

Oh! Glorious alma mater

Although the Western system of medicine came to India through the Portuguese in the early 1500s, it was not until the British East India Company constructed a hospital in Madras (presently Chennai) that it was practised formally in an Indian hospital. Surat and Machilipattinam, the first trading posts of the British, were served initially by British surgeons aboard the trading ships. These surgeons tended to the British living in India. It was after the founding of Madras in 1639 and the construction of Fort St George in 1640 that the British considered setting up a permanent medical facility in India

From a rented house to a State-of-the-art hospital

This rented house in 1664 became a small hospital (Madras General Hospital), lodging 8–10 sick British soldiers of the garrison. The hospital was initially located in Fort St George and was then moved to its current location in 1772. This is illustrated in the plaque (Fig. 1) which remains near the office of the Dean of Madras Medical College (originally inscribed in 1692 under Elihu Yale, governor of the British East India Company and benefactor of Yale University, USA). In 1827, the hospital was imparting training to Europeans, Eurasians and Indians in western allopathic medicine, although a formal medical school had not been established. What started off as a private medical hall, thanks to Dr William Mortimar (superintendent of the hospital), was regularized into a medical school, the Madras Medical School, in 1835. Founded by the then Governor of Madras, Rt Hon. Sir Frederick Adam, KCB, by a General Order of Government dated 13 February 1835, the school was attached to the GGH. Indians were admitted to the school from 1842. On 1 October 1850, the school council submitted a proposal for it to be accorded the status of a college and the school was christened the Madras Medical College. In 1852, the first batch graduated and these students were awarded the degree of graduate of MMC. The MMC was affiliated to the University of Madras from 1857 to 1988, when the Tamil Nadu Dr M.G.R. Medical University was established. The college is celebrating its 189th anniversary in 2024.

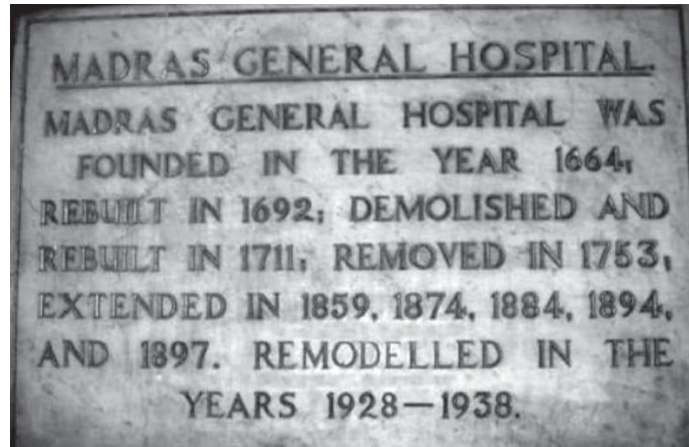


Fig1 . This plaque is currently located near the office of the Dean, Madras Medical College

Divisions

The legendary Dr A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, who was the first Indian to be appointed Principal of the MMC in 1939, wrote in the same year:

The Madras General Hospital now presents an inspiring pile of buildings, of which Madras may well be proud and which delights the eye of every professional visitor to this city.

One such building still in existence on the campus is a red building that houses the anatomy hall, where first-year medical students spend about half their learning time. This hall is aptly termed ‘the Red Fort’, for the student who survives the rigors of learning in this fort seems certain to survive the remaining years of medical education (Fig. 2).



Fig 2 anatomy building : (The red fort)

The year 1934 saw the establishment of the Bradfield surgical block, named in honour of Sir Ernest Bradfield, who was the Professor of Surgery in 1924 and the superintendent of the GGH.

The cardiology block was inaugurated in 1972 and the cornerstone was laid by Helen B. Taussig, one of the founders of the field of paediatric cardiology and

the co-developer of the Blalock–Taussig shunt, the first surgical treatment for tetralogy of Fallot.

The Dr Achanta Lakshmi pathi block for neurology was opened in 1972.

The Regional Institute of Ophthalmology (Fig 3), started in 1819, was the first eye hospital in India and the second oldest in the world, after Moorfield's Ophthalmology hospital in London (started in 1818).

The Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (IOG) (fig 4) , the aerial view of which resembles the female pelvis, was the only institution offering postgraduate courses in gynaecology until 1948.

The Barnard Institute of Radiology (named after Capt. T. W. Barnard OBE10) was started on 26 March 1934. The first X-ray outfit was obtained for the general hospital in 1900, only 5 years after Roentgen made his famous discovery. It was the first in Southeast Asia. The department has the distinction of having had the first MRI equipment among government hospitals in the region.



Fig 3 Regional Institute of Ophthalmology



Fig 4. Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Major achievements

Since the first batch of students graduated from the MMC in 1852, a number of talented physicians and surgeons have graduated from this institute.

The first ever lady doctor in Madras, Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy (Fig. 5), graduated from the institution in 1912 and was the first woman to be nominated a member of the legislative council in 1926. She was also the founder of the Adyar Cancer Institute.

The proposal to open the doors of the MMC to women came from Surgeon-General E. G. Balfour and was sanctioned by the government on 11 January 1875.

One of the first 4 women medical students of the world, Mary Scharlieb (Fig. 6) attended the MMC because she was denied permission to study in British medical colleges. Mary Scharlieb graduated from the MMC in 1878 and continued her higher studies at the Royal London School of Medicine, before returning to Madras to set up the Kasturba Gandhi Hospital for Women and Children (earlier known as the Royal Victoria Hospital for Caste and Gosha Women). She also established the Women's Medical Service in 1916.

An illustrious member of the faculty of the MMC was Charles Donovan. Born in India in 1863, he studied in Trinity College, Dublin and in 1889, became a Professor of Physiology at the MMC. In 1903, while working in the college, he discovered the causative agent of kala-azar—*Leishmania donovani*.

Dr Guruswami Mudaliar was the first Indian to be appointed a professor and held the position of Professor of Therapeutics at the MMC.

Professor Sam G. P. Moses was instrumental in starting the first diabetic clinic in the country in 1953 at the MMC and GGH (which earned him the title of 'Father of Diabetes'). He was the youngest person to be promoted as Professor of Medicine in 1957 at the MMC.

Professor A. Venugopal obtained both his graduate and postgraduate degrees from the MMC and founded the department of Urology at the institution. He was also the honorary director of the postgraduate institute of basic medical sciences of the University of Madras and an executive committee member of the Medical Council of India (1975–83).

Dr T. S. Kanaka, the first female neurosurgeon in Asia, trained at the MMC and later became a professor in the college. Her notable achievement was her contribution to the field of stereotactic surgery. She was the first neurosurgeon in India to perform chronic electrode implantation in the brain.

It was in the MMC that the first case of HIV in India was identified and the first cardiothoracic surgeon in the country, Dr A. Sadasivam, was trained.

Dr B. Ramamurthy, the renowned neurosurgeon, established the Institute of Neurology, which houses all neuroscience specialties and the first head injury unit in India.

Professor N. Rangabashyam, a renowned surgical gastroenterologist, established the first surgical gastroenterology department in India at the MMC and the first ever MCh (surgical gastroenterology) superspecialty training programme in India at the college.

Dr V. Shanta, Director of the Cancer Institute, Adyar and winner of the 2005 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service, too, is a graduate of the MMC.



Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy



Dr Mary Scharlieb



Dr Guruswami Mudaliar



Dr B. Ramamurthy



Professor N. Rangabashyam



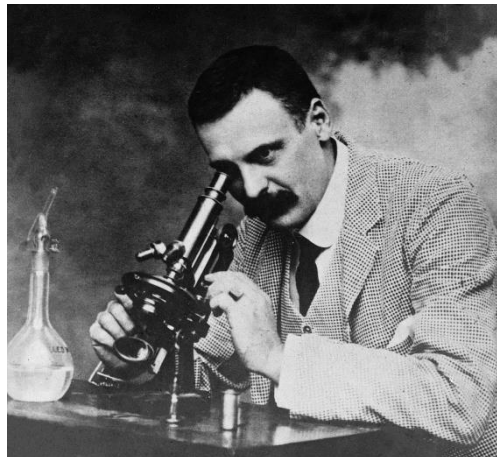
Dr V. Shanta



Dr T. S. Kanaka



Professor Sam G. P. Moses



Charles Donovan