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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### AN ANALYSIS OF ISHWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR AS PIONEER OF WOMAN EDUCATION

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#### Abstract

The eighteenth and nineteenth century are the most resplendent period in the history of India. During this time, India witnessed the holistic reawakening of the people in the world of new ideals, new thoughts and aspirations in every dimensions of life. The regeneration of India got its expression in Bengal and so this resurgence is called Bengal Renaissance Movement. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar played a prominent and vital role in Bengal Renaissance. He also advocated individual liberty and freedom of the press. He was a staunch fighter for the rights and honour of women. Vidyasagar realized 'a change may be said to have come over the spirit of the times and this may be reckoned as a new era in the history of education on Bengal. He also propagated the ideal from the Shasta's, Kanyapibam Palaniyasikshaniyatatnatah- Daughters also are to be reared up and educated with care together with sons.' Vidyasagar left no stone unturned to unfetter women from the bondages. He also fought for widow remarriage, abolition of polygamy, child marriage and female education. Educated women are the weapons who yield positive impact on the Indian society through their contributions of home and professional fields. Education as means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. Vidyasagar was pioneer in woman empowerment who realized way back in 18<sup>th</sup> century that unless and until resurrection and empowerment of woman is done reform or renaissance was impossible to bear fruit in the society.

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#### Introduction:-

**INTRODUCTION** :In Bengal, the nineteenth century was a critical period in the history of India. It was a period of conflicting ideas, leading to new modes of perception and assimilative efforts. This was not so much an awakening as the challenge of western civilization and English education. It was much more a revolt of the modern age against medievalism and the decadence of a semi- feudal society. This daring upsurge has been called the 'Renaissance in Bengal'.

Ishwar Chandra Bandyopadhyay was an Indian Bengali polymath and a key figure of the Bengal Renaissance. He was a philosopher, academic educator, writer, translator, printer, publisher, entrepreneur, reformer and philanthropist. Ishwar Chandra was born on Monday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1820 in a village called veersingha of the then Hooghly district of West Bengal. His father Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay and mother Bhagavati Devi was very religious persons. Their economic condition was not solvent and subsequently the childhood of Vidyasagar was

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spent in poverty. But poverty did neither touch his soul, nor could it defer him from his chosen path of achieving his life's goal.

He received the title 'Vidyasagar' (in Sanskrit Vidya means knowledge and Sagar means ocean, I.e, Ocean of Knowledge) from Sanskrit college, Calcutta (from where he graduated) due to his excellent performance in Sanskrit studies and philosophy.

Vidyasagar started a social crusade for the oppressed. Woman's emancipation was the cherished mission of his life. He was against child marriage and polygamy and an ardent advocate of widow-remarriage. The wretched sorry conditions of the widows and their children did not escape the eyes of Ishwar Chandra when the earning member of the family died. Hindu Family Annuity Fund was formed in 1872 to provide financial help to such helpless families. Different types of dimensions of Vidyasagar concern for the emancipation of the woman and upliftment of the society cause amazement. Although Vidyasagar had a mighty intellect, capable of profound contemplation and subtle thinking he was always practical and placed solid work before metaphysical speculation. He found nobility and depth in women and revered them as his own mother. Another common lady, Raimani who was not related to Vidyasagar had extraordinary qualities. Vidyasagar thought women should not be deprived of the facilities available to men. If men could get a literary education why must not the same facilities be extended to women in cities, towns, as well as villages. That made him a champion of female education. Friendship with Mr. Bethune and his ecstatic admiration of Chandramukhi Basu, first M.A of Calcutta University revealed the bent of his mind.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:** Women education is a big opportunity for India to be developed socially and economically. Educated women are the weapon who yield positive impact on the Indian society through their contribution of home and professional fields. They were the reason of improved economy in the country as well as the society.

Education as means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges to confront their traditional role and change their life. Vidyasagar was pioneers in women empowerment, he had put women education under arc light.

