

# Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and his contributions

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## Manifest Pedagogy:

Issues and personalities in news are a good trigger for UPSC to pick questions from. In both preliminary and mains, the role and ideologies of personalities are taking centre stage. The Questions in the new pattern are looking at very detailed events in individual personalities life and comparing ideologies of various personalities.

## In news

Violence in Calcutta during election and damage to the statue of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

## Placing it in the syllabus

Modern Indian History

## Dimensions

- His time period
- Contributions to widow remarriage
- Contributions to women's education
- Role as Sanskrit scholar

## Content

### His time period

- He was born on 26 September 1820 in Midnapore district of Bengal Presidency(now in West Bengal).
- From 1829 to 1841 Vidyasagar learned Vedanta, Vyakaran,

Literature, Rhetoric's, Smriti and Ethics in Sanskrit college.

- **Meanwhile, he took part in a competition testing knowledge in Sanskrit in 1839 and earned the title of 'Vidyasagar' meaning Ocean of Knowledge. In the same year, Ishwar Chandra cleared his Law examination.**
- **Vidyasagar joined the Fort William College as the Head Pandit** in the Sanskrit department in 1841.
- In 1846, Vidyasagar left Fort William College and **joined the Sanskrit College as 'Assistant Secretary'**.
- In 1849 he supported John Elliot Bethune to establish the **first permanent girls' school in India, the Bethune School.**
- In 1851, Vidyasagar became **Principal of Sanskrit College.**
- In 1854, Vidyasagar started his **campaign for widow remarriage.**
- **In 1854, he began writing against the practice of ascetic widowhood for Tattvabodhini Patrika, a progressive journal.**
- Vidyasagar assumed the responsibilities as a **special inspector of schools** with additional charges and travelled to remote villages in Bengal to oversee the quality of education in 1855.
- **His arguments with the British brought Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act in 1856**
- **Vidyasagar died at the age of 70 in 1891.**

### **Contributions to widow remarriage**

- Vidyasagar was always vocal about the women who were subjected to oppression by society at that time.
- He was very close to his mother, a woman of great character, who once instructed him to do something to alleviate the pain and helplessness of Hindu widows, who had to live a life of self-denial.
- The women were denied basic pleasures of life,

marginalized in the society, often exploited unfairly and treated as a burden by their family.

- The compassionate heart of Vidyasagar could not take their plight and he made it his mission to improve the quality of life for these helpless women.
- Ishwar Chandra challenged the Brahminical authorities and proved that **widow remarriage is sanctioned by Vedic scriptures.**
- Vidyasagar took his arguments to the British Authorities and his pleas were heard when the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856 or Act was decreed on July 26, 1856.
- To set an example Vidyasagar initiated several matches for child or adolescent widows within respectable families and even married his son Narayan Chandra to an adolescent widow in 1870.

### **Contributions to women's education**

- Ishwar Chandra was a keen advocate of education for women. He rightly viewed education as the primary way for women to emancipate themselves from all the social oppression they had to face at the time.
- He exercised his power and lobbied hard for opening of **school for girls** and even outlined a suitable curriculum that not only did educate them but also enabled them to be self-reliant through vocations like needlework.
- He went door to door, asking family heads to allow their daughters to be enrolled in schools. Throughout Bengal, he **opened 35 women's schools** and succeeded in enrolling 1300 students.
- To support women education Vidyasagar organized a **fund called Nari Siksha Bhandar.**
- He supported John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune to establish the first **permanent girls' school in India, the Bethune School**, on May 7, 1849.
- Vidyasagar expressed his ideas through regular articles

he wrote for periodicals and newspapers. He was associated with prestigious journalistic publications like 'Tattwabodhini Patrika', 'Somprakash', 'Sarbashubhankari Patrika' and 'Hindu Patriot'.

### **Role as Sanskrit scholar**

- It was his participation in a competition testing knowledge in Sanskrit in 1839 earned the title of 'Vidyasagar' to him.
- He was the **Head of the Sanskrit department in Fort William College.**
- He worked as **Assistant Secretary and Professor at Sanskrit college** and redesigned the administrative system in the college. **Besides Sanskrit, he made English and Bengali as the medium of learning in the college.**
- Vidyasagar also changed the rules of admission for students in Sanskrit College **allowing non-Brahmin students to enrol in the prestigious institution.** He even cited the Bhagavata Puran to argue that **there was "no direct prohibition in the Shastras against the Shudras studying Sanskrit literature"**
- Later in 1851 he became **Principal of Sanskrit college** and played important role remodelling medieval scholastic system prevailing in Sanskrit College.
- His wrote **two books** which interpreted complex notions of **Sanskrit Grammar** in easy legible Bengal they include;
  - Upakramonika, and
  - Byakaran Koumudi.
- Vidyasagar **established the Sanskrit Press** with an aim to produce printed books at affordable prices so that common people could buy them.