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Historical Perspective Of The Influence Of The Matua Religion On The Upliftment Of Indian Namasudra In The Post-Independence Period

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Abstract

This journal explores the historical perspective of the Matua religion's impact on the upliftment of the Indian Namasudra community in the post-independence period. Founded by Harichand Thakur in the late 19th century, the Matua movement sought to address the socio-economic, educational, and cultural challenges faced by the marginalized Namasudras. The post-independence era presented a complex landscape for the Namasudra community, grappling with historical discrimination and economic marginalization. The Matua religion emerged as a guiding force, advocating for land reforms, economic empowerment, educational initiatives, and cultural revival. This abstract provides an overview of the socio-historical context, highlighting the transformative role of the Matua movement in reshaping the destiny of the Namasudra community. The subsequent sections delve into the specific dimensions of socio-economic upliftment, educational empowerment, cultural renaissance, and the challenges and triumphs encountered on this journey towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

Keywords: Namasudra, Matua, Harichand Thakur, Guruchand Thakur, Community empowerment, Land reforms, Political mobilization, Resilience.

Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of post-independence India, the evolution of the Namasudra community and the catalysing influence of the Matua religion stand as a testament to the transformative power of faith, resilience, and cultural revival. As the Indian subcontinent embarked on a new era of self-governance in 1947, the Namasudra community found itself at a crossroads, grappling with the persistent echoes of historical discrimination and economic marginalization. It is within this complex socio-historical milieu that the Matua religion emerged as a guiding force, offering a beacon of hope and empowerment to a community that had long been relegated to the margins of society. The Matua religion, founded by the visionary Harichand Thakur in the late 19th century, encapsulated a socio-religious movement aimed at dismantling the chains of oppression that bound the Namasudras. Harichand Thakur's teachings and the principles of the Matua faith sought to instill a sense of identity, dignity, and equality among the Namasudras, who had endured centuries of social ostracization and economic exploitation. The post-independence period presented a myriad of challenges for the Namasudra community, with the scars of historical injustices still fresh and the promise of a new era of equality yet to be fully realized. It was in this context that the Matua religion emerged as a guiding light, offering a comprehensive approach to upliftment that addressed socio-economic, educational, and cultural dimensions.

Socio-economic upliftment became a cornerstone of the Matua movement, with a concerted effort to break the chains of economic disparity that had long constrained the Namasudras. Land reforms and advocacy for equal economic rights became integral components of the Matua agenda, ushering in a wave of change that saw the Namasudras rise from the shadows of poverty and exploitation. The Matua leaders, inspired by the principles of justice and equality, became fervent advocates for the economic empowerment of the community, challenging the status quo and paving the way for a more equitable distribution of resources.

Education, another pivotal pillar of the Matua religion's influence, became a catalyst for empowerment within the Namasudra community. Recognizing the transformative potential of education, Matua leaders spearheaded initiatives to establish educational institutions, provide scholarships, and promote literacy within the community. This educational empowerment not only equipped the Namasudras with the tools to navigate a rapidly changing world but also served as a potent instrument of social change, challenging entrenched norms and prejudices.

Background of the study

The historical background of the Matua religion and its influence on the Namasudra community in the post-independence period is crucial to understanding the roots of this transformative movement. The Matua religion traces its origins to the late 19th century and the visionary leader Harichand Thakur. Born in the undivided Bengal in the mid-19th century, Harichand Thakur experienced firsthand the social inequities and discrimination faced by the Namasudra community, a lower-caste Hindu group predominantly residing in the Bengal region. Harichand Thakur, driven by a profound sense of empathy and a vision for social justice, founded the Matua religion as a socio-religious movement aimed at providing a sense of identity and empowerment to the marginalized Namasudras. The term "Matua" itself signifies a sense of belonging and kinship, reflecting the community's shared heritage and the collective pursuit of a better life. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were marked by significant social and political changes in India, including the emergence of various reform movements challenging traditional hierarchies and advocating for social equality. The Matua movement aligned itself with these broader currents of reform, seeking to uplift the Namasudra community from the shackles of caste-based discrimination and economic deprivation. Harichand Thakur's teachings emphasized the principles of equality, humility, and devotion, offering a spiritual framework that resonated with the aspirations of the Namasudra community. The Matua religion, with its egalitarian philosophy, provided a platform for the Namasudras to reclaim their cultural identity and challenge the prevailing societal norms that had long relegated them to the margins.