So, in the present day context, women empowerment and women education go hand in hand, hence as subject of this paper, the presenter has selected an analysis of the contributions of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar towards women education.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY :**

- a) To study the contributions on educational ideals of Vidyasagar.
- b) To analyze the contribution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar towards women education.
- c) To critically analyze the present day relevance of the social and educational contribution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar towards women and women education.
- d) To find out the role of Vidyasagar as a reformer of Women Developer.

**RESEARCH QUESTION :** 1) Is there any contribution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in the field of women emancipation ?

2) Is there any contribution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar to promote of women education ?

3) Are there any activities of Vidyasagar to the reforming of women development ?

4) Is there any role of Vidyasagar as an educational Reformer ?

#### **METHODOLOGY :**

The study is Historical and analytical in nature. Primary and secondary sources are used as sources of collecting data in this historical study. Secondary sources are more used in this study. The information for this study has been collected from various books, articles, research journal and websites and Research thesis. Mainly qualitative information has been used in this study. So, the study is also qualitative.

**ANALYSIS THE CONTRIBUTION OF ISHWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR:** New thoughts and feelings surged in the collective mind and grouped for expression. It is in this context of transformation and imbalance that Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar has to be understood; both as a man and as a social reformer. The year 1850, Vidyasagar's debut in the form of an essay on The Evils of Child Marriage in 'SARBASUBHAKARI PATRIKA', edited by Motilal Chattopadhyay. Before Vidyasagar, Ishwar Chandra Gupta wrote an essay on evils of child marriage, but Vidyasagar's essay is significant for two reasons. Firstly, regarding social reform it was the first

writing and secondly, Vidyasagar does not refer to social injunctions, which he did later. Vidyasagar says in this simple, logical and rational exposition, 'This is only a beginning ;I shall not hesitate to continue...' In 1870 Professor Somnath Mukhopadhyay at Dhaka college founded Balyabibaha Nibarani Sabha .He was also the Chairman. Although Vidyasagar's own marriage was a child marriage, but it was not an exception in the nineteenth century. One significant point is, Vidyasagar's believed in practice not only in words, and did not gave away his own daughters in child marriage. Vidyasagar was totally involved regarding the issue of widow remarriage from 1853 onwards.

Vidyasagar tried to change a society by his activities which was moribund, heartless and cruel, a cruelly espoused as divinity by the priests of religion who catered to the needs of the vested interests. Vidyasagar wholeheartedly tried to teach the society the need for change by his action. Vidyasagar's life was a perfect shining example of how to live. A man inherits the socio-economic environment of his society and the related value system. Vidyasagar was no exception. His socio- economic environment was dying feudalism in confrontation with the emerging capitalism. Ignorance and fear can be removed only by knowledge and courage. Vidyasagar was such a man with such knowledge and courage which led the small active minority and ultimately the vast passive majority also to bring about the change .

Not only in Calcutta but also in remote villages between August 1855 and January 1856 Vidyasagar set up twenty schools in different village. Vidyasagar realized that mass education would be incomplete unless girls also were educated. The conservatives in the society were against education of the girls because girls would not be submissive to their husband, so the apprehension of the patriarchal society which kept its womenfolk behind the pardah. Education would pierce that veil. Ishwar Chandra also had to fight these conservatives with quotations from the Sanskrit Scriptures which clearly prescribed care and education of the daughters.

In Bengal 1849, Bethune established a school now known as Bethune Collegiate School only for girls to develop women education and Vidyasagar became its secretary in 1850. Not only educational reforms, Vidyasagar was very much concerned with social reforms and his contribution was great. Previously, abolishing the practice of sati, Raja Rammohan Roy saved the lives of the widow. But the scenario was not changed, the widows had to suffer a miserable existence for the rest of their life. When Vidyasagar was a 14 yr old boy, his childhood playmate was already a widow. Vidyasagar saw her painful life. Not only the joy of married life, she had to suffer different type of rules and regulations by the society such as she had to fast on some days, was allowed full meal during day time only ,on the other days, was not allowed to participate in any type of social ceremonies. The miseries of widows were inducing Vidyasagar to rebel against the entire social system. At last his mother Bhagavati Debi, a remarkable lady help him to final inducement, who seeing a girl of twelve becoming a widow wept and asked him whether there was nothing in the Sanskrit Scriptures to support remarriage of such widow. Ishwar Chandra also wanted to explain to his people that widow- remarriage was permitted by Hindu Shastras. And he also discovered a stanza from the Parashara Samhita, an ancient legal text in Sanskrit which favored widow remarriage.

