

EDUCATIONAL REFORM OF INDIAN WOMEN: PERSPECTIVE OF ISHWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR

SOUVIK PAUL

Ph.D. Scholar in Education, Raiganj University, Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur (West Bengal)

BISWAJIT CHATTERJEE

Assistant Professor in Education, Raiganj University, Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur (West Bengal)

PRASENJIT DAS

Ph.D. Scholar in Education, Raiganj University, Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur (West Bengal)

ABSTRACT

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar is notable for being an intellectual and a strong advocate of humanity. He was a great personality, social reformer, writer, educator, and one of the entrepreneurs in transforming society. He was known as the key figure of the Bengali *Renaissance*. Women education was neglected in India for a long time. At that time, the position and dignity of women were much lower than that of men in Indian society. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal felt that the denial of education to women was responsible for many problems. He was an opponent of polygamy and a passionate supporter of women education. He was a real blessing to the women of that era. He became the champion of social reform by protecting women in society from social misery, while women were only oppressed by society. He was one of the most iconic symbols in the awakening of women power. Without thinking of the progress of women in the Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's era, today's women would have fallen into the dark world of society. As a key figure in women empowerment, he would always be remembered in history. This paper looked at women education in the country and the background as well as the position of women education in the 19th century, and the reflection of the present century. His relevancy of women education as a measure of social progress and his thought about women empowerment in the present society is a remarkable achievement for any time womanhood. Women recognise their human values through the vigorous works of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

Keywords: educational reform, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, present context, women education in the 19th century, women empowerment

INTRODUCTION

In modern sociological terms, it is more reasonable to call Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar a social reformer rather than a revolutionary (Vikas, 2017). He was one of the greatest men, with his deep respect for the women nation, his motherly devotion, love of affection, and awareness. The emergence of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar is a huge backdrop for the newly awakened Bengal. He brought the wave of *Renaissance* into the life of Bengalis (Sarkar, 1970). Hindu Law Committee of examination gave the title "Vidyasagar", which means "Ocean of Knowledge", to him as an honour for his knowledge, and excellence (Banu & Alam, 2016). One of the major aspects of the social

reform movement of the 19th century in Bengal was the united efforts of women's progress. The end of many long cruel practices (like, the disappearing of children in Gangasagar, *Satidah*, Polygamy, child marriage, torture of legality, vanity of the widows of the society, improved, shared condition of women nation etc.) imposed on the women nation, among them some deliberate efforts to promote education, spread education, make them economically self-reliant, and then the women's development movement was launched around the main goal of the motherland (Sarkar, 1970). Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's thought was so strong and rigid, that he was not constrained by the so-called society in the 19th century (Mondal, 2021). He was attacked by the caste of religion and wanted to break it through social reforms. His firm conviction, determination, and enthusiasm gave him morality and creative power. He was a symbol of sacrifice and action. He was really "*Daya-r Sagar*" or "*Karuna Sagar*" (literally, "Ocean of Kindness"), Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa truly commented about him, "No lake, no puddle, the real sea" (Roy, 2018). However, in present society, the rate of women education has increased due to the touch of modernity, but the rate of social deprivation, exploitation, and oppression has remained almost the same.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The male-centric society was created in our country, so the socialists had tried to leave the women society behind for fear of breaking into this society. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar realised that one of the main reasons for the endangerment of all of us was to leave women society behind. In '*Manu Sanhita*', it was found that the male-centric society had tried to cover up women (Paroi & Sarkar, 2020). If a woman in childhood is a subject to her husband at maturity, and a subject to her children at old age, when does she become independent of her subjecthood? Has this woman never been under the dominance of her mother? Have the mother and rights of that woman who has grown up by being breastfed, become married and later become a mother herself, ever been established in our society? According to Vedic Philosophy, a woman is the epitome of chastity. She has no right to worship; she can only perform rituals with her husband. Therefore, it can be said that the influence of the male-centric society had increased by keeping the female society left behind or suppressed and the male-centric society established. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's foresight thinking was here (Sarkar, 1970). He wanted to develop the women society rather than the men community, by spreading education among the women and making them self-sufficient. However, at the upper levels of Hindu society, the consciousness of women education was gradually transmitted (Ghosh, 1984).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the present study was discussed below:

- Half of the society is female and half is male. Hence, if those women are deprived of the light of education then the overall development of society is not possible. The education of the child originates within the family (Sarkar, 1970). The mother's hand is in his/her first hand. So, one of the main ways to protect a child's education is by teaching his/her mother.
- Today's children are the citizens of tomorrow, the future of the country. The purpose of

today's world is to bring the world's growing population to the right resources (Gupta, 2019).

