



Impact Statement

Aditi Saxena, Grade 11

Life Lived, Chains Broken, 2026

Pen and watercolor on paper, 11.5 x 16.5 inches

BVB Vidyashram, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Unsung Hero: Kadambini Ganguly

I have grown up to believe that history is not made of significant dates, but by those determined enough to etch their own path. Kadambini Ganguly was one such lady who brought a change everywhere she reached. As a student who comes from the same land as hers, I felt a pull towards choosing her as my Unsung Hero.

As a part of my school's curriculum, I was already familiar with the struggles of women during pre- and post-Indian colonial period. But after researching Dr. Ganguly's life, it further widened my perspective. I realised that the education that I often take for granted today was once a hard-earned freedom. I chose Kadambini because she pushed boundaries not only for herself, but for all females out there, defying the so-called societal norms.

Kadambini successfully fought against a society that kept women in shadows. Through my search, I found out that Dr. Ganguly became the first ever accepted female of Calcutta Medical College. But to achieve this too, she had to pass a hindrance. Her form was initially rejected, but that didn't stop her from stepping up. She fought with the management and finally walked down in the college halls, as the first woman. This incident of her life is reflected in my painting, where from a torn rejected form, a swan emerges. Torn because of her efforts, because she fought with the management, torn because she was finally accepted and emerged as a swan, symbolizing Ganguly. Swan is a symbol of an Indian goddess of knowledge and wisdom, Goddess Saraswati, and is also associated with grace and purity, which I felt has a sharp resonance with Dr. Kadambini.

One more life piece of hers that moved me was a newspaper piece where Dr. Ganguly was addressed with disrespectful words. The painting has a part where the ink pen is leaking, the black ink wanting to ruin her reputation, but the ink could never reach her, it dodged her.

My vision was to create not only a life collage but instead weave her story together. For this, I painted some important life stories of Ganguly on the sari she is wearing, which is a traditional Indian attire. This, I felt, represented how she wore all her life and her milestones and her achievements proudly.

Further, to honour the importance of the place she comes from, I went with Pattachitra style of painting, a traditional Indian art form of Bengal region where she hails from, to paint all the life moments of her. The seven block-like motifs on her sari are in Pattachitra style where pop colours like yellow, red, brown, and green are used. The seven moments I have painted

involves her defying the patriarchal system and entering into the real world, her entry into Calcutta College, her receiving the doctorate, all her college badges, her as one of the first women in Congress as a Congress speaker, her help towards the coal mine workers which is not mentioned as much as it should be, and finally her resting in a pleased position, living the life of her ambition.

The borders of the painting too are painted in Pattachitra style where I have incorporated medical symbols. I painted her face in shades of grey to symbolize the timelessness of her presence, to show the impact she had will always be remembered and it will always stand out.

Creating this artwork has shown me the power an individual can hold if she decides to and if she finds the right people. Her father and husband, despite being surrounded by people having a rigid mindset, decided to support Kadambini, whose hands rest on her shoulder in the painting (father and husband written in Bengali, her mother tongue on the hand). I wish to share this piece within my school community to introduce them to this woman of mettle. The red cross in the middle of the painting within the folds of her sari and the transformation of chains into her stethoscope, which is surrounded by the Indian tricolors shows the 'chains she broke' became her path for the 'life she lived'.