

Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder (1870 - 1960)

**On the 9th of December, CMC celebrates
the birth anniversary of its founder, Ida Scudder, as Founder's Day**

CMC's 'founding mother', Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder, was born in Ranipet, a nondescript village in South India, in 1870. The only sister to seven boys, Ida, called Bonnie by her family, epitomised her name. The vivacious child became an effervescent young woman who had no intentions of using her talents and matching good looks for anything other than enjoying 'the good life'.



Ida Scudder with her parents

All this changed one night in Tindivanam, south of Chennai, where she was staying in the Mission House with her parents.

Her parents were second-generation missionaries, committed to a life of daily hardship, receiving no earthly recompense in wealth, name or fame. However this evoked no conflict in her. In fact, it only strengthened her resolve. Her absolute resistance to her parents' chosen path stemmed from her horrendous childhood experiences when she witnessed the ravages of the Great Famine of South India, which killed over five million people.

We all know of watershed events that have changed the course of history for a land and its people. The Montgomery Bus Boycott sparked the US Civil Rights Movement. The Napalm Girl, captured on camera, pricked the conscience of a nation and helped end the Vietnam War. The image of 'Tank Man' became the international mascot for the Tiananmen Square Protests in China. For the Indian Independence Movement, it was the Sepoy Mutiny of Vellore.

Can what happened in Tindivanam be considered such an event? I believe it can because it changed the course of history for Vellore, for Tamil Nadu and in due course for the whole country.

Three men came to Ida, one after the other, asking for help with their teenaged wives, struggling with complicated deliveries. Ida was eager to help, but had no medical training. She assured each of them that her father, a doctor, would soon be on his way to attend to their wives. To her utter shock, all three men refused help saying that it would be better that his wife died than that another man set eyes on her.

Ida wrote*: *“I could not sleep that night – it was too terrible. Within the touch of my hand were three girls dying because there was no woman to help them. I spent much of the night in anguish and prayer...I went to bed in the early morning after praying much for guidance. I think that was the first time I ever met God face to face, and all that time it seemed that He was calling me into this work.”*

The next morning, Ida heard the devastating news that all three girls and their babies had died. With this her life's path was set. By 1899, within ten years of this incident, Ida had completed her medical studies in the US and qualified as a doctor. Soon after, having raised money to build a hospital for women and children in Vellore, she returned to India. In 1900, Ida opened a one-bedded clinic and two years later, in 1902, a 40-bedded hospital. In 1903 she started to train compounders, in 1909 nurses and in 1918 she opened India's first Medical School for Women, with a Licentiate of Medical Practitioner Course, in Vellore.



The 40-bedded hospital has grown into a 3000-bedded multi-speciality healthcare system spread over six campuses, encompassing a range of services from super-specialities to community programmes. Today, CMC is one of the top-ranked educational, healthcare and research institutes in the country. People from all socio-economic backgrounds, religions and ethnicities from across the country and the neighbouring countries come to CMC seeking the ethical, compassionate and quality care it is reputed for.

The medical school started by Ida and later upgraded into a college, completed its centenary last year. Every year, 100 medical students graduate. Some join the nearly 2000-strong team of doctors in their alma mater, some go back to their own home States and a few go abroad. Others serve in rural hospitals under a nation-wide network of 200 hospitals in remote areas run by CMC's various partner missions.



Ida Scudder did not achieve her extraordinary success on her own. Her personal charisma, her unwavering commitment to the disadvantaged, and her vision that her life's work was building 'the Kingdom of God' impacted everyone she met. She inspired people from all over the world. Many who were outstanding in their own fields chose to stand with her and take the plunge into a completely uncertain future that promised nothing ... but deep fulfillment.

Today, thanks to our founder, the motto, 'Not to be ministered unto, but to minister' - not to be served but to serve - still shines as the guiding light for the 119-year-old institution offering health and healing to the people of India.

** Taken from the book 'Ida S. Scudder' by Pauline Jeffrey*