



## 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)**

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**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)**

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