



## **Vidyasagar and Women's Liberation Movement in India: An Assessment**

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### **Abstract:**

**Aims/Purpose:** This paper tried to assess the role of Vidyasagar in women's education particularly of liberation movement in India. Vidyasagar was a symbol of women's advancement in the nineteenth century. At the period, Vidyasagar worked tirelessly to ensure that women had equal rights as males in all sectors. Education can ensure women's rights in society. **Methodology:** The historical method is used to confirm the truth of past occurrences and hence discover the causal relationship between current events by gaining knowledge from the past. **Findings:** Vidyasagar took significant steps to spread and encourage women's education. Throughout his life, he attempted to demonstrate that women had an essential part in social, political, economic, and cultural affairs. At a young age, girls married older men. They became widows at a young age. He introduced widow marriage to alleviate the plight of these young females. He also attempted to raise public awareness of harmful traditions such as child marriage and polygamy. He believed that the fundamental reason for the deterioration of Indian women was a lack of meaningful education. Vidyasagar established girl's schools, a normal school for women's education, and founded 'Narisksha Vandar' to keep girls' schools open. In this paper, we will look at Vidyasagar's role in reintroducing women to the mainstream and understanding their situation in the nineteenth century. **Comments:** Women can now move freely in society, establish themselves through proper education, and freely voice their opinions. When contemporary women are compared to nineteenth-century women, the true contrast becomes clear.

**Keywords:** Vidyasagar, Widow Marriage, Polygamy, Women Education, Narisksha Vandar, Women Awakening.

### **Introduction:**

Iswarchandra Bondopaddhay, the living idol of unbroken masculinity, was born on September 26, 1820, in Birsingh village, Midnapore district. Father Thakurdas Bondopadhyay arrived in Calcutta in 1828 with his very bright son. Vidyasagar was admitted to Sanskrit college in 1829 at the age of nine. Vidyasagar graduated from Sanskrit college at the age of 21, earning the title Vidyasagar. In 1841, he was appointed chief scholar at Fort William College. In 1846, he was hired as an Associate Professor at Sanskrit College, and in 1851, he became Principal. Hallow, the industrious, fearless social reformer, placed a strong focus on both Eastern and Western education. However, he took cautious not to impede the spread of Bengali

literature by being obsessed with English sentiments. His books include ‘Bornaporichoy’, ‘Kothamala’, ‘Siterbanobas’, ‘Betalponchabingsati’, and ‘Vrantibilash’. In the nineteenth century, many scholars arose in the heart of India, dedicated to creating new history. Women were unable to freely express themselves back then. Their range was essentially confined to four walls. In this civilization, women were denied the opportunity to receive formal education. Their lives were afflicted by curses such as child marriage and child widowhood. The history of Indian women’s freedom has witnessed Vidyasagar’s vows to break the curse and his tireless fight to fulfill them.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To know about Vidyasagar’s contribution in bringing women back into the mainstream of society.
2. Knowing the position of women in the nineteen century.
3. Learn about Vidyasagar’s contribution to the spread of women’s education.

### **Importance of the Study:**

1. This will help women to get out of the confines of the four walls.
2. This will help them to realize that they are also contributing to the society.
3. “The child’s first school is his mother’s lap”- this will help to understand the true meaning of the doctrine.
4. Women will be freed from the darkness of superstition.
5. ‘Half of the society is women’- so they also play an important role in society it will be known.
6. Society will know that women are not neglected.

### **Methodology:**

Historical research is the process of describing and understanding historical events using scientific methods. This strategy is used to verify the accuracy of previous occurrences and hence determine the causal relationship between current events using knowledge gathered from the past. Understanding the past helps us better grasp the dynamics of the present. It is claimed that every event has a historical background. If we know the exact history of the evolution of many components of society and culture, we may predict the future society. This article attempts to authentically portray Vidyasagar’s hard efforts to free women from the bonds of superstition and superstition in the nineteenth century.

### **Analysis and Discussion:**

#### **Vidyasagar’s contribution for the advancement of women:**

1. **Introducing widow marriage:** Vidyasagar was a social reformer who introduced widow marriage as his biggest success. In Hindu society, young girls married the old. As a result, girls frequently became widows at a young age. Vidyasagar was the first to experience the anguish of a Hindu child widow. He quotes from the ‘Parasar Sanhita’ to demonstrate that widow marriage is consistent with the scriptures. The widow marriage movement led by Vidyasagar was the first all-India social reform movement of the nineteenth century. At Vidyasagar’s initiative, an application with the signatures of a thousand persons in support of widow marriage was forwarded to the members of the Indian legislature. Lord Dalhousie ultimately passed the widow Marriage Act on July 4, 1855, at Vidyasagar’s insistence, with regulation No.140. When widow marriage became legal, Vidyasagar

stated, "Introducing widow marriage is the most important honest deed of my life." The first widow marriage occurred on December 7, 1856, between Shrishchandra Vidyaratna, a Sanskrit college professor, and Kalimati Devi, a ten-year-old widow daughter of Brambhananda Mukherjee from Burdwan district. He subsequently married his son, Narayan Chandra, to an 18-year-old widow named Vanusundari. Between 1856 and 1867, he married 60 widows for a total cost of Rs. 82000. Vidyasagar established the Hindu Family Annuity Fund in 1872 to assist impoverished widows. Vidyasagar wrote to his brother Shambhu Chandra about his son's marriage to a widow, saying, "Narayan spontaneously got married and made my face brighter."

