Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

The country, whose male population is unkind unreligious and unaware of the distinction between the good and the evil and don't care about justice and fairness and where abiding the rituals is the chief preoccupation of religion, should not give birth to girls!


The materialistic world of the West looks down on India as a poor nation. That assessment is and remains empirically valid, no doubt, even at the end of the twentieth century.

But a society, nation or country that is ever endowed with a great man with a personality, grace and kind soul like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar can be impoverished but hardly poor! Popularly known as Vidyasagar (meaning 'sea of knowledge'), Ishwar Chandra himself was the seat of learning. A gift of God his life was a glittering gem of morality, an exposition of the bliss of modest living, a blue sky of compassion, an everest of unfaltering dedication, a fountain of inspiration, a river of love and indeed an ocean of kindness.

Watch closely how this man lived his life, how he shared his time between his family, his friends, his community and his nation, how he spent his endless energy for awakening awareness of his countrymen and for the emancipation of his nation, how he gave away every comfort of life for the sake of others and your heart will warm up to the message of this man's life. And your life will never be the same again! His graceful gift of love and affection will enrich your existence and humble your thoughts for ever.

Born on Monday the 26th of September 1820 (12 Aswin BY1227) in a village called Veerasingha of the then Hoogley (now part of Midnapore) district of West Bengal Vidysagar spent his childhood in extreme poverty. But poverty did not touch his soul, nor could it deter him from his chosen path of achieving his life's goals.

Ishwar\(^1\) commenced primary education at the village **pathshaala** - an indigenous Indian school where language, grammar, arithmatic and other **shastras** were taught to younsters. In the pathshaala he was a fond student of Pundit Kalikanta Chatterjee\(^2\) for his dedication to learning, modest manners, supreme honesty and great respect. Following his grandfather's death, he accompanied his father to Calcutta. At the time his father was employed as accounts receivable clerk with a metal goods importers store at Barobazar. Ishwar joined a pathshaala in neigbouring Jorashanko. His father's wish was for him to be educated as a Sanskrit scholar so that he would go back to his village and start a **Chuspahathi** (a Sanskrit school) thus maintaining the family tradition in teaching Sanskrit. But one family relative -
Madhusudan Bachaspati who was then studying at the Sanscrit College - convinced his father to send Ishwar to that college arguing that this course of education will allow the youngman to gain access to both Sanskrit and English streams of education.

It is not clear as to what role Ishwar played in this decision but with the possibility of enhanced job opportunities in the future his father relented. Within a short while Ishwar was admitted to the Sanscrit College in grammar class III. As it turned out, this decision was a small turning point in the life of one man, but a giant leap in the history of Bengal.

Young Ishwar applied himself to learning with full discipline, diligence and perseverance - often in the most arduous of circumstances. He passed successive annual examinations with exemplary brilliancy. His meritorious performance in every field of study rewarded him with prizes and scholarships which were a welcome relief in his impoverished financial condition. It is here he came in close contact with half a dozen Sanskrit scholars who would a leave an indelible mark on the young impressionable mind of Ishwar.

In 1839 he graduated in law examination conducted by the Hindu Law Committee. His well rounded education at Sanscrit College saw him amassing considerable knowledge and mastery in a number of shastras or disciplines - kabya (poetry), alonkar (rhetorics), vedanta (vedic literature and anthology), smriti (philosophy of law), nyaya (logic, science and jurisprudence), and jyotish (astronomy). It is here at a tender age the title Vidyasagar was endowed to him. He lived up to that expectation and offered to his society far more than that ...

On 29th December in 1841 Vidyasagar joined Fort William College (FWC) as a Principal Lecturer (or Pundit). G. T. Marshall who was the Secretary of the College at the time acted as the catalyst for gaining this prestigious position for him at the age of 21. Marshall had been thoroughly impressed by Ishwar's scholastic achievements! After a five year stint with the FWC Vidyasagar joined the Sanscrit College as Assistant Secretary. In the first year of service with Sanscrit College, he brought out a report to the authorities outlining and recommending a number of changes to the curricula and the education system. This report attracted criticisms from the College Secretary Rashamoy Dutta (who was jealous of his youthful and energetic Assistant) but it generated keen interest of authorites and a tremendous amount of favourable comments and praises from the Education department - particularly from G. T. Marshall. Because of irreconcilable differences with Dutta on this subject - Vidyasagar resigned and took up the temporary head clerical position at FWC (again on Marshall's advice FWC employed him so he is not lost to the Education system) until a teaching position could be made available.

Ishwar Chandra's principles, determination and courage were unparallel in every detail. He never deviated from his goals in the face of all adversities. He knew not how to compromise on any matter of substance neither in fear nor for favour. Fear was not in his dictionary. He resigned from the college, after the skirmish with Dutta. His well wishers tried in vain to prevent him saying "what will you do? how will you survive?". His reply was "I will sell
vegetables, open a grocery shop, I will find something to survive on".

Another example was cited by Tagore. When Vidyasagar went to visit the Principal of the Hindu College, he was offended by Mr Kerr's rude manners as the latter sat in his chair in a posture resting his booted feet on the desk in a complete disregard for showing any courtesy to his native visitor. Mr. Kerr was reported to have been very displeased when this same courtesy was reciprocated to him on his visit to Sanscrit College at a later date. Tit for tat!

In 1950 Vidyasagar came back to Sanscrit College as Lecturer in Literature. Satisfied with his hard work and his substantive contribution to the betterment of the education system, his remuneration was doubled. Soon afterwards he was appointed Principal of Sanscrit College.

His well documented protestations against Education department officials of the day testify to the degree of intensity with which he pursued the course of education reform. He favoured English and Bengali as a medium of learning alongside Sanskrit and wanted to offer to students a wider range of subjects and thus broaden their horizons in examining European and Indian concepts and practices side by side so they could apply their own judgement in discovering the truth for themselves. He was not afraid of discarding erroneous beliefs of Indian shastras and in preferring European science in its place where appropriate. By the same token he did not accept everything that Europe had to offer. His mind was open and was open only to discovering the truth and reality. In these matters his determination was unmistakable and his resolve unshakable. Here is a sample paragraph of one of his letters to F. J. Mouat, Secretary to the Council of Education:

Leave me to teach Sanskrit for the leading purpose of thoroughly mastering the Vernacular and let me superadd to it the acquisition of sound knowledge through the medium of English and you may rest assured that before a few years are over I shall be enabled if supported and encouraged by the Council to furnish with you a body of young men who will be better qualified by their writings and teachings to disseminate widely among the people sound information than it has hitherto been possible to accomplish through the instrumentality of the Educated clever of any of your Colleges whether English or oriental. To enable me to carry out this great, this darling object of my wishes I must (excuse the strong word) to a considerable extent be left unfettered, so far as I can approve of Dr. Ballantyne's abtracts and treatises such for instance as his excellent Edition of the Novum Organan in English. I will avail myself of them most readily and cheerfully. But if compelled to adopt all his compilations without any reference to my own humble judgement as to their utility and value or to their adaptation to the peculiar wants of the Institution over which I have the honour to preside, my occupation is gone - such a system would break in upon and interrupt my own plan of instruction and in spite of my sense of duty as a servant of the Council the responsibility which I now keenly feel will be assuredly weakened if not destroyed.

