



## FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL BELIEFS IN 'MATUA' SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** The Matua religion occupies a special place in the study of the history of the lower classes of India. The social customs and practices of the Matuas, which are located in the lower echelons of Hinduism, have perpetuated their culture. Through their marriage system and shraddha rituals, the prevailing folklore even provoked protests against the Brahmin society. Harichand Tagore has a special role in the social and cultural life of the Matuas. The Matuas originated from the lower class or lower class of the Hindus, so there are many similarities with the Hindus in terms of their social folklore. Although they are located at the lowest level of society, their existence has survived in the course of time. The internal rituals and customs of contemporary society have influenced the Matuas. The Matuas themselves have continued the movement to assert their position in the social sphere. My main objective in this research paper is to establish the status of the Matuas as an independent nation by highlighting folklore and social beliefs.

**Key words:** Namahsudra - social exploitation - Matua - Harichand - women - folklore.

**Introduction:** The Matua movement was a special trend in the study of the history of the lower classes in India. In the then East Bengal of undivided India, the Namashudra community was at the very bottom of the lower caste Hindus, they had no social status, no rights. They are hated, untouched and neglected by the upper castes of the society and oppressed by the caste Hindu zamindars. They had no acquaintance in the religious field. Sri Sri Harichand Thakur appeared in the role of savior in Bangabhumi (Bengal) during the colonial period to protect the lower class Hindus from indescribable exploitation. He never claimed to be the so-called 'god' of other religions. And the five have lived ordinary lives like ordinary people, mingled with ordinary people. The lower class people who believe in his simple ideology are commonly known as 'Matua'. By pronouncing the initials of Harichand's name, the word 'Hari', the intoxicated people become mesmerized by the joy, the intoxicated people become intoxicated by the joy of life, these simple lower class Namahsudras are known as 'Matua'. Harichand Thakur and his son Guruchand Thakur have dedicated their lives to the cause of education, reform and the establishment of a society free from religious orthodoxy.

Different customs and folklore can be observed in the social life of the Matuas. The Matuas originated from the lower class or lower class of the Hindus, so there are many similarities with the Hindus in their social folklore. If we look at the pages of history to determine the origin of the Matuas, we will see that they existed in the distant past. Historian Niharranjan Roy mentions, "Today we know the Namahsudras at the lowest level of society as Chandals or Charals and they belong to the lower class at the time of composing the Brihadvarma Purana".<sup>1</sup> From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, folklore gained a different dimension in the Namahsudra society, mainly through the advent of Harichand Thakur as an incarnation. The internal rituals and customs of contemporary society have influenced the Matuas. The Matuas themselves have continued the movement to assert their position in the social sphere.

According to the famous historian HH Risley, the Matuas belonged to twelve Kashyap tribes in East Bengal, six Bharadwaj tribes in Central Bengal and 11 Shandilya tribes in West Bengal. Guruchand Thakur united the Matuas divided into different tribes. In this context Guruchand Thakur said, "Shakha or Prashakha whos? One barely we / poor's nobility claim is just arguing / There is no difference between Namahsudras / we are born in one dynasty, barely brothers."<sup>2</sup> Guruchand Thakur eliminated the differences between different districts and clans and introduced marriage among each other. Especially in the Hindu scriptures, in the Brahmanical system, as in the case of inter-caste marriages, the 'sapind' was determined by the head, meaning that marriage between six men was forbidden and marriage law was valid in the case of the seventh man. Again the marriage of sons and daughters belonging to the same 'proverb' was forbidden.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Guruchand Thakur abolished all the aforesaid argumentative rites of Hindu scripture in order to bring unity among the Namah Shudras. The auspicious and auspicious days as prescribed in the calendar are fixed as the days of marriage and other religious ceremonies. Generally, as a standard of Matua religion, various auspicious activities were performed on Wednesday as a holy date or day. Until now, the uneducated Brahmin Samaj used to fix

various days and auspicious moments like their own and instruct them to perform various rituals. Needless to say, Guruchand's attempt was a protest against the ancient Brahmanical superstitions.

Although there were eight types of marriage in contemporary Hinduism, 'Gandharva' marriage was prevalent in the Namasudras in the Samvedic style. Among the Matuas, the first marriage in the Matua Dharmadarsha was held in Khulna, then East Bengal. In the absence of Brahmin priests and scriptural rules, Guruchand Thakur married Tinkari Mollah and Malanch Saha of Terkhada village in Khulna in 1914.<sup>4</sup> This marriage ultimately denied the Brahmanical scriptures. Even in the 'Shraddha' (tribute) ceremony, there are instances of non-observance of various conventional reforms in some cases. However, in general marriage and shraddha ceremonies did not follow the Brahmanical religion among the Matuas, but on the whole the Matuas followed the conventional reform rituals of Hinduism. In the social sphere the practice of polygamy was not prevalent among the Matuas, they believed in the practice of monogamy. In case of untimely death of the wife, the sister of the deceased wife is seen marrying in some cases. According to the scriptures, weddings were performed on the months and days of the wedding. According to the Vedic scriptures, marriage is forbidden in the month of Chaitra, but in the case of the Matuas, there are some instances of marriage in the month of Chaitra. In Namasudra society, the practice of abolition of marriage and 'barapan' was common, but the practice of virginity was prevalent. In case of marriage, the bride could not walk to her father-in-law's house, palanquin or any other vehicle. Due to intense hatred, the noble Brahmin priests never officiated at the social ceremonies of the Namasudras.