**2. Other Social Reforms:** Child marriage was considered a curse in Hindu culture at the time. He was always striving to get rid of the curse. Vidyasagar opposed child marriage and wrote an article titled 'Child Marriage Fault' in the first edition of 'Sarvasubhakari'. As a result of child marriage, girls became widows at an early age, forcing them to spend the remainder of their lives surrounded by widow's squalor and many stringent societal norms. Vidyasagar proposed widow marriage to assuage the sadness of these young girls. As a result of Vidyasagar's protests against child marriage, the British government passed legislation requiring females to marry at the age of ten. At the period, numerous weddings were common in Hindu society. He sent the British government a letter of protest signed by 50,000 people, condemning the practice. However, due to the British government's disinterest, little was done to address this.

**a) Expansion of Women's education:** Vidyasagar was a pioneer in the Indian women's freedom movement. (Maity, 2019) He believed in his heart that half of society is made up of women, and that improving society without them would be impossible. Vidyasagar's measures to increase women's education are as follows:

**b) Editor of Bethune school:** In May 1849, Mr Bethune started a girls' school in Calcutta. Vidyasagar became the school's unpaid secretary in 1850, at Mr. Bethune's request. For a long time, he had demonstrated tremendous aptitude and achievement in operating the school as its secretary. While in charge of the school, he suggested that his contacts send their girls to Bethune School. At his request, daughters of lords such as Taranath Bachaspati, Shambhunath Pandit, and Haradeb Chattopadhyay were accepted. "Kannya pebong palaniya sikshaniyati jatnata:" was written in Sanskrit on the front of the car for Bethune School pupils. This means that a daughter, like a son, must be properly nurtured and schooled. On December 24, 1856, wrote a paper in Sangbad Pravakar advocating for the restoration of the Bethune School. He stated, "It is crucial to note how much Hindu women and their people will profit from appropriate education. "If women are educated and knowledgeable, they will be able to educate their children."

**c) Spread of women's education in rural areas of Bengal:** Vidyasagar was concerned in more than only the education of women in Calcutta's middle class. She also promoted women's education in rural parts of Bengal. at 1857, Vidyasagar opened a girls' school at Jaoun. Bhagwati Vidyalaya was founded in the village of Birsingh, Midnapore, to honor mother Bhagwati Devi.

**d) Establishment of Girl's Schools in different district:** In early 1857, Mr Haliday was appointed junior governor of Bengal. She rose to prominence as an entrepreneur in the field of women's education in Bangladesh. Vidyasagar agreed with Mr Haliday and resolved to promote women's education in the hamlet, which required the establishment of schools. In 1858, 20 girl's schools were built in Hooghly district, 11 in Burdwan district, 3 in Midnapore district, and 1 in Nadia district, totaling 35. The school has 3500 students.

**e) Establish Narisiksha Vandar:** Vidyasagar requested financial support from the Indian government to keep the girls' schools open. However, the Indian government has stated that it will not be able to

offer any permanent funding for these institutions. Vidyasagar then established Narisiksha vandar to address the financial issues of these schools.

3. **Establish Normal School:** Miss Marry Carpenter, at the time, supported attempts to extend women's rights in Bengal. She submitted a teacher education plan to the government in order to make women's education more successful. When the government asked for Vidyasagar's view, he said he agreed with Miss Marry Carpenter's. As a result, the Normal School was established for teacher education.
4. **Women's awakening:** Swami Vivekananda stated, "After Ramakrishna, I follow Vidyasagar". Vidyasagar's name is etched in gold characters on the pages of history for promoting women's education in Bengal. Women became thoroughly integrated into society thanks to the greedy colonial British's superstition and brutality. At this point, Vidyasagar concluded that women's independence could only be achieved via education. He had a deep conviction that the growth of the country was impossible without the development of women. So Vidyasagar endeavored to continue the magnificent effort begun by Raja Rammohon. Since the Middle Ages, Indian civilization has been plagued by some bad habits. The country descended into hell due to several unclean customs such as child marriage, aristocracy custom, veil custom, sotidaha, and so on. As a result, the rising cries of women warmed India's skies. This was the rule in the past, even if it was against the law. Vidyasagar fully rediscovered the texts and condemned all of these activities. This filthy ritual does not apply in a culture where virginity is venerated as the ultimate symbol of power. His purpose was to better society by educating women. To guide women away from the shadows of superstition and toward the light.

### **Conclusion:**

"Jattra nariyoustu pujante ramante tatra debta" translates to "Where women are worshiped, Gods live." Vidyasagar understood the full meaning. So he had spent his entire life trying to enhance women. As a result, no child widows are suffering now in India. Girls of puppeteering age are not crushed in the family mill. Today, they are also enhancing society through education. Today, women are no longer limited to four walls. Women from Hindu society have earned a name for themselves in the world today. Women are now educated, as are their children. As a result, the country's education rate is steadily rising. Women are now exposed because Vidyasagar confronted the wall of superstition and superstition in Indian society. They can now travel freely in society, receive a proper education, and freely voice their opinions. When contemporary women are compared to nineteenth-century women, the true contrast becomes clear. Today, the women's education rate in India is 65.46%, whereas in West Bengal it is 70.54%. Vidyasagar's education reform for women has made an impact in some way. Today, Indians recognize that women make up half of the population, and that no nation can achieve its full potential by ignoring them. Following independence, many committees and commissions were founded to advance women's education, including the National Committee on Women's Education (1958), the Honhsha Meheta Committee (1961), and the Vaktabatsallm Committee (1963). Today, many programs have been accepted based on their recommendations. The government has currently approved a number of projects and programs aimed at empowering women, including the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2001-2010), Kanyashree Prakalpa (2013), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana (2015), and others. So the women's emancipation movement, which began in the nineteenth century with Vidyasagar, is still active today.

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