Vidyasagar wrote a book about the desirability of remarriage of widows in 1855. In this context he gave some quotations from the scriptures apart from giving various reasons which justified remarriage of widow. He selected the democratic method for collecting signatures in support for his proposal regarding widow remarriage. To collect signature Vidyasagar must have walked miles and miles to move from door to door .Finally, we say Vidyasagar was that voice and once he raised his voice, many joined him, though many opposed him also, He was extremely effective and submitted a petition on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1855, requesting the government to pass a law removing all obstacles to widow remarriage. But in spite of all the opposition, the Hindu widows Remarriage Act was passed in 1856, legalizing marriage of widows. Celebrate the first marriage of a widow was not an easy task. Sometimes it was quite difficult to mobilize public opinion regarding the support of widow remarriage and to get the law passed. Vidyasagar's efforts were ultimately crowned with grant success. Srischandra Vidyaratna, who was an admirer of Vidyasagar volunteered to marry a widow. So the first marriage of a widow was celebrated which enlighten the hearts of many, but mortified the hearts of a few champions of the moribund traditions. The society was become electrified. Just like a national festival, the supporters and the opponents started composing poems and songs, the former in his glorifications and the latter in denunciation. When his own son Narayan volunteered to marry a widow, Vidyasagar was really very happy. Those critics who said , 'why was he not marrying his son to a widow'? -Narayan helped his father in his mission. In this context we know that Vidyasagar wrote, ' Marriage of widows is the best achievement of my life.'

Vidyasagar also worked for the abolition of the prevalent practice of polygamy, especially among the kulin Brahmins. Sambhunath Tarkabacspati, who was a teacher of Ishwar Chandra, was going to marry a young girl at that old age by virtue of being a kulin. Vidyasagar was furious. Vidyasagar told his teacher not to do such a sinful act. And when the teacher married that girl without paying heed to him, he refused to take anything in Sambhunath's house. Vidyasagar thought that successful enactment prohibiting polygamy depends on the successful enactment permitting marriage of a widow. After that he collected some statistics. A man of 55 had more than 80 wives. If the man died all the wives would become widows and would be condemned to a miserable existence for the rest of their lives. Though they were not to die on the funeral pyres of their husbands, their life became a slow and continuous process of burning, not in fire but in misery.