In addition to his responsibilities as the Principal of Sanscrit College, he travelled around Bengal in the capacity of Inspector of Schools. This latter role gave him the opportunity to witness the pervading darkness and superstitions in which people of Bengal lived in the absence of education. This caused him great distress. He hurriedly established 20 Model schools in only two months. He also realised that unless women of the land could be
educated it was impossible to emancipate and liberate them from the terrible burden of
inequalities and injustice imposed on them by the cruel society of the day. He worked day
and night and opened thirty girls schools.

In 1854 FWC was closed and a Board of Exeminers was created instead. Vidyasagar was an
active member of that Board. He resigned from Sanscrit College after a disagreement with
the young new head of the Education department in 1958. It was not in his blood to work
under a regime that did not pay full respect to his unquestionable ability to manage the
affairs of his institution independently and without any undue outside interference.

There is not a single living Bengali soul on this planet today who has not heard of
Vidyasagar or has not commenced the process of education with his first book of alphabet
(Part I and Part II) called *Varna Porichoy* first published in 1855. His pioneering works - in
Bengali education, in laying the base foundation stone of Bengali prose (even though his
writing style was considered at the time as conservative since it was aligned closely with
Sanskrit lexicon and grammatical traditions) and in translation of the Sanskrit masterpieces
to Bengali - shall remain as the fitting monument of human endeavour in the quest for and
spread of knowledge.

Vidyasagar's heart was gold - full of mercy and kindness! It always cried out in distress of
the poor, in sufferings of the sick and for injustice to humanity. Even when he was a student
at Sanscrit College, he would spend part of his scholarship proceeds and cooked *mishtanno*
(rice pudding) to feed the poor and buy medicine for the sick. Later on, he paid fixed sums of
monthly allowances to each member of his joint family, to family servants, to needy
neighbours, to villagers who needed help and to the village surgery and school. This he
continued without break even when he was unemployed and had to borrow substantially
from time to time. Once he borrowed Rs.7,500 from *Maharani Swarnamayee*. In his will
he kept all those regular names as beneficiary who received his monthly allowance and he
added more names to that list. Then he had also added a blanket category 'who needed help'.

Vidyasagar did not believe that his responsibility to the suffering humanity ended with his
financial donation. He opened the doors of Sanscrit College to lower caste students
(previously it was exclusive to the Brahmins), nursed sick cholera patients, went to
crematorium to bury unclaimed deadbodies, dined with the untouchables, walked miles in
darkness to take urgent messages to people who would benefit from them. The list goes on!
Even a thousand Nobel prizes wouldn't go close to recognise this man's contribution to the
suffering humanity, such gold was Vidyasagar's heart!

Vidyasagar was a social reformer. His soft heart melted at the pain and suffering imposed by
the society, often in the name of religion, on Indian women. Polygamy, ban on widows from
remarrying, child marriage, inequalities, keeping them away from the light of education,
depriving them from property rights etc. All of this distressed him immensely. Pleading the
case for the remarriage of widows he lamented:
*Oh poor India!...you think the woman whose husband dies immediately turns into a stone;
she does not have sorrow anymore, cannot feel pain any more and all her senses of passions*
and sensualities disappear without trace suddenly! But you well know that such notions are based on false pretences as evidence to the contrary abounds. Just think how these erroneous notions are poisoning this world. How sad! The country, whose male population is unkind, unreligious and unaware of the distinction between the good and the evil and don't care about justice and fairness and where abiding the rituals is the chief preoccupation of religion, should not give birth to girls!

He took up his pen, called discussion meetings, ran seminars and saw Government officials. All of these efforts were directed to wipe out the evil traditions of the nation. But his call fell on deaf ears. On every instance, dictates from Hindu shastras were forwarded by the clergy as an excuse! So Vidyasagar set out to prove them wrong!

He conducted extensive research into Hindu scriptures and puranas and tried to explain that there was nothing against widows marrying a second time and why polygamy was an evil and hence unacceptable. He published two separate volumes on remarriage of widows and another two volumes on polygamy citing quotes from scriptures and explaining the validity of his arguments.

To prove that his compassion for widows was not empty rhetoric as some might have assumed, he married his own son off to a widow. He compiled a list of 'distinguished' polygamous Calcuttans and another for surrounding districts. It is unthinkable that a considerable number on those lists married up to 80 times often under-age girls and yet were unable to control their boundless thirst for lust.

For his stand he was virulently attacked by conservative vested interest groups and the shastrakars (cleric) of the day. He often received threats of physical violence and death. But nothing stopped Vidyasagar from what he set out to do! His iron-will prevailed in the end. On 26th July 1856 widow marriage was legalised by the then Government.

Although Vidyasagar cannot be judged as one of the best pure literary figures of Bengal, for he mostly devoted his time writing reformist literature and text books, his pioneering work in Bengali prose certainly deserves the very best of appreciation. His simplification of idiomatic expressions and clarification of the writing style provided the sound base on which latter Bengali writers like Tekchand Thakur, Pyarichand Mitra and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee built their literary superstructures. Indeed, Tagore revered him as 'the father of modern Bengali prose'. Vidysagar's other contribution in this area was to translate the best of Sanskrit works to Bengali so that the ordinary person, who were not sufficiently versed with that language, could appreciate the immortal contribution by literary greats of India. He wrote biographical notes on numerous noteworthy personalities in the history of the world so the the young generation could be inspired by the great examples of their endurance, hard work, honesty, patience, perseverance, courage, determination and, above all, philosophy of life.

Betal Panchavinsati (The Bytal-Pancheesee - the twenty-five tales of the Demon) published in 1847 - a translation from the Sanskrit Kathasaritsagara, is probably the most popular work of Vidysagar. In its Preface he wrote:
The Bytal Pancheesee is a collection of legendary stories relating to that celebrated character in Hindu Annals, Raja Vikramaditya. The work contains no traces of art or genius in its composition, but on the contrary exhibits those clumsy attempts at the wonderful, sometimes bordering on childishness, which are so general in legends of a dark age. It is, however, very popular among the great mass of the people of this country and expresses accurately their ideas and feelings on many subjects”.

