

Women in Anaesthesiology in India in the year 2025

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Abbreviations

ESRA: European Society of Regional Anaesthesia; AORA: Academy of Regional Anaesthesia; ISCCM: Indian society of Critical Care Medicine; IAWA: Indian Association of Women Anaesthesiologists; BC/CC/C/TP: Brief Communication/Clinical Communication/Commentary/Trial Protocol; CS/CR: Case Series/Reports; Ed: Editorial; LTE: Letter to Editor; MA: Meta-Analysis; NA/SA: Narrative Reviews/ Special Articles, OA: Original Articles.

Editorial

As we celebrate the 'International Women's Day' on March 8, it is time to put on record the major strides women have taken in the field of Anaesthesiology in India. The year 2025 is a time to celebrate the roles women are playing in this physically and mentally demanding branch of Medicine.

The legacy of the important role of women in Anaesthesiology in our country has been carried forward through years. Dr. Rupa Bai Furdoonji was the world's first woman physician anaesthesiologist (Figure 1). She was actively involved in practice of her branch from 1889-1917 [1].



Figure 1: Dr Rupa Bai Furdoonji -The first female anaesthetist of the world.

Much later, Dr.K.P.Mishra and Dr. S.K.Mehta, post-independence, were to become icons in the field of Anaesthesiology in our country. The 1980's and 1990's saw the advent of brilliant women like Dr. Nalini Kotekar and Dr. Jaya Shreedhar [1-3].

Several Ladies are at the Forefront in these Times

Some of them are [1-3]:

Dr. Anju Gupta: The first Indian representative of ESRA (European Society of Regional Anaesthesia), Editor of South Asian edition of Clinical Anaesthesia and National executive member of Indian Association of Paediatric Anaesthesia.

Dr. Vrushali Pande: Founder trustee of Regional Anaesthesia, India (AORA-Academy of Regional Anaesthesia, India), founder Secretary General of Academy of Regional Anaesthesia, India and the recipient of Bharat Jyoti Award, 2020.

Dr. Sunanda Gupta: Founder president of Association of Obstetric anaesthesiologists and Editor of first textbook on Obstetric anaesthesia in India.

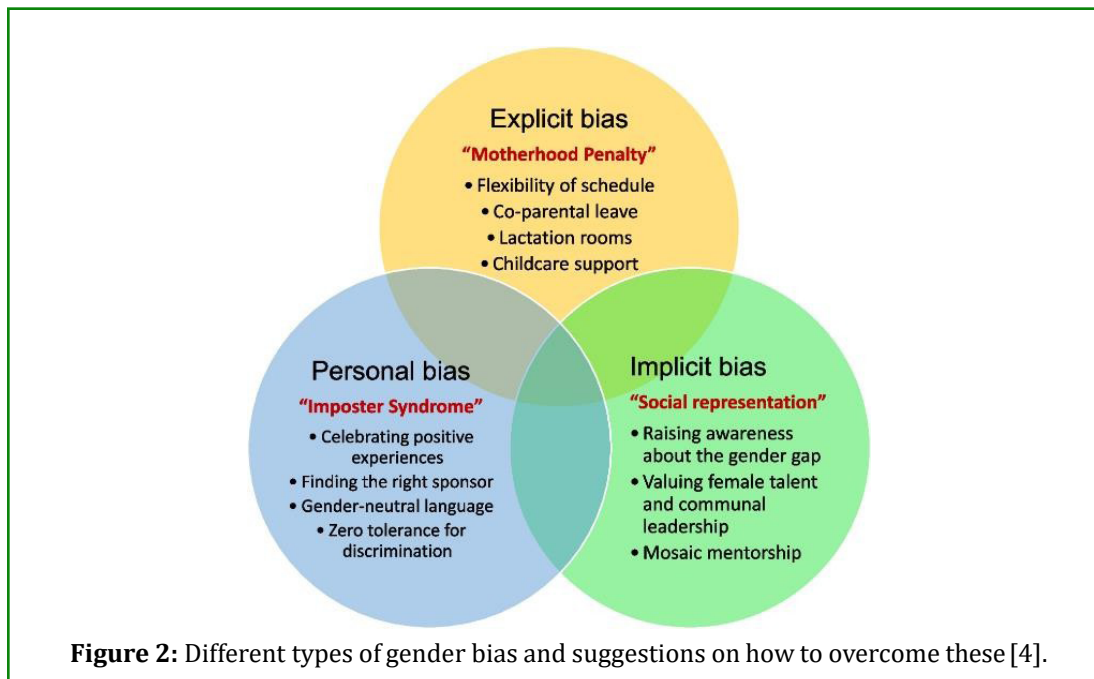
Dr. Sheila N. Myatra: President of ISCCM (Indian society of Critical Care Medicine).

Dr. Jayshree Sood: Chairperson at Institute of Anaesthesiology, Pain and Perioperative Medicine and also, founding member, trustee and President of Indian College of Anaesthesiology.

Through times, women in India have faced several challenges in all professional fields, Anaesthesiology included. But it is heartening to see them taking these challenges in their stride. They are now occupying significant positions in their departments, hospitals and other professional institutions. Today, women are accounting for nearly 35% of the total strength of all anaesthesiologists in our country, up from 10 % nearly 15 years back. Women anaesthesiologists are increasingly occupying leadership positions in their respective departments in medical colleges, hospitals and other professional organisations.

