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## **Contribution of Matuaism in the field of Educational Reformation in Bengal**

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### **Abstract**

*Human being is the best creation of 'God' among the whole living world. Therefore, He creates all types of environment and necessary things whatever he or she needs. He invented a suitable world and a beautiful nature for him or her. Everything goes on nature's own rule and regulation. No creature is unbound within this world. However, when any animal has become greedy, he wants more and hurts others for his entertainment or demand. Then, he has broken all the limits and has crossed all the boundaries. After that, he has created his own rules and regulations. In addition, he has divided many formulas between him and others. He has started to torture others and to absorb all types whatever he or she could. For these reason creates any new things like new society, status, and ways of living and different types of races. We all know that there is any difference within the word 'race of man'. However, some people have created different kinds community within human being.*

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We can see a lot of communities within this world. Many reasons are present for appearing of any new community. Like that community, one has appeared in the adjoining border of East Bengal of India. The name of the community is 'Matua'.<sup>1</sup> Though there is a lot of controversies to take the name 'Matua'. Sri Sri Harichand Thakur established this 'Matua' religion with all the people of Namasudra society and all types of other lower castes in subservient India. 'Matua' is actually a religious community<sup>2</sup>. It had been setup to protect the people who were hated and neglected as a lower class by the Hindu upper class Merchants and landowners in the East Bengal. The of Namasudra community and other lower castes were being diverted to keep themselves protect from the neglect of priest's doctrine. 'Matua Dharma' rescued their self-respect and spiritual sensation. It protests against obsolete, illogical, inhuman and derogatory traditional practices of their followers. The messages of 'Matua Religion' advised all human beings of the world. The aims of this religion were to retrieve the lower class people to the mainstream of society, and not to

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Nandadulal Mohanta. *Matua Andalan O Dalit Jagaran*. Kolkata. Annapurna Prakashani. 2002. p33

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p27

believe the practices of caste distinction. Therefore, the people of all communities accept and bring up with this religion. It also aimed to donate dignity of the people of Namasudras and lower castes. They advised to believe in the doctrine of action and to do work in hand with the uttering the name of God in mouth. They have suggested bringing up the religion of familial lives honestly having the practicing of the life of spiritual meditation and the *Brahmacharya* with their only own wife<sup>3</sup>. The Matua's sect is monotheist. The lower people had been advised not to follow Vedic rituals. They showed the way of salvation by keeping faith and devotion only one that is God<sup>4</sup>.

Different types of works were performed and developed with the help of 'Matua Religion' for Namasudras and others lower class people of society. It performed social reformation, cultural reformation, establishment of a newly distinct religion, development of social status, respect, position and honour, development in agriculture, economy, familial lives, human moralities, reservation in educational, services and in elections etc. These became needful for different types social positions and because of partition of society and professions. Coming of Aryan caste and their tortures upon other castes, maintaining kin system, following of restriction about food habits, customs and cultures of different castes, social marriage system, social rituals, protection of religion from devastations, establishing of identity and to construct a new ways of freedom life-living.

The supreme of Matua Religion, Harichand Thakur watched 'Education', as the great part of life. He understood that no one could be able to bring vast change of different types reformation or development of community or a caste. Therefore, he did first educational reformation and all types of development of Namasudras and others lowers castes with the help of 'Matua Religion'. Therefore, he started his journey with this path and he advised to come after to his son, Guruchand Thakur and his followers. He committed that he received this teaching from his father Harichand.

*"Mor pita Harichand gechhe boley morey,  
Bidya shiksha swajatike dite ghore ghore."*<sup>5</sup>

(My father Harichand instructed me to spread education among all the families).