Other notable literary contributions by him include Banglaar Itihaas (1848), Jivancharita (1849), Shakuntala (1854), Mahabharata (1860), Seetar Vanavas (1860), Bhrantivilaas (1869), Oti Alpa Hoilo (1873), Aabaar Oti Alpa Hoilo (1873), Brajavilaas (1884) and Ratnopariksha (1886). But the most far-reaching and controversial of his social reform monologues are:

- Bidhobabivah (whether widows should remarry) the first exposure (1855)
- Bidhobabivah - the Second Book (1855)
- Bahubivah - (whether polygamy should be banned) the first exposure (1871)
- Bahubivah - the Second Book (1873)
- Balyabivah (flaws of child marriage) - publication date not known

It’s not his literary prowess, but his act of kindness, his fierce determination and courage, his education and social reform programmes made Vidyasagar immortal. Tagore was hard pressed to find a comparable personality in the West and according to him, the closest that he found who could come to resemble him was Samuel Johnson.

He lived as a modest man but his work of charity was that of a king. Even his friend Lieutenant Governor Halliday could not get him to dress up properly when he used to visit him. He preferred plain dress made from home spun cotton - as his mother used to make his dresses when she was alive.

Vidyasagar was a lonely tall tree in the bush around him. He was not happy and his health deteriorated badly in the latter part of his life. Disaffected with petty-mindedness and confronted with selfish behaviour he severed connection with his family and lived with a tribal people in the last years of his life. He died on 29th July 1891 (13th Shrabon BY 1298).

Acknowledgement:

Much of the materials for this article was sourced from the Vidyasagar Rachanabali, Complete Works of Vidyasagar, Kamini Prakashalaya, Calcutta BY 1399

Notes:

1. Vidyasagar spelt his name Eshwar. It is not quite clear why Ishwar is so popularly used in the public domain. We elected to use the latter for reasons of indexing consistency.

2. In a short biographical publication Vidyasagar Charita Ishwar Chandra wrote "I was Guru's most favourite disciple. I vividly remember that, off all students, I was his most affectionate. I respected and revered
him greatly..."

3. "This youngman would go to bed at 10pm. He would ask his father to wake him up at 12am. As the midnight bells rang at the Armenian Church clock tower, his father would call him to wake up and he would study for the rest of the night... But then there was the household work. He had his father and brothers at home. There were no servants. He would cook twice a day. In the morning he would bathe in the Ganges and on his way back home would do the day's shopping at Kashinathbabu's Bazar. Then he would clean fish, dice vegetables, grind spices for cooking. Once the meal was ready the family of four would eat together. Finally, after washing of the dishes, Ishwar would have time to rest. Often he studied as he cooked or walked to school."

The above is a translation of what Tagore proudly wrote about Vidyasagar in a paper he read in the Annual Vidyasagar Memorial ceremony held at Emerald Theatre on 13th Shrabon BY 1302 (July 1895) - refer to Vidyasagarcharita in Charitrapuja, Rabindra Rachanabali vol 4, p.489.

It is widely acknowledged that often Vidyasagar spent hours on end under the streetlights of Calcutta to complete his study and homework. This obviated the need for buying alternative source of light.

4. ibid p. 490.

5. This letter was an informal communication to Cpatain Mouat on 5th October 1853. Vidyasagar sent this in a 'hurry' before he went on holiday and wrote "If required I shall be happy to send in an official and consequently a more formal letter on the subject after the termination of the holiday."


7. English lexicographer, critic, poet and essayist (1709-84) who was immortalised by his excellent biographer Boswell.

8. Tagore, op. cit.
Birth and Early Years:

Iswar Chandra Bandopadhaya was born at Birsingha in Midnapur on September 26, 1820. Son of poor Brahmin parents, Thakurdas Banerjee and Bhagabati Devi. The iron discipline of the father; the large-hearted charity of the mother. The boy was not only remarkably intelligent but full of determination.

Education:


Career:

Teacher at Fort William College for civilians. Then at Sanskrit College. His strictness, fairness and enthusiasm for work. Became Principal of Sanskrit College and also Inspector of Schools. His spirit of independence: his minutes on education are documents of permanent value. Disagreement with the Director of Public Instruction led to his resignation. Thereafter earned economic independence as an author of educational textbooks in Bengali as also as printer and publisher.

His social works:

His fearless championing on behalf of widow re-marriage ends in success. His services to and sacrifice for this cause. He failed to get the abolition of polygamy though succeeded in the imparting female education. First Secretary of Bethune School. The founding of Metropolitan (now Vidyasagar) College: A member of the Senate the newly founded University of Calcutta.

Death and Character:

Died July 29, 1889; his learning, his sprint of independence; his boundless charity made him a legendary man in his life time. But forced to leave his native village. He spent the last years of his life in Karmatola—Santal village. But he never yielded his stand; large-heartedness; perseverance; his strength of character and uncompromising spirit and determination.
Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) born Ishwar Chandra Bandopadhyaya, was a Bengali polymath, Sanskrit pundit, educator, social reformer, writer and philanthropist. He was one of the greatest intellectuals and activists of the 19th century and one of the pillars of the Bengal Renaissance. He was born on 26th September, 1820 to a Kulin Brahmin family at Birsingha in the Midnapore District of Pre-Independence, Undivided Bengal (now in West Bengal, India). He spent his childhood in extreme poverty. But this did not deter him from his chosen path of achieving his life's goals.

Ishwar commenced primary education at the village school – pathshaala - an indigenous Indian school where language, grammar, arithmetic and other shastras were taught to youngsters. He was a student known for his dedicated learning, modest manners, supreme honesty and great respect for teachers.

His parents, despite dire poverty, somehow managed to send him to the city of Calcutta for higher
studies after he finished his early education at the village pathshala.

Ishwar studied at Sanskrit College, Calcutta from 1829 to 1839. He applied himself to learning with full discipline, diligence and perseverance - in the most arduous of circumstances. He passed successive annual examinations with exemplary brilliance. His meritorious performance in every field of study rewarded him with prizes and scholarships which were a welcome relief in his impoverished financial condition. In this institution, he came in close contact with many Sanskrit scholars who left an indelible mark on his young impressionable mind.

In 1839, he graduated in Law examination conducted by the Hindu Law Committee. He gained mastery in many shastras or disciplines - kavya (poetry), alankar (rhetorics), vedanta (vedic literature and anthology), smriti (philosophy of law), nyaya (logic, science and jurisprudence), and jyotish-vidya (astrology).

He bagged all the prizes and scholarships for best performance. Evaluating his stupendous results in the above courses, the College Committee endowed Ishwar Chandra with the Honorific Title of Vidyasagar (Ocean of Knowledge) in 1839 when he became a Law Graduate.