- At present, the teaching of morality or values is extremely relevant in the world of education. The teaching of these values cannot be denied in the child's early education and the lifelong process of education (Mondal, 2021).
- Educating women is essential to move the nation through a stable population and making family planning work more efficiently (Bhaduri, 2019).
- Through women education, women become self-reliant and as their marriage age increases, women gain more freedom in their needs and decisions (Roy, 2018).
- Women can take care of themselves and their families by avoiding dramatic situations (Banu & Alam, 2016).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

The research questions of the present study were:

RQ₁. What was the position of women education in the 19th century?

RQ₂. What was the contribution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in empowering women?

RQ₃. What is the position of women in the present context?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on the research questions, the following objectives were constructed for this study:

O₁. To revisit the women education of the 19th century in India.

O₂. To analyse the contribution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in empowering women.

O₃. To evaluate the position of women in the present context.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was delimited to:

1. The women education in the 19th century of India.

2. The perspective of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar regarding women empowerment.

3. The present position of women.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study was purely historical research in nature which was based on qualitative work. As historical events can be traced through historical research so, one can be determined current and future approaches based on the past. The historical research methodology was necessary to present the data. The investigators had to be involved with the data analysis process and for the work from the very beginning on the nature of the data, and the type of information sources. This study was purely theoretical based. Content analysis was done on the available documents. The data analysis was done by secondary sources only. The investigators collected data from different types of books (including edited books), journals, articles written by great authors, and web portals

as secondary sources.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

The findings of the present study were:

- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar consciously pursued education as an aspect of social reform.
- As a preliminary act of spreading education or at the beginning, he focused on women education.
- In the 19th century, due to the thinking of women education in Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, women get access to education in the present era.
- From childhood, religious rituals occupied a large part in the lives of women.
- Women were deprived of human rights by religion, with the opportunity of their natural affection for religion.
- Women society was severely deprived of the right to education.
- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar realised that one of the major obstacles to the education of women was the lack of native female teachers.
- The 19th century era was of an ideological conflict. The combination of the western, the traditional with modernity, and the combination of modernity with the eastern were characteristics of the era.
- In the present context, even in the 21st century, the condition of women is not improved much, although there is some progress in education, there is a lack of adequate security in the social aspects. Although economically women are somewhat more self-sufficient than past, then they are dependent on men's decisions to spend their earned money, and their condition is very miserable both in health and nutrition.

The Content analysis was followed in discussing the findings:

RQ., What was the position of women education in the 19th century?

Reviewing the trajectory of history showed that since the decline of Buddhism, the rights of men and women in our country had led to discrimination. And as a result, our women society had deprived of social rights, property rights, and education rights. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar wanted women's freedom and liberation through women education (Chitanya & Ambethkar, 2022). In a country, the main hope for the betterment of the world is the social or family status of women, freedom of women, and the promotion of proper women education is the only way to improve women society (Das, 2021). The dress of women, everything they want and desire, is subdued to the willpower of men today. From 1849-1851, as one of the partners of Bethune *Sahib*, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar infiltrated the field of women education in Bangladesh (Ghosh, 1984). For many years after the establishment of the Hindu College, there had been a continuous practice of modern knowledge, science, and literature, but the long-standing prejudice that had been in the minds of people of all levels of society had not yet been eradicated (Malik, 2013). However, there was an emergence of primary awareness about women education among the upper classes of society (Bala, 2019). Although some Western educational consciousness had stirred their minds, it

had not been possible to transform that consciousness into a definitive workplace (Mondal, 2021). Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was the best person to deal with the strong opposition of the upper classes in the field of women education. He believed that the condition of women could be improved only through their education (Bhattacharjee, 2015). Not only that, he was a man capable of getting public support and active support in this regard. The nature of the life of Hindu society was well known to Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, he was well aware of the reluctance of Hindus to send girls to school. Yet, he believed that public support for such goods must be found by working with enthusiasm and zeal (Mahato & Murmu, 2021).

