

Impact Statement

Hrithika K. Sunil, Grade 11

***Kadambini Ganguly : In Her Hands*, 2025**

Acrylic, colored pencil, watercolor on paper, 14.5 x 10.5 inches

Sharjah Indian School, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Unsung Hero: Kadambini Ganguly

I chose Kadambini Ganguly, one of India's first female physicians and a pioneer for women's rights. Growing up as an Indian expatriate in the United Arab Emirates, I have always felt a strong connection to stories of resilience and identity. Kadambini's courage in breaking barriers within a male-dominated society, where women were born to obey, tells you a lot about the woman she was and the woman many girls aspire to be. Kadambini Ganguly made history by becoming one of the first Indian women to earn a medical degree and practice Western medicine. At a time when most women were denied even basic education, she challenged social expectations and opened doors for countless others. Beyond medicine, her involvement with the Brahmo Samaj reflected her belief in social reform and equality, becoming the first woman to address a session of the INC, a big deal, even in today's 'feminist' times. Her life was not just about personal achievement, but about lifting others alongside her. She was seen and viewed as the representative of all things woman wanted and was deeply scorned upon by conservatives for this very detail. She represents the power of education, determination, and radical change.

My artistic vision was to bring forward the spirit of balance and strength that Kadambini embodied. In the artwork, she stands at the center, holding a conch from which a stethoscope emerges — a symbol of how her domestic and professional identities were not separate but intertwined. Surrounding her are books and letters, signifying her thirst for learning. Behind her, two posters of medical illustration popular around the 1880's, anchor her story within the medical knowledge of her time.

The background blends a deep blue, representing wisdom, with a pale beige, symbolizing the spirit of the Brahmo Samaj. Bengali writings float behind her, suggesting how her story was recorded and debated in contemporary journalism. A butterfly carrying a candle sits on a table, symbolizing hope, enlightenment, and spiritual resilience. She wears a dark maroon blouse and a sari with blended shades, highlighting her connection to both tradition and change. In one hand, she holds a lotus flower, a symbol of purity and strength, deeply meaningful in Bengali and Brahmo symbolism.

A framed chart of her degrees stands nearby against a green background that grows darker, symbolizing her academic growth. The stethoscope shaded in blue represents her entry into a male-dominated world, breaking through invisible walls.

Working on this project made me reflect on my own journey as a student living abroad, where balancing cultural expectations and personal ambition often feels delicate. Kadambini Ganguly's story has taught me that courage need not be loud or extravagant — sometimes it is steady, persistent, and quietly transformational.

I plan to share my artwork through this platform so as to spread knowledge about her and the years she had spent to become a woman of many firsts, I hope to remind others, including myself, that barriers are meant to be broken — and that identity, tradition, and ambition can coexist powerfully, just as they did in Kadambini's hands.