The Sanskrit Title "Vidyasagar" has the Etymology of Vidya = Knowledge and Sagar = Ocean, thus meaning "Ocean of Knowledge." The appellation of this Name is identified almost exclusively with Ishwar Chandra due to his many scholastic achievements.

On 29th December in 1841, at the age of 21, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar started his career as the Head Pundit of Fort William College, Calcutta. He joined Sanskrit College as a Professor in 1850. Satisfied with his hard work and his immense contribution to the betterment of the education system, his remuneration was doubled. Soon afterwards, he was appointed Principal of the Sanskrit College.

Concurrently with this position, in 1855, the government also appointed him as the Special Inspector of Schools for the districts of Hooghly, Burdwan, Midnapore and Nadia in the then Undivided Bengal of Pre-Independence India.

Vidyasagar was consulted in all educational matters by Sir Frederick Halliday, the first lieutenant-governor of Bengal.

He was also an honorary office bearer of several organisations including Asiatic Society and Bethune Society. He also received honors and felicitations from many social, cultural and scientific organisations.

**Vidyasagar: A Mother’s Son**

Vidyasagar’s mother had a very deep-impacted spiritual influence on him all his life. He always remembered his mother’s words and deeds, who had made many a sacrifice for her son.
She taught her son not to be concerned with only worldly education.

In her opinion, the shallow ones acquire all kinds of scholarship, but have little understanding of who and what they are. By study alone, a man does not get rid of his lowly ways. Through scholarships, one cannot acquire complete wisdom. Why pursue studies which end up in death? One should study so as to free himself from death. Spiritual Knowledge can make one achieve such Immortality. It is enduring...Worldly Knowledge is temporary and transient. For earning one's livelihood, worldly education is necessary. But this education should be acquired only to lead an independent life, with limited wants.

Therefore, Vidyasagar was encouraged by his mother to not only pursue his academics but also embark on a Spiritual Quest.

Vidaysagar was very fond of his mother and was very obedient of her. Once during his early education years, while he was staying and studying away from home, his mother asked him to come and visit her. When he arrived at the river bank, all the boatmen refused to cross the river because of an impending storm. Unable to persuade anyone as all the boatmen were afraid of the bad weather, he started swimming across the river. This anecdote of his life not only symbolizes his fearlessness and bravery but also his blind obedience to his mother whom he loved and revered very much.

On completing his education and taking up his first job assignment, Ishwar went to his village at Barsingha one day, to attend a folk festival. The women of the village had donned their best clothes and jewellery to attend the festival. His mother also went but in tattered clothes. The son could not bear to see his mother's impoverished plight.

He said, "Mother, you have neither good clothes nor jewellery. I am distressed to see you like this. Please let me know what ornaments you wish to have!"

The mother replied, "This is not the right time, son. I shall let you know at the proper time".

When Vidyasagar rose to the higher positions in his career, he again returned to his mother and asked what ornaments she desired. “I shall get them as fast as I can”, he said.

His mother told him that she wished 3 ornaments, but she would disclose what they were later on, as the opportune moment hadn’t yet arrived.

The son in the course of years reached one of the highest positions in the academia, and once again he entreated her, "Mother, I have some money now. Please let me know what jewels you would like. I shall get them for you."

The mother said, "Son! I can now wear those jewels. There are 3 ornaments I would like you to give me:
"In our small village, I am grieved to find that the children have to go to distant places for education. The 1st ornament I desire is that you should set up a primary school in the village.

Our people in the village have no facilities for medical care. Please set up a health care centre here. This will be your 2nd ornament for me.

The 3rd ornament is something which you have to do by yourself. In the days to come, your reputation may grow. If anybody asks, who is your mother? You may mention my name. Your conduct must be such that you must share with others the benefits of the education you have received. Do not go after wealth. The worshipper of the Mammon will not yearn for God. The observance of this is the 3rd ornament I desire from you."

Vidyasagar did everything that his mother wanted by opening up the school and health centre in his village and followed her words of wisdom throughout his life.

Vidyasagar and Education:

Vidyasagar travelled all over Bengal in the capacity of Inspector of Schools. This gave him the opportunity to witness the pervading darkness and superstition amongst the illiterate, uneducated masses of Bengal. He was so distressed by all the malpractices he saw and esp. the exploitation of women in the name of religion, that he hurriedly established 20 Model schools in a short period of only 2 months.

He realised that unless women of the land were educated, it was impossible to emancipate and liberate them from the terrible burden of inequalities and injustice imposed on them by the oppressive Hindu society blinded by false beliefs and derelict customs. He worked relentlessly and opened 30 schools for girls in Bengal. In order to promote the education of girls, Vidyasagar made door to door calls, requesting parents to send their daughters to schools.

As Special Inspector of Schools, Vidyasagar also used his position to encourage landholders and other wealthy people to establish educational institutions. Within his inspection zone, he was instrumental in founding many schools, several of which were for girls. Some schools were established at his own initiative and with his financial support. Vidyasagar's philanthropy was proverbial. It is said that half the money that he got from his salary and the royalties of his published books was kept reserved for helping the distressed.

His well documented protests against the then Education Department officials testify the degree of intensity with which he pursued the course of educational reforms. He favored English and Bengali as a medium of learning alongside Sanskrit and wanted to offer students a wide range of subjects. He wanted to broaden their horizons in studying and analysing European and Indian conceptual practices so
that they could judge for themselves and discover the ultimate truth.

He was not afraid of discarding erroneous beliefs of Indian shastras and preferring European science wherever appropriate. But he also did not blindly accept everything European just by its virtue of being a western concept. He had an open mind for discovering the truth and truth alone, with an unshakable determination.

**Close Encounters with Vidyasagar:**

Vidyasagar was a very righteous and fearless persona with unparalleled courage. He never deviated from his goals despite all adversities. He never compromised on any matter of substance neither in fear nor for favors. Here are a few of his life’s anecdotes to exemplify his outstanding personality:

Ishwar Chandra stuck to the traditional Indian attire of his home-spun cotton Dhoti-Kurta, woven by his mother. He was once denied entry into a club by the gatekeeper as he was not dressed according to the dress code of the club. He then went back home, changed into a suit and was promptly given admission by the same gatekeeper who refused to recognize him before. At the dinner in the club, he kept on talking to his clothes and prodded them to have food. The host and the other guests at the party were bewildered and then he explained the incident with the gatekeeper. He elaborated that respect is increasingly being accorded to sartorial affairs, rather than cerebral affairs.

