read about **Marriage and voyage**.
- Read about **Her support network**.
- Read about **Legacy and comparisons**.

Who she was

Who was Anandibai Joshi and why is she famous?

Joshi became the first Indian woman to earn a Western medical degree, at just 20, with a thesis blending two medical traditions.

Anandibai Joshi lived from 1865 to 1887. She became the first Indian woman to earn a medical degree from a Western institution.

She graduated from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania on 11 March 1886.

She was only 20 years old when she earned her MD, just short of her 21st birthday. Her thesis, "Obstetrics among the Aryan Hindus," combined Ayurvedic and Western medical ideas.

Think of her as a pioneer. Before her, no Indian woman had finished a medical course in the West. She did it in about three years, far from home, at a very young age.

Her thesis shows how she thought. She did not throw away Indian medicine. She set Ayurvedic ideas beside Western ones and compared them.

Why does this milestone matter for exams? It marks the first time an Indian woman finished a full Western medical course. Examiners like such firsts, so remember the year 1886 and her age of 20 together. Link them to her thesis title and you will recall all three at once.

> **Quick check 1.** Anandibai Joshi earned her MD at age 20, becoming the first Indian woman to earn a medical degree from a Western institution. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓



Anandibai Joshi, photographed before 1887. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The loss that drove her

Why did she choose medicine?

A child's death, ten days after birth, gave Joshi the purpose that carried her through medical school and into an early death of her own.

At age 14, Anandibai gave birth to a son. The infant died just ten days later, from a lack of proper medical care.

This loss is widely credited with turning her toward medicine.

She wanted to spare other Indian women the same loss. She died of tuberculosis on 26 February 1887, in Pune.

She had already been appointed to a medical post, but declining health meant she never treated a patient.

Her grief was the turning point. A baby that dies for lack of care leaves a deep mark. She saw that many Indian women had no woman doctor to turn to.

That is why her aim was so clear. She did not want fame. She wanted to treat women who would not see a male doctor.

> **Quick check 2.** Anandibai Joshi lived long enough to treat patients at the medical post she had been appointed to. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Marriage and voyage

How did a child bride get to America?

Married as a child to a much older widower, Joshi crossed the ocean to America with his unusual support, at real social cost.

She was married at age nine, a common practice at the time. Her husband, Gopalrao Joshi, was a widower about twenty years older than her.

Her birth name was Yamuna; Gopalrao renamed her Anandi after their marriage.

Gopalrao held strong, unusual views on women's education for his time. She sailed to America in 1883, crossing the "kala pani," or ocean.

This voyage led to ostracism from parts of her own community.

Child marriage was common then, so her marriage at nine was not unusual. What was unusual was her husband's push for her studies. Few men of that time did this.

The cost was real. Crossing the sea was seen as breaking caste rules, so some people shut her out. She went anyway.

Her voyage shows how personal courage and family support worked together. Society expected a young wife to stay home. Instead she crossed the sea to study. That choice made her a symbol for later women who wanted an education.

> **Quick check 3.** Anandibai Joshi's husband, Gopalrao Joshi, renamed her from her birth name, Yamuna, after their marriage. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Her support network

Who helped her reach medical school?

A chance letter connected Joshi to an American friend and eventual host, while a Viceroy's donation helped fund her journey.

An American missionary periodical printed one of her letters in 1880. Theodicia Carpenter of New Jersey read that letter and wrote back offering help.

Carpenter and Anandibai exchanged letters for nearly two years before 1883.

Their letters discussed early marriage, women's health, religion, and the status of Indian women. Viceroy Lord Ripon contributed 200 rupees toward her education.

In February 1883, she defended her plan in a public speech at Serampore College Hall.

She told the audience, "There is a growing need for Hindu lady doctors in India, and I volunteer to qualify myself for one."

Her case shows how one idea can travel by post. A single printed letter led to two years of letters and then to a home in America. Money and kind words came from different people.

Her public speech in 1883 mattered too. She spoke in front of a large crowd and asked for their support. Many listened.

> **Quick check 4.** Anandibai Joshi's connection with her American host, Theodicia Carpenter, began after Carpenter read a letter of hers printed in a missionary periodical. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Legacy and comparisons

Where does she stand among India's women doctors?

Joshi's degree came first among Indian women, though a contemporary is credited with actually practising Western medicine in India before her.

She returned to India on 16 November 1886. She was appointed physician-in-charge of the female ward at Albert Edward Hospital, in Kolhapur.

Anandibai Joshi earned her degree first, but Kadambini Ganguly is credited as the first Indian woman to actually practise medicine.

In her Serampore speech, she also spoke of wanting to open a medical college for women in India. The International Astronomical Union named a crater on Venus "Joshee" in her honour.

Google marked her 153rd birth anniversary in 2018 with a dedicated Doodle.

She belongs to a small, closely-timed group of pioneering Indian women in medicine and reform, including Muthulakshmi Reddy, who trained as a doctor a generation later.