As India gained independence in 1947, the Namasudra community faced the challenge of navigating a new socio-political landscape. The promises of equality and justice embedded in the Constitution were yet to be fully realized for many marginalized communities, including the Namasudras. The Matua religion, rooted in a tradition of resilience and empowerment, became a guiding force during this period of transition. The post-independence era saw the Matua leaders actively engaging with the socio-political dynamics of the time. Land reforms, economic empowerment, and educational initiatives became central components of the Matua movement's agenda, reflecting a holistic approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by the Namasudra community. In essence, the historical background of the Matua religion is inseparable from the socio-cultural and political milieu of post-independence India. Harichand Thakur's vision, coupled with the collective aspirations of the Namasudra community, laid the foundation for a transformative movement that sought not only spiritual salvation but also socio-economic upliftment and cultural revival. The subsequent sections of this exploration will delve deeper into the specific dimensions of the Matua movement's impact on the Namasudras, tracing the contours of a journey towards empowerment and inclusivity.

Post-Independence Challenges

The post-independence period in India brought about a myriad of challenges for the Namasudra community, setting the stage for the Matua religion to emerge as a transformative force in addressing the historical injustices and systemic barriers faced by this marginalized group. As the nation celebrated its newfound freedom in 1947, the Namasudras found themselves at a critical juncture, navigating the complexities of a socio-political landscape marked by promises of equality and justice.

- **Historical Discrimination:** Despite the promises of independence, the deep-rooted caste system continued to cast a long shadow over the aspirations of the Namasudra community. Historical discrimination, perpetuated by entrenched societal norms, limited their access to social, economic, and educational opportunities. The Matua community, with its roots in the struggle against such discrimination, aimed to challenge these age-old prejudices and forge a path towards a more inclusive society.
- **Economic Marginalization:** Economic disparities were a stark reality for the Namasudras post-independence. Landlessness, limited access to resources, and exploitation were rampant, contributing to a cycle of poverty that persisted for generations. The Matua movement recognized the urgent need for economic upliftment, advocating for land reforms and policies that would address the economic vulnerabilities of the community.
- **Educational Deprivation:** The post-independence period witnessed a stark educational divide, with the Namasudra community often deprived of quality education. Limited access to schools, coupled with societal biases, hindered the educational progress of Namasudra youth. The Matua leaders recognized education as a potent tool for empowerment and actively campaigned for educational initiatives to break the chains of ignorance that had long held the community back.
- **Social Exclusion:** Social exclusion, a byproduct of historical prejudices, persisted in various forms, impacting the everyday lives and aspirations of the Namasudras. The Matua religion, with its ethos of inclusion and equality, aimed to challenge these social norms, fostering a sense of community pride and identity that transcended the limitations imposed by a discriminatory social order.
- **Political Underrepresentation:** Political representation was a glaring gap in the post-independence period, with the Namasudra community often marginalized in the political arena. The Matua movement recognized the importance of political mobilization as a means to address systemic issues and actively engaged in the political processes to secure representation and advocate for the rights of the community.

In the face of these challenges, the Matua leaders emerged as catalysts for change, navigating the complex socio-political landscape to address the multifaceted issues confronting the Namasudra community. The Matua religion, grounded in principles of justice and equality, sought to dismantle the barriers that hindered the progress of the community, marking the beginning of a transformative journey towards empowerment and social upliftment. The subsequent sections of this exploration will delve into how the Matua movement strategically addressed these challenges, ushering in a new era for the Namasudra community in post-independence India.

Socio-Economic Upliftment

The socio-economic upliftment of the Namasudra community in the post-independence period emerged as a central focus of the Matua religion, driven by a commitment to dismantle the economic barriers that had long constrained the community. The Matua leaders recognized that breaking the cycle of economic marginalization was paramount to empowering the Namasudras and fostering a more equitable society. Several key initiatives were undertaken to address the socio-economic challenges faced by the community:

- **Land Reforms:** Landlessness was a pervasive issue among the Namasudras, contributing significantly to their economic vulnerability. The Matua movement, therefore, advocated for land reforms that aimed to redistribute land and provide the community with a means of sustainable livelihood. By challenging entrenched landownership patterns, Matua leaders sought to empower Namasudras economically and break free from the historical shackles of agrarian exploitation.