While a principal and Inspector of Sanskrit College, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar worked tirelessly to promote education through the Bengali language, along with the ancient 'Shastra' teaching, to spread education in western knowledge, and science with a free mind (Umar, 1985). He wrote a variety of textbooks for Sanskrit College students, children, and higher education students' needs (Roy, 1986). In those days, social barriers to women education were difficult. The field of women education was one where the enthusiasm of the common people was very low. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was the same thinking in a subdued country as we think of an autonomous, self-controlled, and managed educational institution at present. Because he realised that freedom was an absolute necessity in education. So, it was seen that in the efforts of Bethune *Sahib*, when 35 girls' schools were established in Bengal, he opened a women's education institute to manage them (Bhattacharjee, 2015).

RQ. What was the contribution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Empowering Women?

Empowerment is a process that helps people to gain control over their lives by raising awareness, taking action, and working to exercise gender control (Sinha, 2005). According to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, an individual is educated by educating a man, but a family can be educated only by making women get educated. Therefore, according to his words if a woman is empowered means 'Mother India' is empowered (Nagaraja, 2018). One of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's social reform movements was the women's liberation movement. He indeed paved the way for the formation of a new country by granting women the right to society. The process of empowerment deals with how to increase the capacity of women and what they need to become empowered (Raj, Ravi, & Latha, 2005). He realised that without the development of women society, it was not possible to develop the whole society. In the early stages of national awakening, the development of the consciousness of women in society is essential. Therefore, to prepare the field for future development, he took up the first programme to promote women education (Giri, 2017). He wanted to develop the self-consciousness of women society through education and tried to establish the self-esteem of women through social reforms to secure their fundamental rights. He also protested against child marriage and Polygamy (Bhattacharjee, 2015). In introducing the widows' remarriage, we found that Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar realised the necessity of a state law to regulate widows' remarriage (Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act., 1856).

150 years ago, he fought hard to establish the rights of one of the major functions of the nation by applying this democratic system. The establishment of the classical culture of the country along with modern western knowledge and the practice of Bengali education were two of the major achievements of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and one of the major achievements was the attempt to

promote women education in this country (Ghosh, 1984). On June 15, 1872, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar founded the "Hindu family annuity fund". Keeping in mind the economic security of women society, he planned to establish this annuity fund. At that time, the Bengali Hindu family was generally dependent on a bread earner (male person) (Singh, 2018). When he died for some reason, his wife, son, and other relatives were all helpless. Even today, we are facing such a real image. We can also see how helpless the wife becomes after her husband's death. In the modern era, as the future financial security of the insurance policy has been secured, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar had also taken the initiative to secure future financial security by establishing an annuity fund (Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar: A profile of the Philanthropic Protagonist, n.d.). And there is no denying that his plan was not largely realistic. Although his plan did not last long for various reasons, it can be said that such a plan at that time was prosperous (Rani, 2020).

RQ₃. What is the Position of Women in the Present Context?

If we evaluate the position of women in society in all aspects at present, then the image we get:

Social Position

- Women are still lagging in our society in various aspects.
- Because of being a woman, women are lagging in society, disrupting women's lives at every step, and depriving women of their dignity, rights, and privileges (Raj et al., 2005).
- A major limitation to the advancement of women is the institutionalised set of social prescriptions that limit their participation in socio-economic activities and their input in decision-making (Sinha, 2005).
- Due to various inequalities from birth to death, the lives of women are spent in misery, and the security of women is disrupted at every step (Das, 2021).

Family Position

- In the family, women do not get the same dignity as men; society wants women to be far below men.
- The role of women in making decisions for the development of family and society has little to do (Umar, 1985).

Political Position

- Socially, politics is the work of sensible people, which is beyond the control of women.
- Women's Participation in politics had not been reflected in their record of success in elections (Sharma, 2002).
- Women can handle their homes, and take care of others, politics is not their job.
- Because women are dependent on men, they have less chance of developing an independent political ideology (Singh, 2018).
- Although women are represented in the Panchayat and Municipality for the reservation of women, the full participation of women in the political process is not seen (Raj et al., 2005).

- The recognition of women's political equality in the Indian constitution was a radical departure, not only from the inherited norms of traditional Indian society but also from the political norms of most advanced countries at that time (Sharma, 2002). And now in many cases, the consequences are visible.