It see to observe the matter of educational arrangement of Bengal from the second part of 18<sup>th</sup> century, inland educational arrangement or tools primaries of that time were directed by patronization of Brahmins or aristocrat landowners, merchants. Education related matters were confined within landowners, businessmen and government employees who introduced a stream of vocational education for their need, scriptural education for the religious need of priest-class, reading of 'Koran' in Arabic Schools of Muslim and French education in some

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<sup>3</sup> Santosh Kumar Barui. *Matua Darpan Pttrika*. Durgapur, West Bengal. Santosh Kumar Barui. January-March, 2014. p3

<sup>4</sup> Nakul Mallik. *Thakur Harichand Guruchand and the Doctrine of Matua Religion*. Hridaypur. Dalita sahitya sansad. 2017. p45

<sup>5</sup> Acharya Mohananda Halder. *Sri Sri Guruchand Charit*. Thakurnagar. Kapil Krishna Thakur. 2016. p108

schools. In this way, arrangement of 'Quran' education in Madrasa or Moktab and only French education were controlled by government employees for professional purpose. There were no any chances of learning of lower caste within these institutions. In the same way, women also deprived of these native educations. Sree Sree Thakur realized two things clearly one is political awareness and another is education and that is why he uttered, "When a nation is on the verge of ruin without education, send children to school even at the cost of starvation"<sup>6</sup>

There were two main causes of not reaching lights of education to adjacent villages of East Bengal's societies. Firstly, living persons of these localities were too poor; therefore, they involved themselves with the different professions like farming, tailoring, fishing making of earthen pots, making of iron things etc. On the poor life-livings of their, they were made destitute and indigent by merchants and landowners. Landowners and merchants, who were economically and socially developed, substantiated poor farmers as inferior.

From the ancient time and on arrangement of Indian religion and society, cultural heritages of Vedic Hindu's customs were tried to keep far always from the courtyard of education of *sudras*, lower castes and education of women.

For the causes of socio- economic, the inhabitants of lower people were in the bordering villages that separated from communication and spread of education did not happen in the villages of East Bengal like Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, Barisal, Maimansingha and Bakerganj. After half a century religious leader Guruchand Thakur introduced an extensive movement of education with his tireless and ceaseless efforts. This educational movement was separated from the Kolkata township centred Renaissance. The movement developed among the different communities of lower castes of East Bengal. The lights of Renaissance did not fall on the lower caste society. Even at the time of Renaissance the deception and hostile mentality of landowners and merchants kept the lower caste people depressed.<sup>7</sup>

Besides educationists of that time also did not show interest for spreading of education within lower castes. So, the adversity of communicational arrangement and economic weakness, pathetic condition of educational arrangement within lower castes was the common feature of the Indian caste based societies. Diversity in East Bengal within the entire Namasudras and other lower castes completed by the devotional idealism of 'Matua Religion which was produced by Harichand Thakur and Harichand Thakur showed the path of spiritual world by his own religious ideas doing protest against Brahmin obscurantist of Hindu religion. His son, Guruchand Thakur was advised by him to take preparation for spreading of education of own-caste. Movements of 'Matua' were going on different flows with the leadership of Guruchand Thakur. Matua educational movement was a most important flow or side among those.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.p144

<sup>7</sup> Swpan Kumar Biswas. *Hari Guruchand*. Delhi. B.N.Saha. 2004. p100  
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Spread of education expanded not only within Matua community or Namasudras, but also in the whole lower caste by untried labour. Sagacity, broad thinking and publicity of an introducer of Matua religion and his eligible son of his later age, Guruchand Thakur brought a 'new flow' within Namasudras. Movements of consciousness of Guruchand widened not only within Matua community or Namasudras, but also in entire lower castes. In the field of spread of education of Guruchand within Dalits or lower castes of Bengal, were acceptable even to Muslims. Dalits of Bengal were deprived from education and cultures for centuries, so, they were retarded. They had not any consciousness or experiences about education. Having surpassed preventions religion and castes, Guruchand donated educational consciousness to them.<sup>8</sup>

Extend of educational movements of Guruchand were divided into two categories – non-institutional spread of education and institutional spread of education. Institutional spread of education can be discussed into two categories as spread of universal education and spread of women education.