Challenges for Female Anaesthesiologists

Gender bias: Unfortunately, gender bias has not been totally eliminated in our country, even today. Male colleagues and patient's relatives are often sceptical regarding the abilities of a woman anaesthesiologists. However, times are changing and changing fast.



Maintaining a Work-Life Balance: Women besides doing their professional duties have also got to balance their professional lives with their personal lives. The additional pressures of managing and bringing up kids besides looking after homes indeed put the women through great physical and mental stress. Often, it becomes difficult to maintain physical and mental harmony.

Limited Opportunities for Training and Career Advancement: Due to the double load on women due to taxing duty schedules at work and home, women doctors in general and anaesthesiologists in particular, cut down on their research, training and other career advancement programmes.

Family Pressures to Prioritise Family Responsibilities Over Career Responsibilities: In our patriarchal society, it is expected that women only have to prioritise homes over hospitals.

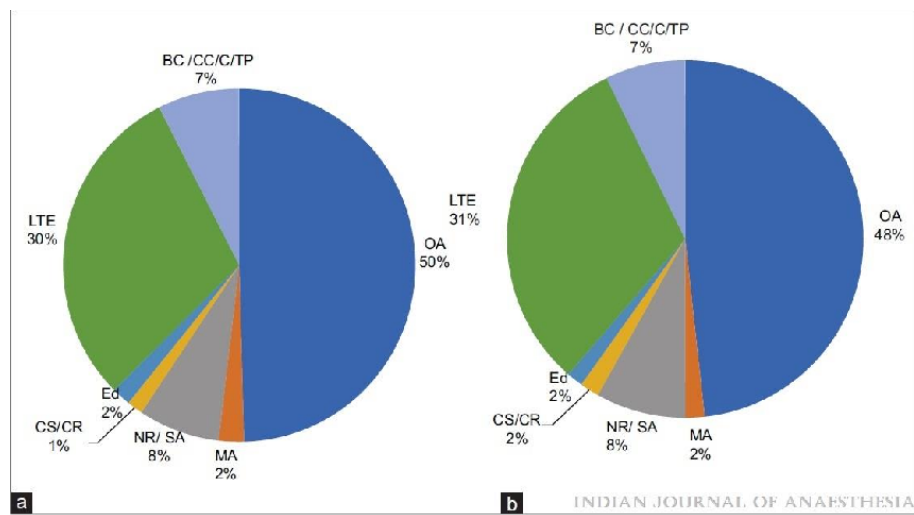
Opportunities and Future Prospects

The Healthcare sector is growing at a rapid rate in our country, opening the way for a great demand for anaesthesiologists in our country and the women anaesthesiologists will have far more opportunities to build successful careers.

Organisations like ISA and IAWA (Indian Association of Women Anaesthesiologists) are providing guidance, mentorship and career advancement opportunities for

female anaesthesiologists.

Women anaesthesiologists are now contributing significantly in Research and Innovation. From 2010- 2018, women represented less than a third of first authors and less than a fifth of last authors in original research papers published in three international journals in Anaesthesiology with high impact factors-The British Journal of Anaesthesia, Anaesthesiology and Anaesthesia. Another observation based on original research articles published in high impact Anaesthesiology journals over the past 15 years demonstrated that women made up a higher percentage of first authors in manuscripts with female co-authors [3,5] (Figure 2).



Source: BC/CC/C/TP= Brief communication/ clinical communication/commentary/trial protocol, CS/CR= Case series/reports, Ed= Editorial, LTE= Letter to Editor, MA: Meta-analysis, NA/SA= Narrative reviews/ Special articles, OA= Original Articles [2].

Figure 3: Pie diagrams showing the proportion of the various types of articles published in the Indian Journal of Anaesthesia and Journal of Anaesthesiology Clinical Pharmacology in percentages with women anaesthesiologists as a) First Author and b) Corresponding Author.

More non-experimental studies had female senior authors than experimental studies. Also, more female first authors were there in the sub-specialities of neuroanaesthesia, Obstetric anaesthesia, Pain management and Paediatric Anaesthesia.

It is refreshing to note that a large number of articles published in Indian Journal of Anaesthesia have women as first authors. Similarly, a sizeable and increasing number of female award paper nominees are showing their presence in National conferences.

Empowering women in Anaesthesiology

Empowering women in Anaesthesiology is crucial for creating a more inclusive and supporting environment.

Empowerment strategies

Mentorship programmes: Mentorship programs need to be established that pair women anaesthesiologists with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, support and career advice.

Training and education: Training and education programs that address the needs and challenges of women in Anaesthesiology need to be provided.

Networking opportunities: Creation of networking opportunities that allow women to connect with peers so as to build relationships and share their experiences.

Flexible work arrangement: Flexible arrangement in duty

schedules should be there for women anaesthesiologists so that a balance is maintained between work and family responsibilities.

Women anaesthesiologists should be encouraged to take up leadership roles with opportunities to develop leadership skills and confidence.

The Indian society of Anaesthesiology should establish a women's section to address to the unique needs and challenges of women anaesthesiologists.

Hospitals and Health care institutions should also help in providing empowerment and more opportunities for women anaesthesiologists. The Government should also provide scholarships, training and mentorship programs for empowering women in general and women anaesthesiologists in particular.

To conclude, the status of Women in Anaesthesiology in India in the year 2025 is pretty promising and needless to say, a bright future as well!

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