Economical Status

- Women have less ownership of wealth, only 5% of the entire world's wealth.
- Women are not recognised as workers because there is no labour cost in the house. But even if directly involve in household farming, shells, livestock, and other production activities, they remain as efficient workers (Roy, 2018).
- Women roles are seen as reproductive and domestic in support of the male breadwinners of the family, and this practice is condition women to accept a subservient role (Sinha, 2005).
- Women have no control over their earnings; men decide where their money would be spent (Singh, 2018).

Position of Health and Nutrition

- The stress of these burdens of housekeeping, economic work, and childbirth is breaking women's health.
- Malnutrition, anaemia, complications of childbirth, childhood marriages, motherhood, and oftentimes death due to unknowable tips for abortion (Das, 2021).

Educational Position

- According to the 2011 census, India's total literacy rate and female literacy rate were 64% and 65.46% respectively, which was higher than the female literacy rate of 2001 i.e. 54.16%. From 1991-2001, the male literacy rate increased to 11.72% and the female literacy rate increased to 14.87%. The female literacy rate was 3.15% higher than the male literacy rate (Census of India, 2011). It can be said that the rate of female literacy has increased comparatively at present.
- Although, the 'Education for All' programme is one of the major programmes run by the Government of India, the rate of women education in India in Asia is still very satisfactory (Lavanya, 2022).
- Despite the large number of women in society, their number in the field of education is very low, which is a huge loss for Indians (Sinha, 2005).
- The rate of admission of girl children to parents is very low due to a lack of persuasion and the dropout rate among enrolled girl students is very high (Hazarika, 2011).
- Despite the good participation of women in literacy centres, it is difficult to keep up with the pressures of the work of the world and the success achieved by lack of practice (Das, 2021).
- Women have little chance of training to enhance their technical skills.

- Efforts are being made to bring women into the arena of education through social campaigns such as *'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)'* (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, 2015).
- Initiatives have been taken to empower women above the age of 16 years through adequate education with the help of a scheme called *'Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)'* (Hazarika, 2011).
- In the 21st century's context, gender inequality still exists, which is evident in the early stages of parents sending their sons to school and girls doing housework. Therefore, women of the modern age have to face considerable social uncertainty in getting a school education (Roy, 2018).

Legal Status

- In the Indian Constitution, the equal rights of women and men had been mentioned, and laws had enacted, and amended, but in reality, the rights had kept on paper (Chitanya & Ambethkar, 2022).
- Most of the time women are poor because they cannot afford legal opportunities (Sinha, 2005).
- Ignorance and fear of legal rights, and measures.

CONCLUSION

The history of human civilisation had passed through the centuries. Human civilisation had been stepping forward amid many breakdowns, rise and fall (Hazarika, 2011). In human society, human consciousness had not constant at any level. People were constantly striving to meet their needs, alleviate suffering, and fulfil their aspirations (Sarkar, 1970). There was a socio-economic and scientific basis for the passage of society from one level to the next. History creates entrepreneurs or craftsmen who change their own needs. So, the heroes of history can be seen in the need of the era (Singh, 2018). One such hero was the great Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar; his contribution to promoting education was historic. He was a realist, who did not support Vedic Brahmin's education system (Roy, 2018). The British Government formally sought to open a few schools and work for the promotion of women education. But Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar wanted to promote women education in the wider society. He realised that it would not be possible for their children to flourish as lifelong learners if they could not educate their mothers. The need and right to education are equal for both boys and girls. He wrote many books from different times of his life for the noble purpose of educational reformation of Bengal, these are 'Betal Panchabinsati' (1847), 'Banglar Itihaas' (1848), 'Jivancharita' (1850), 'Bodhadoy' (1851), 'Upakramanika' (1851), 'Barnoparichoy' (1854), 'Shakuntala' (1854), 'Kothamala' (1856), 'Seetar Vanabas' (1860), 'Bhrantivilaas' (1869), 'Brajavilaas' (1884), 'Ratnpariksha' (1886) etc. (Roy, 2018). His thought, philosophy, and reformation still stir us, we did not forget him, or his works, day by day will be influenced the person (especially women), who wants to change society (Banu & Alam, 2016). As a result of the modern thinking of a great man like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in the 19th century, the role of women is also paramount in keeping pace with the men of the present society (Paroi & Sarkar, 2020).

