

Death of Lord William Bentinck - [June 17, 1839]

This Day in History

The first Governor-General of India, Lord William Bentinck died on 17 June 1839 in Paris. He is most remembered for his abolition of Sati in British India. In this edition of This Day in History, you can read all about the life of Lord William Bentinck - India's first Governor-General for the UPSC and other government exams.

Who was William Bentinck?

William Bentinck was born on 14 September 1774 at Buckinghamshire, England to William Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland and Lady Dorothy. His father was a Prime Minister of Great Britain. Bentinck joined the British army at the age of 16 and had become a colonel by 1798. In 1803, he was named the Governor of Madras. He was a British soldier who later served as Governor-General of India from 1828-1835. He is credited with reforms in educational, social and judicial spheres during his tenure as Governor-General of British India.

There are certain facts related to Lord William Bentinck which IAS exam aspirants should know, that will help them for UPSC Modern History segment:

Facts about Lord William Bentinck

- It was during his term that the Vellore Mutiny took place prompted by his order that the Indian troops be denied permission to wear their traditional dress. As a result, he was recalled in 1807.
- His career in the army continued. He was also a member of the House of Commons. In 1828, he was appointed the Governor-General of Bengal. His chief task was to recover the loss-making East India Company.
- He was able to bring about a sound financial management system for the company but the process was also accompanied by a policy of westernisation. He was influenced by Jeremy Bentham's and James Mill's utilitarian principles.
- Bentinck revised the court system as well as the educational system.
- In 1831 William Bentinck took control of Mysore on grounds of misgovernance.
- He passed the English Education Act 1835 that replaced Persian with English in the higher courts. He also advocated Indians to be educated in the western style so that more Indians could be employed in the administration.
- He opened the Calcutta Medical College in 1835 and it became the first western medical school in all of Asia where people could be admitted irrespective of caste or creed.
- Along with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bentinck tried to suppress many superstitious practices prevalent then. Sati, the practice of widow burning, was abolished by the Bengal Sati Regulation (Regulation XVII) on 4th December 1829.

- He also tried to control, with Ram Mohan Roy's advocacy, practices like polygamy, child marriages and caste rigidity.
- The Charter Act of 1833 was passed in his tenure. This Act marks the centralisation in India's administration and also made provisions for the inclusion of Indians in government service. This also made Bentinck the first Governor-General of India.
- He reformed the military by banning flogging as a punishment in the British Indian army.
- Bentinck also did a commendable job of controlling organised Thuggee. Thugs were gangs of professional thieves and even murderers that had created a huge law and order problem. Thuggee was finished off by 1837.
- He was the Governor-General of India till 20th March 1835.
- Lord Bentinck died on 17 June 1839 in Paris.