Once, while he was traveling to a village for one of his regular speeches to the masses, a young officer, who wanted to listen to Vidyasagar’s lecture, got down from the train with a suitcase to go to the lecture hall. Vidyasagar also got down from the same train with a suitcase to go to the Lecture hall.

The young officer was shouting for a coolie. Vidyasagar went to him and said, "Why do you need a coolie to carry this small suitcase? Can’t you carry it yourself and save the money?"

The young officer replied, "It is not in keeping with my dignity to carry my suitcase. I am an educated person."

Vidyasagar told him, "The hallmark of education is humility and not pride. If you cannot carry your own bag, how are you carrying your body? If however, you cannot carry your bag, I shall do so." Ishwar carried the officer’s suitcase, acting on his life’s motto of "simple living and high thinking."

Vidyasagar left the suitcase where the officer wanted it. The young man then offered money to his ‘porter’. Vidyasagar told him, “To serve you is my reward” and went away.

The young officer then left and started proceeding to the venue of the meeting. He was stunned to see people welcoming Vidyasagar with garlands in the Lecture-Hall. He realised that the man who had
offered to carry his suitcase at the station was none other than the respected lecturer of that evening, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. He felt ashamed that he had made such a great man carry his suitcase. He reflected. "What is his education and what is mine? I have behaved like a monkey. I am like a glow worm before the sun".

Once when Vidyasagar went to visit the the then Principal of Hindu College, Mr. Kerr, he was offended by the latter’s rude manners as the he didn’t get up to welcome him, instead kept sitting on his chair, resting his booted legs on the desk upfront, with a complete disregard for showing any courtesy to his native visitor. Mr. Kerr was reported to have been very displeased on his visit to the Sanskrit College at a later date, when this same behavior was reciprocated to him by Vidyasagar as a Tit for Tat!

There was another incident when Vidyasagar happened to travel by train in a compartment with some Englishmen. He sat between the two of them. One of them asked, "Who is this donkey?" The other man asked, "Who is this pig?" A third English man asked, "Who are you?" Ishwar Chandra coolly replied, "I am a human being sitting between a donkey and a pig." The three Englishmen felt ashamed of themselves as they didn’t expect him to know and speak English.

They felt even more awkward when they saw a large crowd of persons with garlands waiting to receive Ishwar Chandra when he descended from the train. The Englishmen then realised that though many Indians might appear simple and unlettered, they were inherently wise and educated.

**Vidyasagar and Women’s Liberation:**

The enactment of the Act of 1856, legalizing widow remarriage and the Civil Marriage Act of 1872, abolishing polygamy and child marriage and encouraging widow remarriage, owed a great deal to Vidyasagar, whose writings and activities had helped to create public opinion in favor of these social issues.

Perhaps Vidyasagar’s greatest legacy is his unflinching resolve to change the plight of Indian women, especially in his native Bengal. Being a devout Hindu himself, he sought transformation of orthodox Hindu society from within. As the principal of the Sanskrit College, he encouraged scholars to study ancient sacred texts and interpret them for contemporary usage. His study of ancient texts convinced him that the debilitating status of women in 19th century Hindu society had less legitimacy according to the scriptures, but had more to do with the existing power relations in society.

The prevailing social custom of Kulin Brahmin polygamy ensured that aged persons (often on the verge of death) married teenage girls and even children. The ill-fated girl used to be widowed very soon because her elderly husband died in old age. The life of such girls for the rest of their lives was full of woes and miseries like abstinence, torture, discrimination and deprivation.
These hapless widows were prohibited (as spiritual sanction) to abstain from consuming meat, fish, onion and garlic. Everyday, they had to rise before dawn to conduct their diurnal religious rituals, bathe in icy cold water and wrap a clean white sari around their wet bodies without drying themselves, and pick fresh flowers with dew-drops, to offer prayers to God. By custom, they were the last ones to eat in the household, or went without food observing various religious fasts.

They had to dress in plain white cotton saris and remain with their shaved off, hairless heads for the rest of their lives to render them unattractive to other men. They were usually abandoned soon after their husband’s demise and despatched to their parental homes, with their parents bearing the entire expense of their upkeep in addition to the financial burden of the wedding and dowry.

Some widows would even be thrown out of their houses or sent to religious places like Varanasi or Vrindavan in India, supposedly to pray and purify themselves, but in reality, they frequently ended up as prostitutes, rape victims and unsupported mothers.

Vidyasagar was very deeply moved by the plight of these hapless widows.

Vidyasagar’s heart melted at the pain and suffering imposed by the society, often in the name of religion, on Indian women. Polygamy, ban on widows from remarrying, child marriage, gender inequalities, keeping women away from the light of education, depriving them from property rights, etc. All these malpractices deeply distressed him.

He took up his pen, called discussion meetings, ran seminars and saw Government officials. All these efforts were directed to wipe out the evil traditions of the nation. But his call fell on deaf ears. On every instance, dictates from Hindu shastras were forwarded by the clergy as an excuse. So Vidyasagar set out to prove them wrong.

He conducted extensive research into Hindu scriptures and puranas and tried to explain that there was nothing against widows marrying a second time and why polygamy was an evil and hence unacceptable.

As the principal of the Sanskrit College, he encouraged scholars to study ancient sacred texts and interpret them for the times. His study of these texts convinced him that the debased status of women in 19th century Hindu society, the bias in law against female inheritance, wealth and property, and the social prejudice against female autonomy and education was not sanctioned by the scriptures, but had more to do with the prevalent power relations in society.

He published two volumes of books on remarriage of widows and another two volumes on polygamy citing quotes from scriptures and explaining the validity of his arguments.

He compiled a list of 'distinguished' polygamous Calcuttans who unable to control their boundless lust for sex, had married up to 80 times, often marrying under-age girls.
For his stern stand against polygamy, he was virulently attacked by the conservative Hindu religious groups and also received threats of physical violence and death. But nothing stopped Vidyasagar from what he had set out to do. His iron-will prevailed till the very end. On 26th July 1856, widow re-marriage was legalized by the then Government of India.

Due to his courageous entrepreneurship, widow-remarriage was ushered in the conservative Hindu Brahmin society of Bengal.

To prove that his compassion for widows was not empty rhetoric as some might have assumed, he even encouraged his son to marry a widow. He also established the Hindu Family Annuity Fund to help widows who could not remarry. He financed many such widow re-marriage weddings, often getting into debts himself.

**Vidyasagar: The Compassionate Reformist**

Though he was very outspoken and blunt in his mannerisms, yet Vidyasagar had a heart of Gold - full of mercy and kindness. He always reflected and responded to distress calls of the poor, sufferings of the sick and injustice to humanity. While being a student at Sanskrit College, he would spend part of his scholarship proceeds and cook paayesh (rice pudding) to feed the poor and buy medicines for the sick.

