



Reforms in the Sati System

For Prelims: [Commission of Sati \(Prevention\) Act, 1987](#), Sati, [Bhanugupta](#), Eran Pillar Inscription, [Bhanugupta](#), [Akbar](#), [Guru Amar Das](#), [William Bentinck](#), [Infanticide](#), [Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar](#), [Age of Consent Act, 1891](#), [Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 \(Sarda Act, 1929\)](#), [Land Revenue Settlement](#), [Mahalwari system](#), [Raja Rammohan Roy](#).

For Mains: Rise and growth of socio-religious reform movements, Role of various actors in socio-religious reform movements.

Source: [IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, 8 persons were **acquitted** in connection with **glorifying the act of Sati** by constructing **temples** in her name.

- The Sati was committed on **4th September 1987** in Rajasthan in the **Roop Kanwar case** which led to the enactment of the [Commission of Sati \(Prevention\) Act, 1987](#) by the Union government.

What are the Key Facts Regarding Punishments for Offences Under Sati Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987?

- **Attempt to Commit Sati: Section 3** of the Act states that anyone who attempts to **commit sati and takes any action towards it** may face up to one year of imprisonment, a fine, or both.
- **Abetment of Sati: Section 4** of the Act states that anyone who **abets sati, directly or indirectly**, will face life imprisonment and a fine. Eg. Convincing a widow or woman that committing sati would bring **spiritual benefits** for her or her deceased husband or improve the family's well-being.
- **Glorification of Sati: Section 5** of the Act states that **glorifying sati** is punishable by one to seven years of imprisonment and a fine of five to thirty thousand rupees.

What was the Sati System?

- **About Sati:** Sati refers to the practice of a **widow immolating herself** on the cremation pyre of her husband.
 - After the immolation, a **memorial stone** and often a **shrine** was erected for her and she was worshipped as a **Goddess**.
 - The first **epigraphical evidence** of Sati has been found from the **Eran Pillar Inscription of Bhanugupta**, Madhya Pradesh in **Eran in 510 AD**.
- **Steps Taken to Abolish Sati:**
 - **Mughal Empire:** In **1582**, emperor [Akbar](#) ordered his officials throughout the empire to **stop the immolation** of a woman if they saw that she was being forced.

- He also offered **pension, gift and rehabilitation** to the widow to stop the practice
- **Sikh Empire:** [Sikh Guru Amar Das](#) **condemned** the practice in the 15th-16th centuries.
- **Maratha Empire:** The Marathas **banned** sati in their region.
- **Colonial Powers:** The [Dutch, Portuguese](#) and the [French](#) also **banned** Sati in their colonies in India.
 - British Governor-General [William Bentinck](#) declared the practice of sati **illegal and punishable** by criminal courts under the **Bengal Sati Regulation, 1829**.
- **Other Legal Initiatives to Ameliorate Women's Position:**
 - **Female Infanticide:** The **Bengal regulations of 1795 and 1804** made [infanticide](#) illegal, equating it with murder.
 - An **1870 act** required parents to register **all births and mandated verification of female infants** for several years in areas where infanticide was secretly practised.
 - **Widow Remarriage:** With the efforts of [Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar](#) the **Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856** was passed.
 - It **legalised the marriage of widows** and recognised children from such marriages as legitimate.
 - **Child Marriage:** [Age of Consent Act, 1891](#) forbade the marriage of girls below the age of 12.
 - [Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 \(Sarda Act, 1929\)](#) pushed up the marriage age to **18 and 14 for boys and girls**, respectively.
 - **Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1978** raised the age of marriage for girls from **15 to 18 years and for boys from 18 to 21**.
 - **Education of Women:** **Calcutta Female Juvenile Society 1819** marked the beginning of a broader movement towards female education.
 - **Bethune School 1849** became a pivotal institution for women's education.

What was Raja Rammohan Roy's Role in Abolition of Sati?