Do not mix up the two firsts. Joshi was first to earn the degree. Kadambini Ganguly was first to practise. Write the two names side by side when you revise.

Her honours came long after her death. A crater on Venus and a Google Doodle keep her name alive today.

> **Quick check 5.** Anandibai Joshi and Kadambini Ganguly are the same historical distinction, both remembered for the exact same first. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Angle: What to Expect

What might exams ask about her?

Do not confuse Anandibai Joshi with Kadambini Ganguly. Joshi earned her degree first, in 1886, but died before she could practise.

Ganguly is separately credited as the first Indian woman to actually practise Western medicine, in Calcutta.

Examiners may pair her with Rukhmabai, whose personal court case reshaped debate on marriage and consent. Her thesis topic connects to broader questions on Ayurveda versus Western medicine in colonial India.

> **Quick check 6.** Kadambini Ganguly is separately credited as the first Indian woman to actually practise Western medicine, in Calcutta. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 7. Anandibai Joshi's thesis relied purely on Western medical knowledge, with no reference to Ayurvedic ideas. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 8. Anandibai Joshi returned to India in November 1886, months after earning her MD, and was appointed to a hospital post in Kolhapur. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 9. Anandibai Joshi's 1883 voyage to America was considered crossing the "kala pani," and led to ostracism from parts of her own community. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 10. Anandibai Joshi is honoured today with both an astronomical namesake and a Google Doodle marking her birth anniversary. True or false? *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Where does this information come from?

- Standard record of Anandibai Joshi's life, medical degree, and death.

Practice MCQs

1. Anandibai Joshi earned her medical degree from which institution?

A. Johns Hopkins University

B. Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania

C. University of Edinburgh

D. Grant Medical College, Bombay

See answer ↓

2. What was the broad subject of Anandibai Joshi's graduation thesis?

A. Obstetrics among Hindus

B. Child nutrition

C. Tropical fevers

D. Surgery in war

See answer ↓

3. Who was Anandibai Joshi's husband, who backed her study abroad?

A. Raghunath Karve

B. Gopalrao Joshi

C. Mahadev Govind Ranade

D. Jyotirao Phule

See answer ↓

4. Anandibai Joshi was offered a post at which hospital in Kolhapur?

A. Albert Edward Hospital

B. Sassoon Hospital

C. Cama Hospital

D. King Edward Memorial Hospital

See answer ↓

5. In which year did Anandibai Joshi die?

A. 1883

B. 1885

C. 1887

D. 1890

See answer ↓

6. Who is credited as the first Indian woman to actually practise Western medicine?

A. Muthulakshmi Reddy

B. Anandibai Joshi

C. Rukhmabai

D. Kadambini Ganguly

See answer ↓

7. Joshi's American friend and host, who read her letter in a missionary periodical, was:

A. Theodicia Carpenter

B. Rachel Bodley

C. Clara Barton

D. Annie Besant

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.** She joined in 1883 and graduated in 1886. This made her the first Indian woman with a Western medical degree. ↑ Q1
2. **A.** Her thesis was on obstetrics among the Aryan Hindus. It drew on both Ayurvedic and Western ideas. ↑ Q2
3. **B.** Gopalrao was a widower, much older than her. He held unusual views on women's education for his time. ↑ Q3
4. **A.** She was to run the female ward there. Poor health stopped her from ever treating patients. ↑ Q4
5. **C.** She died on 26 February 1887, a few months after returning to India. She was about 21. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** Joshi earned her degree first but died before practising. Ganguly practised in Calcutta. ↑ Q6
7. **A.** Carpenter of New Jersey wrote back offering help. The two exchanged letters for nearly two years. ↑ Q7

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** Her thesis, "Obstetrics among the Aryan Hindus," combined Ayurvedic and Western medical ideas. ↑ 1
2. **False.** She had already been appointed to a medical post, but declining health meant she never treated a patient before her death. ↑ 2
3. **True.** Her 1883 voyage to America, crossing the "kala pani," led to ostracism from parts of her own community. ↑ 3
4. **True.** They exchanged letters for nearly two years before Joshi's 1883 voyage, alongside a 200-rupee contribution from Viceroy Lord Ripon toward her education. ↑ 4
5. **False.** Joshi earned her medical degree first, but Kadambini Ganguly is separately credited as the first Indian woman to actually practise Western medicine. ↑ 5
6. **True.** Examiners may pair Joshi with Rukhmabai, whose personal court case reshaped debate on marriage and consent in the same era. ↑ 6

7. **False.** Her thesis, "Obstetrics among the Aryan Hindus," deliberately combined Ayurvedic and Western medical ideas, not just one tradition. ↑ 7
8. **True.** She died only months later, in February 1887, before she could begin treating patients there. ↑ 8
9. **True.** This came despite her husband Gopalrao holding strong, unusual views on women's education for his time. ↑ 9
10. **True.** The International Astronomical Union named a crater on Venus "Joshee" in her honour, and Google marked her 153rd birth anniversary in 2018 with a dedicated Doodle. ↑ 10

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