

## DR. SAKINEH PARI, THE FIRST IRANIAN FEMALE SURGEON

### DR. SAKINEH PARI, PRVA IRANSKA KIRURGINJA

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*"Do something wonderful, people may imitate it."*

Albert Schweitzer, 1875-1965,  
Nobel Peace Prize Winner (1952)

#### SUMMARY

Modern surgery has been evolved in Iran by the establishment of Dar al-Funun and Tehran University in 1851 and 1934 respectively. Professor Yahya Adl established the first academic department of surgery at Tehran University in 1930s and he is known as the father of modern surgery in Iran. Until recent times, women's options for obtaining advanced surgical training programs were severely restricted all over the world. Dr. Sakineh Pari, born in 1902, was the first Iranian female surgeon. The aim of this article is to introduce Dr. Sakineh Pari as the first woman surgeon in Iran.

**Key Words:** History of Surgery, female surgeon; 20<sup>th</sup> century; Iran; Sakineh Pari.

#### WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF SURGERY

Modern surgery has been introduced to the history of surgery by William Stewart Halsted (1852-1922). As a professor of surgery, Halsted moved surgery

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from the melodramatics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the starkness and sterility of modern operating rooms [1,2]. He designed the first surgical residency program with the aim of training “not only surgeons but surgeons of the highest type” [3]. Halsted is known as the father of American surgery [4]. One of the many overlooked areas of the modern surgery is the involvement of women. Until recent times, women’s options for obtaining advanced surgical training programs were severely restricted [2]. Dr. Mary Edwards Walker (1832-1919) is recorded as the first female surgeon in the United States. In 1855, she was the second female graduate of an American medical school, with Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell being the first in 1949. Dr. Edwards Walker went into practice with her husband Albert Miller, a classmate. Also, Dr. Jennie Smillie Robertson (1878-1981) was the first recorded female surgeon in Canada [5,6].

### EVOLUTION OF MODERN SURGERY IN IRAN

Hadji Baba (also known as Hadji Mirza Afshar, Hakim-Bashi) was the first Iranian who was sent to the Britain to study anatomy and surgery in 1812. He was granted and supported by Prince Abbas Mirza (1789–1833), the younger son of Fath Ali Shah Qajar [7]. Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir, the reformist prime minister of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar founded Dar al-Funun (Institute of Techniques) in 1851 in Tehran, Iran which served as a polytechnic school and trained Iranians in medicine, engineering, military sciences and geology. It was the first modern institute of higher education in Iran [8].

Tehran University was established in 1934 in Tehran, Iran as the first modern university in the country. Tehran University was established from unification of Dar al-Funun’s institutions. Professor Yahya Adl (1908-2002) established and organized the first department of surgery at Sina (Avicenna) hospital which was affiliated to Tehran University. Dr. Adl is known as the father of modern surgery in Iran. He initiated modern surgical residency training programs in Iran [9]. Interestingly, Sakineh Pari is known to be the first female surgeon (1902-?) in Iran [10].

### DR. SAKINEH PARI (1902-?)

Sakineh Pari was born in Bakhchysarai, former Soviet Union in 1902. Her mother was an Iranian-Armenian and her father was from Hamedan, Iran. Sakineh Pari studied medicine in Soviet Union and then she continued her studies in surgery and oncology. She received her certification in surgery and oncology in 1933. She worked in Soviet Union for five years

[10-12]. Because of her great interest to Iran, she moved to Iran after she lost her parents. She was recognized as a physician in Iran in 1934 after she obtained a number of qualifications. In addition to Persian and Russian, she was able to speak Turkish-Azeri languages and thus, she accepted the offer of North Iranian Fisheries Company to work in Gharasoo, Iran. She worked for fourteen years in Gharasoo and then moved to Bander-E-Gaz, Gorgan in the north of Iran. She has had private practice there [13].



Dr. Sakineh Pari, the first Iranian female surgeon

Dr. Pari worked as a medical practitioner in under-developed cities of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century northern Iran such as Gharasoo and Bandar-E-Gaz and served the poor patients. Because of her reputation for serving the poor and providing free medical care, it is that her services were comparable to those of Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) to the people of Africa [11-13]. Dr. Pari is known to be the first female surgeon in Iran and her great attempts to provide and facilitate health care and medical practice in Iran would never be forgotten [10-13]. Involvement of women in surgery is an interesting topic in the history of surgery and we are grateful to Dr. Pari for her contribution to the art and science of surgery in early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Iran.

## CONCLUSION

Physicians' Day is celebrated on 23<sup>rd</sup> of August in Iran annually. It is the birthday of Sheikh al-Raeis Ali al-Hussain ibn Abdullah ibn Sina (AD 980-1037) (also known as Avicenna in the west), the great physician, scientist and philosopher of mediaeval Iran [14,15]. In 2013, during physicians' day ceremony in Bandar-E-Gaz, Golestan, Iran, Dr. Sakineh Pari was called as a pioneer in modern Iranian medicine not only for being the first female Iranian surgeon but also for her activities toward providing free medical care and serving the poor in northern Iran.<sup>16</sup> We are grateful to Dr. Sakineh Pari for being the first female surgeon in Iran. Iranian physicians and surgeons would never forget her contributions to the practice of medicine and surgery in Iran.

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## SAŽETAK

*Moderna iranska kirurgija razvija se od osnivanja sveučilišta Dar al-Funun 1851. godine odnosno teheranskog sveučilišta 1934. godine. Professor Yahya Adl, otac iranske moderne kirurgije, osnovao je tridesetih godina 20. stoljeća prvu katedru za kirurgiju na teheranskom sveučilištu. Sve donedavna mogućnost da ženi bude dodijeljen napredni program kirurškog usavršavanja bio je svugdje u svijetu znatno ograničen. Profesor Adl pokrenuo je u Iranu specijalističko usavršavanje u kirurgiji, no slično drugim zemljama, žene su bile manje poželjne i imale su manje izgleda za dobivanje specijalizacije. Dr. Sakineh Pari, rođena 1902. godine, bila je prva iranska kirurginja. Živjela je u nerazvijenim gradovima sjevernog Irana i bila je desetljećima na usluzi siromašnima.*

**Ključne riječi:** *povijest kirurgije; kirurginja; 20. stoljeće; Iran; Sakineh Pari*