

## **Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials**

**Programme: Bachelor of Arts**

**Subject: History**

**Course Code: HSC 109**

**Paper Title: History of Women's Movement**

**Unit: III**

**Module Name:** Women's issue in the 19<sup>th</sup> century India -Sati, Widow Remarriage, Age of Consent Bill

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Bentinck 's rule as Governor – General opened a new era of social reforms in India. None of his predecessors had given any time or thought to the problems of society being themselves too much engrossed in wars of expansion. His regime shines forth as a progressive one. He tried to reform Hindu society by abolition of the cruel rite of sati and suppression of infanticide. He crushed the gangs of assassins called thugs and made peaceful living possible. The term sati literally means 'a pure and virtuous woman'. It is used in the case of a devoted wife who contemplates perpetual and uninterrupted conjugal union with her husband after life and as a proof thereof burns herself with the dead body of her husband. The belief that the dead need company and victuals in their journey to far off paradise was prevalent among many primitive peoples, and it was customary to bury, with the body of a chief, his drinking bowls, horses, dogs and even his favourite wives and concubines. Probability was due to a false sense of conjugal duty sanctioned by society and religion, through the motivating urges were economic and moral. Widow Remarriage

This has been a stumbling block in the path of the emancipation of women since long period.

Early efforts of encouragement to remarriage of widows were made in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A notable contribution was made by Pandit I. Vidyasagar who wrote articles in 1854 to show that the Vedic religion and Hindu Shastras do not abhor the practice of widow remarriage. The Government passed the Widow Remarriage Act (Act XV) in 1856, allowing even the legitimate share in the property to the sons of the widows that remarried. However, in Bengal the widow remarriage reform achieved very limited success. Age of Consent Act- 1891

Legislative action in prohibiting child-marriage came in 1872 when by the Native Marriage Act, Popularly known as Civil Marriage Act, marriage of girls below the age of 14 and boys below 18 years was forbidden. However this act was not applicable to Hindus, Muslims and other recognized faiths and as such had very limited impact on Indian society. B.M. Malabari, a Parsi reformer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, started a crusade against child marriage and his efforts were crowned by the enactment of the Age of Consent Act, 1891, which forbade the marriage of girls below the age of 12.