Non-institutional education were canvassed by Guruchand and Harichand Thakur like as 'singing of God's glory and pronunciation the name of Hari', 'grand festival or obsequies of father or mother', 'educational news of Guruchand Etc. His feelings of education were discussed in 'the assemblies of awakening'. Twelve followers' of Guruchand as the name as 'Dwadash Rudras' took a special importance in the field of canvass about the educational news within the lower castes.

Contemporary devotees of Guruchand widened educational consciousness non-institutionally within lower castes. According to the order of Guruchand, they went to the houses of devotees and they explained the importance of education within their own castes. His education related news or proposals worked as 'provision of revolutionary thinking' within whole members. Because, Guruchand Thakur said the entire devotees that if obey the adherent of Matua obey Guruchand Thakur as a demonstrator of religious paths, sons and daughters could not be kept as uneducated and illiterate; if they could not get foods, they would be donated education. All obeyed the speech of Guruchand and as its outcome, stages of education made in the villages of Orakandi, Grit Kandi, Sonaparaetc. Non-institutionally Guruchand himself and his contemporary Gonsai of Matuaas' Dradash Rudras' were not confined expedition of educational spread only within Namasudras or Chandals of Matua, widened in lower castes of complete Bengal. For the spread of education within village to village, Guruchand canvassed as

*"Sabakare boli ami jadi mano money,  
Abidwan putra jenno nahi thake ghore;  
Khao ba na khao kono dukkha naai,  
Chhele pile siksha dao ei ami chai."*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Matua Pratibimba Patrika*. Durgapur, West Bengal. January-March, 2000. p26

<sup>9</sup> Acharya Mohananda Haldar. *Sri Sri Guruchand Charit*. Thakurnagar. Kapil Krishna Thakur. 2016. p144

(If you obey me I would advise you to see that there should be no uneducated persons in your family. You may have to starve but make sure that your children obtain education).

As the institutional spread of education and its effect of Guruchand Thakur and other Matua devotees were the results of establishment of primary schools in villages. Beyond all types of prohibitive, Guruchand Thakur first set up a school within his village, Orakandi of Faridpur. Without any governmental help, School establishment of his own attempt was an example, a precedent. Guruchand Thakur understood, that the cultured and educated society of Hindu caste would not help his attempt, rather they would create a hindrance.

Published educational movements of Guruchand and other matua devotees reached directly or indirectly to the villages of different districts of Bengals, established schools and continued educational spread. As many lower caste people were poor. So, shortage of money became a hindrance to establish school and donate higher education to boys and girls.<sup>10</sup>

Guruchand Thakur himself donated money and helped them and inspired comparatively rich persons for the help of money to set up own castes education. Guruchand Thakur was first idol person of educational spread within Dalits of Bengal. Having taken his hand. afterward, many great people of different districts had come into the villages of Bengal for the spread of education within lower castes of Bengal. Harichand Thakur had to find an alternative path for different adversity and to solve different types of works. He took some ways like establishment of school in cowshed, arrangement of teachers training, 'Namasudra Benevolence Association'. Lodging-system etc.

For extend of education within Namasudras and other lower castes people, performance of Guruchand was dissimilar. The society where people had not right of education, Guruchand established within them total 2048 schools including primary lower primary, upper primary, middle school and high school within the year from 1880 to 1918. The first educational institution was established by Guruchand in 1880 in his own village Orakandi and the first teacher was in this school was Raghunath Sarkar. After the partition of Bengal, to spread the importance of education the follower of Guruchand Thakur have built a huge number of colleges themselves and also with other's collaboration in West Bengal. These educational institutes mainly established in the refugee and border areas of undeveloped villages. There are present many numbers of schools as 36 in Gaighata Police Station, 13 Bagda police station, 1 in Barakpur police station of North 24 pargana, 15 in Hanskhali police station of Nadia District, 2 in Miyapur police station, 11 in Amdanga Police Station, 3 in Habra Police Station, 1 in Baduria Police Station, 1 in Ashokenagar Police Station, 5 in Kolkata, 6 in Tehatta Police Station, 5 in krisanganj Police station, 7 in Dhantola Police Station, 9 in Chakdaha Police station 2 Kaliganj Police Station, 1 in Hariharpur Police Station of Murshidabad District, 1 in Baharampur Police Station, 1 in Murshidabad Police Station, 6 in Bamangola Police Station, of Malda District, 5 in Habibpur Police Station, 8 in