- **Crusader Against Sati:** Raja Rammohan Roy is a key figure in **19th-century India's social reform movement**, known for his strong efforts to eliminate the practice of Sati.
- **Beginning of Activism:** Rammohan launched his **anti-Sati campaign in 1818**, driven by the belief that the practice was morally and ethically wrong.
- **Use of Sacred Texts:** He cited sacred texts to prove his contention that **no religion sanctioned** the burning alive of widows.
- **Rationality and Humanity:** He also appealed to the broader concepts of **humanity, reason, and compassion** to engage both the religious and secular communities in his fight against Sati.
- **Grassroots Activism:** He also **visited the cremation grounds**, organised vigilance groups, and filed counter-petitions to the government during his struggle against sati.
- **Bengal Sati Regulation, 1829:** Rammohan Roy's tireless efforts culminated in **Bengal Sati Regulation, 1829** which declared the practice of Sati a crime.

What are the Other Reforms Undertaken by William Bentinck (1828-1835)?

- **Administrative Reforms:**
 - **Indianisation of Administration:** Bentinck reversed Cornwallis's policy of excluding Indians from administrative roles by **appointing educated Indians as Deputy Magistrates and Deputy Collectors**, marking a significant move towards Indianising the government service.
 - **Land Revenue Settlement:** Lord William Bentinck **reviewed and updated** the [Mahalwari system](#) of land revenue in **1833**. It involved detailed surveys and **negotiations with large landholders and village communities**, leading to increased revenue for the state.
 - **Administrative Divisions:** Bentinck reorganised the [Presidency of Bengal](#) into **twenty**

divisions, each overseen by a commissioner which enhanced administrative efficiency.

▪ **Judicial Reforms:**

- **Abolition of Provincial Courts:** Bentinck abolished **provincial courts** and established a new hierarchy of courts to expedite judicial processes, including the establishment of a **Supreme Court in Agra** for civil and criminal appeals.
- **Judicial Empowerment:** He created separate **Sadar Diwani Adalat and Sadr Nizamat Adalat at Allahabad**, improving judicial accessibility for the public.
- **Reduction of Punishments:** Bentinck reduced the severity of punishments and **abolished inhumane practices**, such as flogging.
- **Language of the Courts:** Bentinck ordered the use of **vernacular languages** in local courts.
 - In higher courts, Persian was replaced by **English**, and qualified Indians were appointed as **Munsiffs and Sadar Amins**.

▪ **Financial Reforms:**

- **Cost-Cutting Measures:** Bentinck formed two committees, **military and civil**, to examine rising expenditures. Following their recommendations, he significantly **reduced the salaries and allowances** of officials and cut travel expenses, leading to substantial annual savings.
- **Revenue Recovery:** He investigated land grants in Bengal, where many rent-free landholders were found to possess forged title deeds and enhanced the company's revenue.

▪ **Educational Reforms:** Influenced by **Macaulay**, Bentinck supported **English as the medium of instruction**.

- The **Persian** language was **replaced by English** as the official language for the government of India in **1835** by the **English Education Act, 1835**.

▪ **Social Reforms:**

- **Suppression of Thuggee:** He took decisive action against the **Thuggee system**, a criminal organisation that engaged in robbery and murder.
 - By the end of **1834**, Bentinck had successfully suppressed this practice, alleviating the fears of the populace.
- **Support from Reformers:** His reforms were supported by notable figures like **Raja Rammohan Roy**, who actively campaigned for the abolition of Sati and advocated for social reform in India.

Conclusion

To further advance social reform in India, it is crucial to continue **raising awareness** about women's rights and education, **enforce existing laws against practices like Sati**, and foster community engagement. Collaborating with grassroots organisations can enhance advocacy efforts, ensuring lasting change and empowerment for marginalised groups in society.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the role of Raja Rammohan Roy in the abolition of Sati. How did various rulers and colonial powers respond to this practice?

Civil Services Examination, Previous Year's Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. In collaboration with David Hare and Alexander Duff, who of the following established Hindu College at Calcutta? (2009)

- (a)** Henry Louis Vivian Derozio
- (b)** Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

(c) Keshab Chandra Sen

(d) Raja Rammohan Roy

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Trace the rise and growth of socio-religious reform movements with special reference to Young Bengal and Brahmo Samaj. **(2021)**

Q. The women's questions arose in modern India as a part of the 19th century social reform movement. What were the major issues and debates concerning women in that period? **(2017)**

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/reforms-in-the-sati-system>

