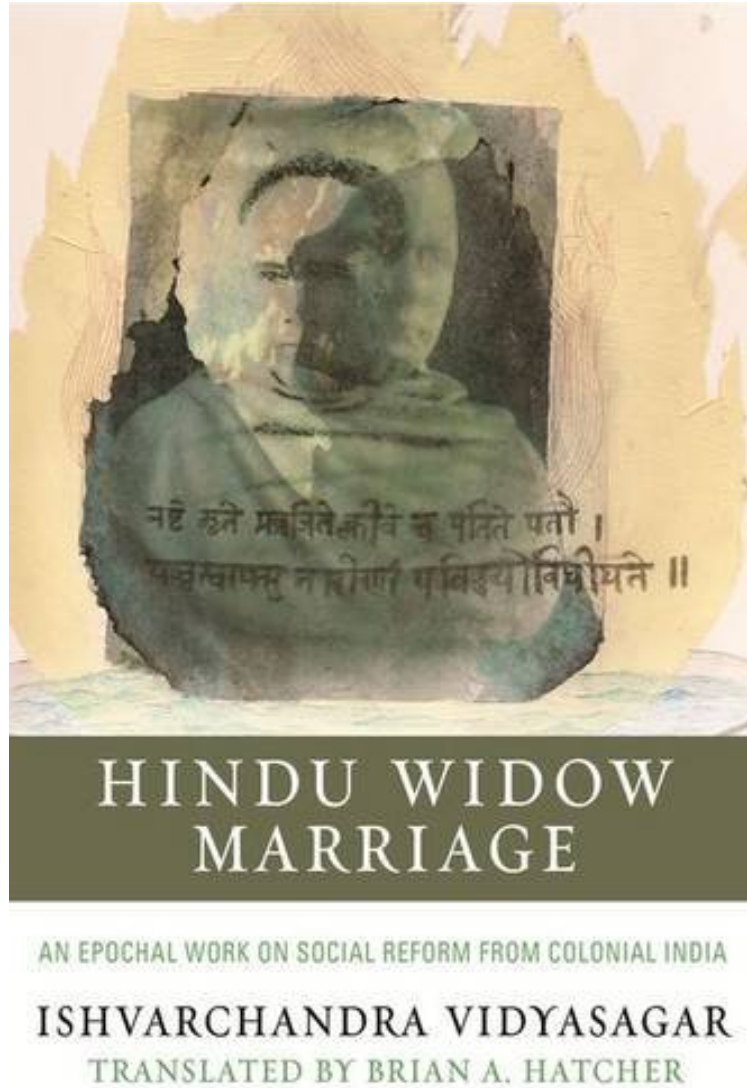


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Hindu Widow Marriage

Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar

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Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar : Hindu Widow Marriage before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hindu Widow Marriage:

Before the passage of the Hindu Widow's Re-marriage Act of 1856, Hindu tradition required a woman to live as a virtual outcast after her husband's death. Widows were expected to shave their heads, discard their jewelry, live in

seclusion, and undergo regular acts of penance. Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar was the first Indian intellectual to successfully argue against these strictures. A Sanskrit scholar and passionate social reformer, Vidyasagar was a leading proponent of widow marriage in colonial India, urging his contemporaries to reject a ban that caused countless women to suffer needlessly. Vidyasagar's brilliant strategy paired a rereading of Hindu scripture with an emotional plea on behalf of the widow, resulting in an organic reimagining of Hindu law and custom. Vidyasagar made his case through the two-part publication *Hindu Widow Marriage*, a tour de force of logic, erudition, and humanitarian rhetoric. In this new translation, Brian A. Hatcher makes available in English for the first time the entire text of one of the most important nineteenth-century treatises on Indian social reform. An expert on Vidyasagar, Hinduism, and colonial Bengal, Hatcher enhances the original treatise with a substantial introduction describing Vidyasagar's multifaceted career, as well as the history of colonial debates on widow marriage. He innovatively interprets the significance of *Hindu Widow Marriage* within modern Indian intellectual history by situating the text in relation to indigenous commentarial practices. Finally, Hatcher increases the accessibility of the text by providing an overview of basic Hindu categories for first-time readers, a glossary of technical vocabulary, and an extensive bibliography.

Hindu Widow Marriage threw down a major challenge to popular attitudes about the destinies of widows. It was both denounced by traditionalists and embraced by reformers. In his translation of and extensive introduction to Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar's text and context, Brian A. Hatcher brings to life the contentious debates within Calcutta's emerging middle class about how a modern world can be embraced within the framework of an enduring tradition. This book is a masterful contribution to our understanding of how traditional textual authority, prevailing social practices, and the pressures of colonialism collided and brought into being a religious and cultural world that was both in continuity with and a departure from the past. (Paul Courtright, Emory University, coeditor of *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture*) Brian Hatcher is to be commended for giving them such detailed and responsible treatment and, thereby, making Vidyasagar's documents accessible to a wide scholarly audience. (David Brick *Journal of the American Oriental Society*) It is superbly researched and written, with useful resources that go a long way towards making the text intelligible to non-specialists. (Ferdinando Sardella *Journal of Hindu Studies*) Hatcher's masterly translation of Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar's *Hindu Widow Remarriage* affords us a rare opportunity to peer deeply into the world of the nineteenth-century Bengali intelligentsia... [this translation] must now be considered "required reading." (*International Journal of Hindu Studies*) A triumph of historical scholarship.... Hatcher's translation of Vidyasagar's Bengali text is exemplary with its close attention to details and his concern for readability and integrity. His annotations are ample and meticulous. (*Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*)

About the Author: Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) was a Sanskrit scholar, author, educator, and social reformer. A leading figure in the Bengal Renaissance, he was responsible for transformations in everything from Bengali prose style and printing techniques to Sanskrit curriculum and Hindu social practices. Brian A. Hatcher is professor and Packard Chair of Theology in the Department of Religion at Tufts University. His research centers on Hinduism in modern India. He is the author of *Idioms of Improvement: Vidyasagar and Cultural Encounter in Bengal*; *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse*; and *Bourgeois Hinduism, or the Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal*.