Later on, when he started earning, he paid fixed sums of monthly allowances to each member of his joint family, to family servants, to needy neighbors, to villagers who needed help and to his village surgery and school. This he continued without break even when he was unemployed and had to borrow substantially from time to time.

Vidyasagar did not believe that money was enough to ease the sufferings of humanity. He opened the doors of the Sanskrit College to lower caste students (previously it was exclusive to the Brahmins), nursed sick cholera patients, went to crematoriums to bury unclaimed dead bodies, dined with the untouchables and walked miles as a messenger-man to take urgent messages to people who would benefit from them.

When the eminent Indian Poet of the 19th century, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, fell hopelessly into debts due to his reckless lifestyle during his stay in Versailles, France, he appealed for help to Vidyasagar (who was also known to all as Dayar Sagar – the Ocean of Kindness, for his immense generosity), Vidyasagar laboured to ensure that sums owed to Michael from his property at home were remitted to him and sent him a large sum of money to France.

**Vidyasagar’s Published Works:**

Vidyasagar devoted most of his time in writing reformist literature and text books. He also wrote
biographical notes on numerous noteworthy personalities in the history of the world so that the young generation could be inspired by reading the great examples of their endurance, hard work, honesty, patience, perseverance, courage, determination and philosophy of life.

Betaal Panchavinsati - 25 tales of a Betaal (Demon) published in 1847 - a translation from the Sanskrit Kathasaritsagara on King Vikramaditya and his Betaal, is one of the most popular works of Vidyasagar in Bengali Prose.

Other notable Literary contributions by him include Banglar Itihaas (1848), Jivancharita (1849), Shakuntala (1854), Mahabharata (1860), Seetar Vanavas (1860), Bhrantivilaas (1869), Oti Alpa Hoilo (1873), Aabaar Oti Alpa Hoilo (1873), Brajavilaas (1884) and Ratnopariksha (1886).

But the most far-reaching and controversial of his Social Reform Monologues are:

Bidhobabivah (Widow Remarriage – on widows’ rights to remarry) the First Exposure (1855)

Bidhobabivah – (Widow Remarriage – on widows’ rights to remarry) the Second Book (1855)

Bahubivah - (on Banning of Polygamy) the First Exposure (1871)

Bahubivah – (on Banning of Polygamy) the Second Book (1873)

Balyabivah (on the Flaws of Child Marriage) - publication date not known

Vidyasagar is also famously known for his Educational Book of “Barnoparichoy” – a first book of the Bengali alphabet to introduce children to the alphabetical letters of the Bangla Language. The term “Barna” means Letter (of the alphabets) and “Parichoy” means Introduction. This book on the Bengali alphabets and their elementary usage is illustrated with very interesting pictures, which was an entirely innovative and novel concept during those times.

Vidyasagar: A Persona Beyond Comparison

Thus, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was a legendary figure who played a significant role in all aspects of Indian life - be it education, culture, religion, ethics or literature.

He struggled relentlessly against all forms of corruption, blind superstition, prejudices and malpractices. He tried his best to emancipate the Indian women from the shackles of the biased, patriarchal society and didn’t want them to live like second class citizens of the country. He wanted them to be strong individuals with dignity and self-esteem. He was literally a 'modern' man with refined ideas. He fought with the conservative society in the 19th century and influenced the Government to enact the Widow
Remarriage Act. He also fought relentlessly to abolish the practice of polygamy in the Indian Society.

His acts of supreme kindness and generosity, his fierce determination and courage, his education and social reform publications and activities have made Vidyasagar Immortal. The poet, Rabindranath Tagore was hard pressed to find a comparable personality in the West and according to him, the closest that he found who could come to resemble Vidyasagar in his words and deeds, was the English writer, Dr. Samuel Johnson.

Vidyasagar lived all his life as a very modest man, a simpleton, but with a generous heart, as he contributed so much to society by dedicating his whole life to the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden.

Towards the later part of his life, there was considerable deterioration in his health because of all the struggles he had gone through those many years of perseverance, in order to bring about social reform and justice.

Disgruntled with some of his own family members’ petty-mindedness and selfishness, he severed all relations with them and lived amongst the tribal people in his last years. He died on 29th July, 1891 at the age of 70.

Vidyasagar’s stature as an educator, reformer, writer, scholar and philanthropist grew to such great heights that the whole nation, irrespective of race, religion and caste, mourned his sad demise. The newspapers and magazines were flooded with obituaries and features applauding his deeds and achievements; poets and writers, including the poet-laureate Rabindranath Tagore, wrote poems and prose in his remembrance.

**Teaching career**

In 1841, Vidyasagar took the job of a Sanskrit pandit (professor) at Fort William College in Kolkata (Calcutta). In 1846, he joined the Sanskrit College as Assistant Secretary. A year later, he and a friend of his, Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, set up the Sanskrit Press and Depository, a print shop and a bookstore.

While Vidyasagar was working at the Sanskrit College, some serious differences arose between him and Rasamoy Dutta who was then the Secretary of the College, and so he resigned in 1849. One of the issues was that while Rasamoy Dutta wanted the College to remain a Brahmin preserve, Vidyasagar wanted it to be opened to students from all castes.

Later, Vidyasagar rejoined the College, and introduced many far-reaching changes to the College's syllabus.

Vidyasagar was one of the first persons in India to realize that modern science was the key to India's
future. He translated into Bengali the English biographies of some outstanding scientists like Copernicus, Newton, and Herschel. He sought to inculcate a spirit of scientific inquiry into young Bengalis. A staunch anti-Berkeleyan, he emphasized the importance of studying European Empiricist philosophy (of Francis Bacon) and the inductive logic of John Stuart Mill.

In the face of opposition from the Hindu establishment, Vidyasagar vigorously promoted the idea that regardless of their caste, both men and women should receive the best education.

**Reform Concerning Widow Remarriages**

Main article: Widow Remarriage Act

Vidyasagar championed the uplift of the status of women in India, particularly in his native Bengal. Unlike some other reformers who sought to set up alternative societies or systems, he sought, however, to transform orthodox Hindu society from within.