The education of Indian women did not form a recognized part of the Government's duties before 1850, although a beginning in this direction had been made by some respectable Indians and the Christian missions. Social reform and the emancipation of women constantly used to engage his mind. Vidyasagar was a staunch supporter and promoter of women's education. Women's emancipation was the cherished mission of his life. He even advocated higher education for women. Vidyasagar threw his whole soul in the cause of female education, and the eminent Drinkwater Bethune welcomed him and invited him to be the Honorary Secretary of the Bethune School in December 1850. After that he continued as Honorary Secretary of the Bethune School Committee till March 1869. He was intimately connected with the Bethune Society and Bethune School which, in course of time, became the Bethune College after the name of its first founder. In spite of the numerous demands on his time and attention, Vidyasagar always took a lively interest in the welfare of that institution. A report dated 15 Dec, 1862 which gives a glimpse of the condition of Bethune school and the progress made by Vidyasagar during his secretaryship. The curriculum consisted with reading, writing, arithmetic, biography and history of Bengal with gallery lessons during the secretaryship of Vidyasagar. Apart from this needle-work and sewing were also taught. In Bethune the tutorial staff consists of a Head Mistress, with two female assistants and two pundits. This institution has rendered splendid service in the spread of women education in eastern India. In India Lord Dalhousie favored the annual donation of Rs. 8000 for five years for the maintenance of the Bethune School. Vidyasagar continued to take great interest in Women's education and as a result was associated with the foundation of a number of girls schools in the province including one at Birsingha, his place of birth. For the girls of the Bethune School, Vidyasagar published his 'Sisusiksha' on 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1851. It was a Bengali version of the Chambers's 'Rudiments of knowledge' and dealt with diverse informative subjects for the children. After that the name of the book was afterwards converted to 'Bodhodaya'. Vidyasagar applied for government grant for female school in May, 1857. Government sanctioned the grant with Frederick Halliday's consent. In 1857 a girls school was set up in Bardhaman district. The attitude of the Bengal Government towards the education of Indian women appeared to the Pandit to be encouraging. Vidyasagar had already put the Model Vernacular Schools for boys - had generally been approved by Government, and under this impression he opened a number of female schools in the districts under his charge. But point to be noted that November 1857 to May 1858 during this period thirty-five schools with an average total attendance of 1300 girls, were established by Vidyasagar in the districts of Burdwan, Hooghly, Midnapore and Nadia. which were also borne by him. It was a difficult task in those days, particularly in the context of strong opposition against women's education. After that he set up many schools for boys and girls in different parts of Bengal. Vidyasagar keenly felt that, like sons, daughters should also be educated (Kanyasulkang Palaniya Sikshiniyati Janatu) Vidyasagar realized that to improve the quality of teaching, the teachers must be trained. So he founded a normal school for the betterment of the teachers in the premises of the Sanskrit college. And Principal of this institution was Aksay Kumar Datta. Miss Mary Carpenter was a philanthropic worker and friend of the Indian People. She wished very much to promote female education in India, and on her arrival in Calcutta sought to make the acquaintance of Vidyasagar who was well known as a champion of the cause of female education. Accompanied most of the time by Vidyasagar she visited some of the female schools in the vicinity of Calcutta. In the premises of the Bethune school Miss Carpenter moved the Government to undertake the establishment of a Normal school for the training of native female teachers.

Different kinds of reform schemes were taken up by Vidyasagar, but he gained maximum success in propagation of education, specially female education. He always tried his utmost for the natural progress of the women and achieved a fair degree of success, whereas he could not succeed considerably in introducing widow-remarriage in spite of the assistance of the ruling class. Without depending wholly on the Government Vidyasagar opened schools, one after another, presented the school girls with books with his own hands in order that female education might improve and the girls might get more and more interested in learning. Vidyasagar was a pragmatist

that is ,he was practical –minded. What he considered worth doing for the good of mankind in the light of his own experiences, he also proceeded to platform in his own way.

**CONCLUSION :** In the final analysis,we say that Vidyasagar was the biggest fighter for the cause of womankind during his time.He was one of the earliest entrepreneurs of Bengal to bring a new era of Bengal . He was a reformer not a rebel.It is true that his personality was greatest contribution in his century .Vidyasagar worked within the mainstream of Hindu life, but retained his unique self reliant individualism. Not only Bengal, the efficacy of his measures is to be analyzed vis-à-vis the national level.In a retrospect of Two hundred years, it is the attitude of the man that remains relevant, not a particular item of reform. He has a great contribution in the field of social reform, educational reform and literature. His ideas regarding humanism,nationalism and democratic liberalism had influenced the middleclass society in 19<sup>th</sup> century .As a social reformer Vidyasagar worked to uplift the status of women in India especially in Bengal, He wanted to change the orthodox Hindu society from within. He introduced the practice of widow remarriage and worked against polygamy.Our present society is still buried under the heaps of ignorance, prejudices and women related superstition .All sorts of physical and mental tortures are still prevalent in our society against women with more violence than before.We claim that we belong to a more enlightened society, but the scenario has not changed,fact is that the certain mental make up have not been changed yet.

In this context of moral degradation and social oppressions, there has again arisen the need of propagating Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's ideas for reconstructing the Indian society. So, it is very significant to find out the relevance of Vidyasagar ideologies in the context of the present day.

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