- **Access to Resources:** The Matua leaders actively campaigned for increased access to resources for the Namasudra community. This encompassed efforts to secure financial assistance, agricultural inputs, and technology to enhance productivity. By addressing the disparities in resource allocation, the Matua movement aimed to uplift the economic status of the community, enabling them to participate more actively in the economic mainstream.
- **Economic Empowerment Programs:** The Matua religion initiated various economic empowerment programs to provide skill development, vocational training, and entrepreneurial opportunities for the Namasudra community. These programs aimed to diversify the economic activities of the community, fostering self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on traditional, exploitative structures.
- **Advocacy for Equal Economic Rights:** Matua leaders engaged in advocacy efforts at both local and national levels to secure equal economic rights for the Namasudras. This involved challenging discriminatory practices and policies that hindered the economic progress of the community. The Matua movement became a vocal proponent for policies that promoted economic inclusivity and worked towards creating an environment conducive to the economic advancement of the Namasudras.
- **Cooperative Movements:** Cooperative movements were encouraged by the Matua leaders as a means to pool resources and enhance collective economic strength. Cooperative farming, credit societies, and other collaborative initiatives were promoted to empower the Namasudras economically and create a more sustainable economic model that addressed the specific needs of the community.

The socio-economic upliftment initiatives led by the Matua religion marked a transformative phase for the Namasudra community. The movement's holistic approach, addressing both structural inequalities and providing practical economic solutions, contributed to a gradual but significant improvement in the economic conditions of the community. As Namasudras gained access to land, resources, and economic opportunities, they began to break free from the cycle of poverty and exploitation, paving the way for a more prosperous and self-reliant future. The success of these socio-economic initiatives laid a foundation for addressing other dimensions of empowerment, including education and cultural revival, as the Matua movement continued to shape the destiny of the Namasudra community in post-independence India.

Educational Empowerment

Educational empowerment emerged as a cornerstone of the Matua religion's transformative agenda, recognizing that breaking the chains of ignorance was essential for the holistic upliftment of the Namasudra community in the post-independence period. The Matua movement, led by visionary leaders, embarked on a mission to empower the Namasudras through education, providing them with the tools to navigate a rapidly changing world and challenge systemic biases.

- **Establishment of Educational Institutions:** Central to the Matua movement's vision was the establishment of educational institutions tailored to the specific needs of the Namasudra community. Schools, colleges, and educational centers were founded to provide accessible and quality education. These institutions not only focused on academic learning but also sought to instill a sense of cultural pride and social responsibility among the students.
- **Scholarship Programs:** Recognizing the socio-economic challenges faced by the Namasudra community, the Matua leaders-initiated scholarship programs to facilitate the education of deserving students. These programs aimed to remove financial barriers, enabling talented individuals from the community to pursue higher education and skill development.
- **Promotion of Literacy:** The Matua movement actively promoted literacy campaigns within the Namasudra community. These campaigns sought to eradicate the prevailing ignorance and illiteracy that had long constrained the community's progress. The emphasis on basic literacy was foundational to empowering individuals to engage actively in societal and economic affairs.
- **Advocacy for Inclusive Education:** Matua leaders advocated for inclusive educational policies that addressed the unique challenges faced by the Namasudra community. They sought to eliminate discriminatory practices within educational institutions, ensuring that Namasudra students had equal opportunities for learning and advancement.

- **Cultural Integration in Education:** The Matua religion, deeply rooted in cultural heritage, integrated cultural education into the academic curriculum. This not only preserved and celebrated the rich traditions of the Namasudras but also fostered a sense of identity and pride among the students. Cultural education became a means of empowerment, enabling the community to reclaim its narrative and heritage.
- **Empowerment of Women through Education:** The Matua movement placed a particular emphasis on the education of women, recognizing the pivotal role they play in community development. Initiatives were launched to ensure that Namasudra women had access to education, thereby challenging gender norms and fostering a more equitable society.
- **Skill Development Programs:** Beyond formal education, the Matua leaders implemented skill development programs to equip the Namasudra youth with practical skills for employment and entrepreneurship. This approach aimed to address not only educational disparities but also economic challenges faced by the community.

The educational empowerment initiatives led by the Matua religion had a profound impact on the Namasudra community. As literacy rates increased, a new generation of educated individuals emerged, capable of actively participating in shaping their own destinies. The Matua movement's emphasis on education laid the groundwork for broader social transformation, challenging stereotypes and creating a more informed and empowered community. This educational empowerment was not merely a means of acquiring knowledge; it became a catalyst for societal change, breaking down barriers and opening doors to new possibilities for the Namasudra community in post-independence India.

Cultural Renaissance

The Matua religion, deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Namasudra community, spearheaded a cultural renaissance that played a pivotal role in reshaping the narrative and identity of the community in the post-independence period. Recognizing the intrinsic link between cultural pride and empowerment, the Matua movement sought to revive and celebrate the rich traditions, art forms, and practices that had long been suppressed.