With valuable moral support from people like Akshay Kumar Dutta, Vidyasagar introduced the practice of widow remarriages to mainstream Hindu society. In earlier times, remarriages of widows would occur sporadically only among progressive members of the Brahmo Samāj. The prevailing deplorable custom of Kulin Brahmin polygamy allowed elderly men — sometimes on their deathbeds — to marry teenage or even prepubescent girls, supposedly to spare their parents the shame of having an unmarried girl attain puberty in their house. After such marriages, these girls would usually be left behind in their parental homes, where they might be cruelly subjected to orthodox rituals, especially if they were subsequently widowed. These included a semi starvation diet, rigid and dangerous daily rituals of purity and cleanliness, hard domestic labour, and close restriction on their freedom to leave the house or be seen by strangers. Unable to tolerate the ill treatment, many of these girls would run away and turn to prostitution to support themselves. Ironically, the economic prosperity and lavish lifestyles of the city made it possible for many of them to have quite successful careers once they had stepped out of the sanction of society and into the demi-monde. In 1853 it was estimated that Calcutta had a population of 12,718 prostitutes and public women.

Vidyasagar took the initiative in proposing and pushing through the Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856 in India.

**Alphabet reform and Vidyasagar's other contributions**

Vidyasagar reconstructed the Bengali alphabet and reformed Bengali typography into an alphabet
(actually abugida) of twelve vowels and forty consonants.

Vidyasagar contributed significantly to Bengali and Sanskrit literature.

Rectitude and courage were the hallmarks of Vidyasagar’s character, and he was certainly ahead of his time.

In the final years of life, he chose to spend his days among the Santhals, an old tribe in India.

Shortly after Vidyasagar’s death, Rabindranāth Tāgore reverently wrote about him: "One wonders how God, in the process of producing forty million Bengalis, produced a man!"

Vidyasagar Setu (commonly known as the Second Hooghly Bridge), is a bridge over the Hooghly River in West Bengal, India. It links the city of Howrah to its twin city of Kolkata. The bridge is named after Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

A fair named Vidyasagar Mela (Bengali: বিদ্যাসাগর মেলা Biddashagor Mêla), which is dedicated to spreading education and increasing social awareness, has been held annually in West Bengal since 1994. Since 2001, it has been held simultaneously in Kolkata and Birningha.
Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

**Born:** 26 September, 1820  
**Died:** 29 July, 1890

**Contributions**  
Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar is considered as one of the pillars of Bengal renaissance. In other words, he managed to continue the reforms movement that was started by Raja Rammohan Roy. Vidyasagar was a well-known writer, intellectual and above all a staunch follower of humanity. He brought a revolution in the education system of Bengal. In his book, "Barno-Porichoy" (Introduction to the letter), Vidyasagar refined the Bengali language and made it accessible to the common strata of the society. The title 'Vidyasagar' (ocean of knowledge) was given to him due to his vast knowledge in almost all the subjects. Poet Michael Madhusudan Dutta while writing about Ishwar Chandra said: "The genius and wisdom of an ancient sage, the energy of an Englishman and the heart of a Bengali mother".

**Life & Education**  
Ishwar Chandra Bandopadhyaya, was born in Birsingha village of Midnapore district, West Bengal. His father Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay and mother Bhagavati Devi were very religious persons. Their economic condition was not that stable and subsequently the childhood days of Vidyasagar were spent in abject poverty. After the completion of elementary education at the village school, his father took him to Calcutta (Kolkata). It is believed that Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar learned English numbers by following the mile-stones labels on his way to Calcutta at the age of eight years.

Ishwar Chandra was a brilliant student. His quest for knowledge was so intense that he used to study on street light as it was not possible for him to afford a gas lamp at home. He cleared all the examinations with excellence and in quick succession. He was rewarded with a number of scholarships for his academic performance. To support himself and the family Ishwar Chandra also took a part-time job of teaching at Jorashanko.

In the year 1839, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar successfully cleared his Law examination. In 1841, at the age of twenty one years, Ishwar Chandra joined the Fort William College as a head of the Sanskrit department.

After five years, in 1946, Vidyasagar left Fort William College and join the Sanskrit College as 'Assistant Secretary'. In the first year of service, Ishwar Chandra recommended a number of changes to the existing education system. This report resulted into a serious altercation between...
Ishwar Chandra and College Secretary Rasomoy Dutta. Following this, Vidyasagar resigned from Sanskrit College and rejoined Fort William College but as a head clerk.

**A kind-hearted Ishwar**

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar would start crying in distress whenever he saw poor and weak people lying on the footpath and street. He used to spend a part of his scholarships and salary for the welfare of those poor people. He would also buy medicine for the sick.

**Reforms**

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar initiated the concept of widow remarriage and raised concern for the abolition of child-marriage and polygamy. He also opened the doors of the colleges and other educational institutions to lower caste students, which was earlier reserved only for the Brahmins. For his immense generosity and kind-heartedness, people started addressing him as "Dayar Sagar" (ocean of kindness).

**Nawab's shoe donation**

One day, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and his few friends decided to collect donations to form Calcutta University. He traveled across Bengal and neighboring states asking people to donate for the foundation. While doing so, one day he reached outside the palace of an influential King. After hearing his plea the King, pulled one of his shoes and dropped into Vidyasagar's bag as donation. Vidyasagar thanked Nawab and left.

The very next day Vidyasagar organized an auction of the Nawab's shoe and earned Rs. 1000. The Nawab after hearing that his shoe has fetched so much amount of money, he himself gave a similar amount of money as donation.

**Death**

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the great scholar, academician and reformer passed away on 29 July, 1891 at the age of 70 years. After his death Rabindranath Tagore said, "One wonders how God, in the process of producing forty million Bengalis, produced a man!"
Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

26 September 1820

Born Ghatal subdivision, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India

Died 4 September 1890 (aged 27) Friday

Calcutta, West Bengal, India

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar CIE (Bengali: ইশ্বরচন্দ্র বিদ্যাসাগর Ishshor Chôndro Biddashagor 26 September 1820 – 29 July 1891), born Ishwar Chandra Bandopadhyay (Bengali: ইশ্বরচন্দ্র বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, Ishshor Chôndro Bôndopaddhae), was an Indian Bengali polymath and a key figure of the Bengali Renaissance. [1][2] Vidyasagar was a philosopher, academic, educator, writer, translator, printer, publisher, entrepreneur, reformer, and philanthropist. His efforts to simplify and modernize Bangla prose were significant. He also rationalized and simplified the Bengali alphabet and type, which had remained unchanged since Charles Wilkins and Panchanan
Karmakar had cut the first wooden Bangla type fonts in 1780. He received the title "Vidyasagar" ("Ocean of learning" or "Ocean of knowledge") from the Calcutta Sanskrit College (where he graduated), due to his excellent performance in Sanskrit studies and philosophy. In Sanskrit, Vidya means knowledge or learning and Sagar means ocean or sea. This title was mainly given for his vast knowledge in all subjects which was compared to the vastness of the ocean.