In this way, in the contemporary situation, the Namashudras or the Matua community, despite being exploited in various ways, maintained their own folklore and social customs. But even so, it is seen that the traditional social thought was awake in the deepest state of their minds. They were able to change a lot by following Hindu theology, social customs, religious rituals as they were included in the Hindu society in a larger social sphere. However, in contemporary situations this task was not easy at all, the upper caste bloodshot eyes and prohibitions were always focused on them. Therefore, important social ceremonies of Hinduism like marriage and 'shraddha' ceremonies have been preserved for a long time. In the changed circumstances, the Matuas made special efforts to gain a higher position and status in the society. A number of books were written on this occasion, such as Devendra Lal Biswas Tagore's 'Matua Bibah Bidhan', Gauranga Sundar Majumdar's 'Sri Sri Guruchand probortito Matua Dharma motey bibah Shraddha anusthan'. The words and utterances of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur in 'Sri Sri Harililamrita' and 'Sri Sri Guruchand Charita' are also known to the Matuas as prophecies.<sup>5</sup>

It has also been seen that 'Gonsai' or Matua Sadhu has officiated in various ceremonies. Due to the prohibition of accepting donations according to the Matua religion, the possibility of a 'priestly class' like that of the Brahmin priests was destroyed. Moreover, the Matua community has been freed from Hindu-Brahmin domination by holding weddings and 'shraddha' ceremonies as they see fit. Matuas' marriages can be performed outside of Matuas not only for their own caste. According to the Matua custom, the marriage ceremony is performed by placing a 'mangalghat' with the idol of 'Shanti-Hari' in the case of marriage, paying homage to 'Hari-Guruchand' in the case of purification and chanting of hymns by Matua Sadhu or Gosai.<sup>6</sup> The rituals are performed such as paying homage to the former men, bringing the bridegroom, building the wedding basin, giving the bride, taking the oath of the bride and groom, giving vermilion, post-wedding 'bauvat', flower bed, 'dwiragraman' etc. In recent times, however, the practice of enforcing marriage laws through court marriage registries, part of the modern marriage system, has entered into them.

At first, the condition of women in Namasudra society was not very good, due to poverty, untouchability and religious prejudices, women did not get due respect. At least the life of the women of the Matua community was extremely dark, neglected and neglected compared to the dignity and rights of the upper class Hindu women. Later, however, the Matua religion was able to show social mobility. Attempts have been made to promote religious practices, education and equal rights for men and women in and out of the family. At least towards the end of the nineteenth century, the influence of the progress made by women in the colonial rule has penetrated the Hindus of Matua religion. The social status of women was well established, as Namasudra women often had to work with men and engage in various financial activities in the family due to poverty. They could go to the market, to the field like men, the pressure of gambling was less, even the practice of widow marriage was observed among women.<sup>7</sup> Men had a single wife present and did not believe in polygamy. Due to these reasons, the lower class Matua women were able to enjoy more status than other women during the colonial period. The role of women in various classical rituals and pujas was especially important. Women were largely free from the shackles of various social reforms and restrictions.

But due to financial prosperity in the late nineteenth century, the Namasudras were able to bring about socio-economic development and establish themselves as a major agricultural nation. An attempt to ascend socially to a higher level is seen among the Namasudras at this time. Complications arose when the upper caste Brahmin community was quick to intervene in the worship of the Namashudras. Not only the Namashudra community, but also a large number of people of other castes became believers in the Matua Dharmadarsha. Efforts to establish the dignity and rights of women can be seen courtesy of them. According to them, without ignoring and neglecting women, without discriminating between men and women, chanting of 'Harinam', festivals were called for at the same time to unite in religion. In this context, Harichand Thakur himself said, "There is no difference between men and women. A girl sits on a man and eats on one leaf."<sup>8</sup> We see that Harichand Thakur instructed the apostate Hiranman to return to his wife's life and practice the worldly religion equally. In other words, Matua ideology is not an obstacle in the way of women's religion.

Harichand and Guruchand made special efforts to make women equal to men. One of the notable steps taken by Harichand Thakur in this regard was to establish daughter's right over father's property, to give status to widows in the society and to stop sexual exploitation on them.<sup>9</sup> He made a special effort to change the conventional social meditation concept centered on women. As a worthy heir of the father, Guruchand has continued to try to place women in a position of dignity. However, in this case, Guruchand was specially assisted by the Christian missionary Mead Saheb and his rationalist philosophy. Guruchand understood that the awakening of women is possible only through education. The women's awakening that started earlier with the help of Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar, Madanmohan Tarkalankar, etc., was also specially propagated in the lower class Namashudra Matua society with the help of Guruchand. As a result, Guruchand Tagore said, "The unfortunate widows of Namashudra society spend their days shedding tears in the corner of the dark house. If the father and mother are alive, they will somehow find a place in the father's house or in the form of a maid. Their lives became poisonous. So Matua spread the proposal of widow marriage to the entire Namashudra community through the devotees."<sup>10</sup>

Matua folklore has been seen in various ways to establish the status of women in religion and social customs. Attempts have been made to open all the closed doors for women in the Matua religious society to make independent sacrifices in education, literature and cultural activities, starting from the home to the larger masses. Matua Literary Manohar Mouli Biswas has especially praised Matua women. He said, "If one goes to Matua Harisava or Hari-Kirtan, one has to be surprised to see the art of the girls. They participate more in performing music than men. Their practice is captivating, advanced and captivating in the delightful art. For every woman in the Harisava for half the sky of the world, women show their self-empowerment."11 So the restoration of this dignity of women, the promotion of culture through folklore has indirectly made them more socially and financially self-sufficient.

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