

# The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act 1856

The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act 1856 legalized the remarriage of Hindu widows on 16th July 1856. The Act was enacted on 26th July 1856. In this article, you can read all about the Act and how to it was brought about for the IAS exam.

The introduction of the widow remarriage act was a major change in the state of women that prevailed during that period. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar played a major role in the establishment of the act. Before this act, the Sati custom was also abolished by Lord William Bentick.

This act also provided protection and aimed at safeguarding the condition of men who married widows.

## Overview of the Hindu Remarriage Act, 1856

A cursory detail of the act is given in the table below:

<b>Hindu Remarriage Act, 1856</b>	
<b>Long Title</b>	Hindu Remarriage Act, 1856 or Act XV, 1856
<b>Territorial Extent</b>	Territories under East India Company rule
<b>Enacted by</b>	Lord Dalhousie
<b>Enacted</b>	26th July 1856
<b>Commenced</b>	26th July 1856
<b>Status</b>	Repealed

## Hindu Widow Remarriage Act

- This Act, also known as Act XV, 1856 legalised the remarriage of Hindu widows in all the regions which came under the jurisdiction of the East India Company.
- The Governor-General of India at that time was Lord Canning. The act was enacted due to the tireless efforts of social reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

### **Condition of widows before the Introduction of the Act**

- According to the prevalent customs in some parts of India, widows, especially upper caste-Hindu widows were expected to lead a life of austerity and extremities.
- Remarriage was not permitted even if the widow was a child and the marriage was not even consummated. Widows had to wear a white saree of coarse material. In many cases, she had to shave off her hair and was not even allowed to wear a blouse.
- They were boycotted from festivals and even shunned by members of the family and society.
- Ishwar Chandra cited Hindu scriptures to show that widow remarriage was well within the folds of Hinduism. Through his efforts, Lord Canning enacted the Widow Remarriage Act throughout British India.

### **Major changes after the Establishment of the Act**

- As per the law: “No marriage contracted between Hindus shall be invalid, and the issue of no such marriage shall be illegitimate, by reason of the woman having been previously married or betrothed to another person who was dead at the time of such marriage, any custom and any interpretation of Hindu Law to the contrary notwithstanding.”
- The law also held that widows who remarry were entitled to all the rights and inheritances that a woman who marries for the first time would have.
- As per the act, the widow forfeited any inheritance that she may have obtained from her deceased husband.
- The act also provided legal safeguards to men who married widows.
- Widow remarriage was, however, commonplace among people of the lower castes.
- This act was a watershed in the social reformation of Indian society during the nineteenth century.
- The first widow remarriage that took place after the law was enforced took place on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1856 in north Calcutta. The groom was the son of Ishwar Chandra’s close friend.