Early life

Ishwar Chandra was born to Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay and Bhagavati Devi at Birsingha village, in the Ghatal subdivision of Midnapore District, on 26 September 1820. Thakurdas was employed in a shop in Burrabazar and had a meagre income of approximately eight rupees per month. The childhood days of Ishwar were hence spent in abject poverty. He joined a local school run by Kalikanta Chattopadhyay at the age of five. After a year he fell ill with chronic fever and inflammation of the spleen, When he didn't recover even after six months, his maternal grandfather took him for Ayurvedic treatment. He recovered completely within three months and subsequently returned to Birsingha. Thereafter he continued his studies in the same school till the age of eight.

After his grandfather's demise, Thakurdas decided to take Ishwar to Calcutta for further studies. They set forth on foot from Birsingha. Interestingly, he learned English numbers by following the mile-stones labels on his way to Calcutta.

In Calcutta, Ishwar started living in Bhagabat Charan's house in Burrabazar, where Thakurdas had already been staying for some years. Ishwar felt at ease amidst Bhagabat's large family and settled down comfortably in no time. Bhagabat's youngest daughter Raimoni's motherly and affectionate feelings towards Ishwar touched him deeply and had a strong influence on his later revolutionary work towards the upliftment of women's status in India.

His quest for knowledge was so intense that he used to study on street light as it was not possible for him to afford a gas lamp at home. He cleared all the examinations with excellence and in quick succession. He was rewarded with a number of scholarships for his academic performance. To support himself and the family Ishwar Chandra also took a part-time job of teaching at Jorashanko.

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College, as a professor of literature. In 1851, Iswar Chandra became the principal of Sanskrit College. In 1855, he was made special inspector of schools with additional charges. But following the matter of Rasomoy Dutta, Vidyasagar resigned from Sanskrit College and rejoined Fort William College, as a head clerk.

**Teaching career**

Vidyasagar in Calcutta and many other reformers in Bombay set up schools for girls. When the first schools were opened in the mid nineteenth century, many people were afraid of them. They feared that schools would take away girls from home and prevent them from doing their domestic duties. Moreover, girls would have to travel through public places in order to reach school. They thought that girls should stay away from public spaces. Therefore, most educated women were taught at home by their liberal fathers or husbands.

![Vidyasagar House, in Kolkata.](image)

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Later, Vidyasagar rejoined the College, and introduced many far-reaching changes to the College's syllabus.

In the face of opposition from the Hindu establishment, Vidyasagar vigorously promoted the idea that regardless of their caste, both men and women should receive the best education. His remarkable clarity of vision is instanced by his brilliant plea for teaching of science, mathematics and the philosophies of John Locke and David Hume, to replace most of ancient Hindu philosophy. His own books, written for primary school children, reveal a strong emphasis on
enlightened materialism, with scant mention of God and religious verities - a fact that posits him as a pioneer of the Indian Renaissance.

A compassionate Reformist

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar felt very sorry and compassionate whenever he saw poor and weak people were in distress. Though he was very outspoken and blunt in his mannerisms, yet Vidyasagar had a heart of Gold. He was also known for his charity and philanthropy as "Daya-rasagar" or "Karunar Sagar" - ocean of kindness, for his immense generosity. He always reflected and responded to distress calls of the poor, sufferings of the sick and injustice to humanity.

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Widow Remarriage

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quite successful careers once they had stepped out of the sanction of society and into the demi-monde. In 1853 it was estimated that Calcutta had a population of 12,718 prostitutes and public women.\(^2\)

Vidyasagar took the initiative in proposing and pushing through the Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856 in India. He also demonstrated that the system of polygamy without restriction was not sanctioned by the ancient Hindu Shastras.\(^8\)

**Bengali Alphabet and language reconstruction**

Vidyasagar reconstructed the Bengali alphabet and reformed Bengali typography into an alphabet (actually abugida) of twelve vowels and forty consonants. Vidyasagar contributed significantly to Bengali and Sanskrit literature.

**Meeting with Sri Ramakrishna**

One of the important chapters in the The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is the depiction of the meeting between Sri Ramakrishna, the 19th century Indian saint and mystic, and Vidyasagar. The meeting was arranged by Mahendranath Gupta, better known as M, the author of the Bengali version of the Gospel, a lay disciple of Ramakrishna and the then headmaster in the Metropolitan school owned by Vidyasagar.

At that time Vidyasagar used to stay in Badur bagan in North Calcutta. Sri Ramakrishna in the course of the conversation apparently praised him on his philanthropic activities, kindness and compassion and suggested him to do these activities in a selfless spirit. Vidyasagar was himself secular and liberal in his outlook even though he was born in an orthodox Hindu Brahmin family. He was highly educated and hence influenced by Western thoughts and ideas. Ramakrishna in contrast did not have any formal education. According to the gospel Ramakrishna discussed various topics including the world of duality and transcendent nature of Brahman, citing the parables of the salt doll, the wood cutter and the ant and the sugar hill, on discrimination between true and false knowledge, on different manifestations of God's power, on ego and suffering, on power of faith etc.\(^9\)

**Accolades**

Shortly after Vidyasagar's death, Rabindranath Tagore reverently wrote about him: "One wonders how God, in the process of producing forty million Bengalis, produced a man!" After death, he is remembered in many ways, some of them include:
Vidyasagar Setu

1. **Vidyasagar Setu** (commonly known as the Second Hooghly Bridge), is a bridge over the Hooghly River in West Bengal, India. It links the city of Howrah to its twin city of Kolkata. The bridge is named after Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

2. A fair named **Vidyasagar Mela** (Bengali: বিদ্যাসাগর মেলা Biddashagor Mêla), which is dedicated to spreading education and increasing social awareness, has been held annually in West Bengal since 1994. Since 2001, it has been held simultaneously in Kolkata and Birsingha.

3. There is a reputed college named after him and it is located in **college street, Kolkata** and a university named **Vidyasagar University** in Paschim Midnapore.

4. Rectitude and courage were the hallmarks of Vidyasagar’s character, and he was certainly ahead of his time. In recognition of his scholarship and cultural work the government designated Vidyasagar a **Companion of the Indian Empire** (CIE) in 1877. In the final years of life, he chose to spend his days among the "Santhals", an old tribe in India.

5. There is **Vidyasagar Street** in **Central Kolkata**, which is named after him.

6. The **Paschimbanga State Government** has established a stadium named after this great man (বিদ্যাসাগর স্টেডিয়াম- Vidyasagar Stadium) at **Barasat**, the district center of **Uttar 24 Pargana**.

**Corpus**

**Textbooks**

- *Barnaparichay* (Parts I & II, 1855)
- *Rijupath* (Parts I, II & III, 1851-52)
- *Sanskrita Byakaraner Upakramonika* (1951)
- *Byakaran Kaumudi* (1853)

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- www.americanchronicle.com