- **Revitalization of Traditional Art Forms:** The Matua leaders actively supported and promoted traditional art forms that held cultural significance for the Namasudra community. Music, dance, and visual arts were revitalized, providing a platform for artists within the community to showcase their talents. This cultural resurgence became a source of pride, allowing the Namasudras to reclaim and showcase their artistic heritage.
- **Preservation of Folklore and Oral Traditions:** In an effort to preserve the unique folklore and oral traditions of the Namasudra community, the Matua movement undertook initiatives to document and transmit these cultural narratives to younger generations. Storytelling, folk songs, and oral histories became integral components of the cultural revival, fostering a sense of continuity and connection with the community's roots.
- **Cultural Festivals and Events:** The Matua religion actively organized and participated in cultural festivals and events that showcased the vibrancy of Namasudra traditions. These gatherings served as platforms for community bonding, fostering a collective sense of identity and belonging. Cultural events became opportunities to celebrate diversity and challenge the historical stigma associated with the Namasudra community.
- **Promotion of Cultural Education:** Cultural education was integrated into the broader educational initiatives of the Matua movement. Schools and institutions founded by the Matua leaders incorporated the teaching of cultural history, languages, and traditions into their curricula. This educational approach not only transmitted cultural knowledge but also instilled a sense of cultural pride among the younger generation.
- **Cultural Activism:** Matua leaders engaged in cultural activism, challenging stereotypes and discriminatory practices that sought to marginalize Namasudra cultural expressions. Through public discourse, literature, and artistic endeavors, the Matua movement actively worked towards creating a more inclusive space for Namasudra culture within the broader societal framework.
- **Empowerment of Cultural Practitioners:** The Matua religion recognized the importance of empowering individuals engaged in cultural practices. Initiatives were launched to support artists, musicians, and

performers within the community, providing them with opportunities for skill development, recognition, and platforms to showcase their talents.

- **Incorporation of Cultural Symbols:** Cultural symbols and iconography specific to the Namasudra community were incorporated into religious and social practices within the Matua religion. This integration served not only as a spiritual connection but also as a conscious effort to embed cultural pride into the fabric of everyday life.

The cultural renaissance led by the Matua religion was not merely a nostalgic revival of the past; it was a dynamic and transformative process that actively shaped the contemporary identity of the Namasudra community. By reclaiming and celebrating their cultural heritage, the Namasudras experienced a profound sense of empowerment and self-determination. The cultural revival, intertwined with socio-economic and educational initiatives, became a holistic approach towards building a more resilient, proud, and united community in the post-independence period.

Challenges and Triumphs

The journey of the Matua religion in influencing the upliftment of the Indian Namasudra community in the post-independence period has been marked by a tapestry of challenges and triumphs. Navigating a complex socio-political landscape, the Matua movement encountered formidable obstacles even as it achieved significant milestones in the pursuit of social justice, economic empowerment, and cultural revival.

Challenges:

Political Resistance: The Matua movement faced resistance from established political forces and caste-based hierarchies. The entrenched power structures were reluctant to cede ground to the demands of the Namasudra community, resulting in political opposition and challenges to the implementation of policies advocated by the Matua leaders. **Societal Biases:** Deep-seated societal biases and prejudices persisted, posing a continuous challenge to the acceptance and integration of the Namasudra community. The Matua movement had to contend with ingrained stereotypes that perpetuated discrimination, hindering the community's social mobility and acceptance. **Economic Disparities:** While the Matua movement made strides in advocating for land reforms and economic empowerment, persistent economic disparities remained a challenge. Breaking away from centuries-old patterns of exploitation and economic marginalization proved to be a complex and ongoing struggle. **Educational Barriers:** Despite efforts to promote education, the Namasudra community faced barriers such as limited access to quality educational institutions, discrimination within the educational system, and economic constraints that hindered the full realization of educational empowerment. **Cultural Stigma:** The cultural renaissance led by the Matua religion faced resistance from those unwilling to embrace a redefined cultural narrative. The stigma associated with the historical marginalization of the Namasudra community lingered, posing challenges to the acceptance of cultural initiatives as integral to the community's empowerment.