WORKS CITED

- Bala, B. (2019). Contribution of Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) as a messiah of women emancipation in 19th century Bengal. *Ensemble*, 1(2), 79–86.
- Banu, A., & Alam, S. (2016). Influence of western knowledge and culture upon Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and his philosophy of education. *International Journal of Education and Psychological Research*, 5(2), 12-18.
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao. (2015). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved February 20, 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beti_Bachao_Beti_Padhao
- Bhaduri, I. (2019). The 'New Women' of the Tagore agoremenege- Breaking stereotypes and a polegomena to his literature on women. *An International Journal of English Language, Literature and Literary Theory Online*, 8(1), 214–225.
- Bhattacharjee, D. (2015). Women's issue: Contribution of the reform and reformers in colonial India. *International Journal of Economic and Business Review*, 3(2), 247-252.
- Census of India. (2011). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved April 17, 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Census_of_India
- Chitanya, G., & Ambethkar, R. (2022). Feminism – Women's empowerment. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Negative Results*, 13(7), 6790–6795.
- Das, T. (2021). Contribution of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in women education. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 9(1), 4377-4382.
- Ghosh, B. (1984). *Vidyasagar O Bangali Samaj*. Kolkata: Orient Longman Limited.
- Giri, A.K. (2017). Women in India: From the perspective of contemporary society. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies*, 4(6), 275–279.
- Gupta, A.K. (2019). Vidyasagar in popular perception: Recovered through anecdotes. *Studies in Peoples History*, 6(1), 23–32. Retrieved April 17, 2023 from <https://doi.org/10.1177/2348448919834789>
- Hazarika, D. (2011). Women empowerment in India: A brief discussion. *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration*, 1(3), 199–202.
- Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act. (1856). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved January 8, 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_Widows%27_Remarriage_Act,_1856
- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar: A Profile of the Philanthropic Protagonist. (n.d.). *Boloji*. Retrieved March 10, 2023 from <https://www.boloji.com/articles/7697/ishwar-chandra-vidyasagar>
- Lavanya, C. (2022). Welfare schemes and administration programmes for women in India– A study. *International Journal in Management and Social Science*, 10(10), 1–11.
- Mahato, U., & Murmu, D.K. (2021). Versatile Vidyasagar: A superior scholar, modern philosopher, real educationist & true social reformer. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 2(1), 63–69. Retrieved November 17, 2022 from <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.02.01.08>

- Malik, V. (2013). Problems of widow remarriage in India: A study. *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research*, 2(2), 23–31.
- Mondal, B. (2021). Role of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in the development of science teacher education in 19th century Bengal: Relevance to present study. *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 12(3), 137-140. Retrieved March 25, 2023 from <https://doi.org/10.52711/2321-5828.2021.00022>
- Nagaraja, K. (2018). Empowerment of women through higher education. *International Journal of Current Research*, 10(2), 66113-66115.
- Paroi, S., & Sarkar, C. (2020). Vidyasagar and Women Empowerment. *Tathapi*, 19(5), 707–727.
- Raj, D.S., Ravi, R.V., & Latha, H.M.H. (2005). Women and Empowerment: A perspective. In V.N. Reddy, S.V. Kumar, & B. Nalini (Eds.), *Women in development: Challenges and achievement* (pp. 44-61). New Delhi: Serials Publications.
- Rani, D.M.R. (2020). Women empowerment in India- A historical perspective. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, 9(8(4)), 178–186.
- Roy, A.K. (2018). Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar: The champion educator of Bengal. *The Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(11), 290-294.
- Roy, P. (1986). *Vidyasagar samajik byaktitwa*. Kolkata: New Shashi Press.
- Sarkar, S. (1970). *Bengal Renaissance and other essays*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House.
- Sharma, B.M. (2002). Political status of Women in India. In B. M. Sharma (Ed.), *Women and Education* (pp. 65-79). New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers.
- Singh, P. (2018). Women's movement in India from its earliest noticeable beginning to contemporary times. *International Conference on Future of Women*, 1, 37–47. Retrieved February 20, 2023 from <https://doi.org/10.17501/icfow.2018.1105>
- Sinha, D. (2005). Empowering women: A catalyst in social development. In V.N. Reddy, S.V. Kumar, & B. Nalini (Eds.), *Women in development: Challenges and achievement* (pp. 3-20). New Delhi: Serials Publications.
- Umar, B. (1985). *Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar O unish shataker Bangali samaj*. Kolkata: Chiryata Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.
- Vikas, W.S. (2017). Feminist movement in Modern India. *NAVJYOT*, 9(I), 11–14.