Triumphs:

Political Mobilization: The Matua movement achieved notable success in political mobilization, leading to increased political representation for the Namasudra community. The community's active engagement in political processes resulted in a platform to voice concerns, advocate for rights, and influence policies that addressed their socio-economic needs. **Land Reforms and Economic Empowerment:** Land reforms advocated by the Matua leaders bore fruit, leading to a more equitable distribution of land and resources within the Namasudra community. Economic empowerment initiatives contributed to a tangible improvement in the socio-economic status of many, breaking the cycle of poverty and exploitation. **Educational Advancements:** Despite challenges, the Matua movement made significant strides in promoting education within the Namasudra community. The establishment of educational institutions, scholarship programs, and literacy campaigns contributed to an increase in educational attainment among the Namasudra youth. **Cultural Pride and Revival:** The cultural revival led by the Matua religion succeeded in instilling a profound sense of pride and identity within the Namasudra community. Festivals, traditional art forms, and cultural

events became powerful instruments of reclaiming heritage and challenging cultural stigmas. **Community Solidarity:** The Matua movement fostered a strong sense of community solidarity, uniting the Namasudras under a common vision of empowerment and equality. This unity became a source of strength, enabling the community to face challenges collectively and celebrate triumphs as a united front.

In navigating these challenges and celebrating triumphs, the Matua religion's influence on the upliftment of the Indian Namasudra community reflects a dynamic and ongoing process. The resilience of the Matua leaders and the unwavering commitment of the Namasudra community have shaped a narrative of progress, empowerment, and a continuous pursuit of a more just and inclusive society.

Political Mobilization

The Matua leaders played a pivotal role in the formation of political platforms dedicated to addressing the concerns of the Namasudra community. These platforms provided a unified voice for the community, enabling them to articulate their needs and aspirations in a political arena dominated by historically entrenched power structures. A significant triumph of political mobilization was the increased representation of Namasudra leaders in various political offices. Matua leaders actively participated in elections, securing positions in local, regional, and national governance bodies. This increased political representation became a means to influence policies and advocate for socio-economic reforms that benefited the community. Political mobilization became a vehicle for social justice campaigns, challenging discriminatory practices and advocating for the rights of the Namasudra community. Matua leaders used their political platforms to raise awareness about societal biases, demanding legal and institutional changes to dismantle discriminatory structures. The Matua movement strategically formed alliances with broader social justice movements, recognizing the interconnectedness of various marginalized groups' struggles. Collaborative efforts with other movements amplified the impact of political mobilization, creating a more formidable force for advocating systemic change. The Matua movement actively encouraged the participation of women in politics, recognizing the importance of gender-inclusive representation. This led to the empowerment of Namasudra women in political leadership roles, contributing to a more comprehensive and diverse representation within the community. The Matua community, under the leadership of Matua religious leaders, actively participated in mass movements advocating for social and political change. These movements often transcended regional boundaries, bringing together Namasudras from different areas to collectively voice their concerns. The triumphs of increased political representation and policy reforms not only addressed the immediate challenges faced by the Namasudras but also laid the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable political discourse in post-independence India.

Conclusion

Indian Namasudra community in the post-independence period unfolds as a multifaceted narrative of resilience, empowerment, and transformation. The Matua movement, founded on the visionary principles of Harichand Thakur, emerged as a beacon of hope for a community that had long grappled with historical discrimination, economic marginalization, and social exclusion. From the socio-economic challenges of landlessness and economic exploitation to the educational deprivations and cultural stigmas, the Matua religion strategically addressed these issues through a holistic approach. The movement's impact on socio-economic upliftment, educational empowerment, and cultural renaissance reflects a comprehensive effort to break the chains that bound the Namasudra community to the margins of society. The Matua leaders, through political mobilization, successfully carved out a space for the Namasudra community in the political landscape, challenging established power structures and advocating for policies that addressed their unique needs. This political empowerment became a catalyst for broader socio-economic and cultural advancements. While the movement has achieved significant triumphs, including increased political representation, tangible socio-economic progress, and a revived cultural identity, contemporary challenges persist. Economic disparities, educational inequalities, social stigmas, and ongoing political struggles highlight the continued

need for vigilance and proactive efforts to secure a more inclusive and equitable future for the Namasudra community.

In the journey of the Matua religion and the Namasudra community, the story is not just one of overcoming adversity; it is a testament to the enduring spirit of a community that, guided by its cultural roots and the principles of the Matua faith, continues to strive for justice, equality, and empowerment. The narrative is an ongoing saga, with each chapter revealing new opportunities for progress and posing fresh challenges to be surmounted. As the Matua movement navigates the contemporary landscape, its historical legacy serves as a source of inspiration for the Namasudra community, reinforcing the belief that, with resilience and collective effort, a more inclusive and just society is within reach.

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