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<sup>10</sup> Kapil Krishna Thakur. *Guruchand Thakur O Antyaja Banglar Naba Jagaran*. Kolkata. chaturtha Dunia. 1998. pp140, 141

Gazole Police Station,4 in Old Police Station,1 in English Bazar Police Station,5 in Raiganj Police station of North Dinajpur,3 in Sonamukhi Police Station.2 in Gopalganj Police Station,4 in Khulna District, 4 in Kotalipara Sub-Division,2 in Rajor sub- Division,5 in Jessore District. There are various colleges have established by the influence of the follower of Srihari-Guruchand Thakur. The colleges are named as- P. N. Das College of Palta under North 24 Pargana, Yogendra Nath Mahavidyalaya of Nahata, Dr. Ambedkar Centenary Mahavidyalaya of Helencha, Tangrakhali College of South 24 Pargana, Bagula Srikrishna College of Nadia, Betai Dr. Ambedkar College, Bethuadahari College, Pakua High Degree College of Malda, Medinipur Pashang College, Chittaranjan College of Kolkata.<sup>11</sup>

Another characteristic of Renaissance in 19<sup>th</sup> are century spread of women education, freedom of women and leave of non- human habits and customs and rituals and forecast of ancient unscriptural and reasonable discuss of superstition by the attempts of women for the settlement of rights.

Though, throughout complete the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the attempt of women education were going on by governmental, non-governmental or missionaries, but that was only for the women of aristocrat and rich families. If little attempt were done for the lower castes women, spread of education could be done more.

Though when Vidyasagar was the school inspector of British Government, established a lot of girls' school in West Bengal. From the year 1855 to 1858 he established 36 girls' school (20 in Hooghly, 11 in Burdwan,3 in Midnapur, 1 in Kolkata and 1 in Nadia.) None except Vidyasagar endeavored for the extend of women education

In the second part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Harichand Thakur raised some ideal like 'men and women are equal' for the development women's education. He also lifted up women as mothers.

For maintaining all types' familial works,women should learn and gather experience. He realized that it was important to bring women in the light of education. He thought that if he could spread education within women, they would be conscious about their own responsibilities, rights and duties. They would acquire self-power and would be interested to grow self-progress. For the spread of women education, Guruchand Thakur widened the houses of Matua devotee's community. After that, he established first girl school in village of Orakandi in 1937. Help and co-operation of Australian Christian Missionary were mentionable for the establishment of Orakandi Girls School. This school maintained by the money of Missionary.

However Guruchand Thakur did not succeed to spread women education more, but it was remarkable that he made attentive mentality within Matua societies of Namasudras for the need of women education. Having lived in the darkness like that uneducated village,

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Oral discussion with *Mamata Bala Thakur* (MP: Bongaon Lok Sabha) on the 17th day of October,2018.Thakurnagar.9:45 am-11:50 am.

Guruchand earnestly ran after canvass of women education. So, he said to the girls of villages to be attentive –

“Go to school, if you want to get good husband, gain education.”<sup>12</sup>

‘Shanti Satyabhama Balika Vidyalaya’ and ‘Taltala Gadadhar Balika Vidyalaya’ of Orakandi which were established by Guruchand Thakur, mainly made ‘women Army’ to spread women education, Swing of wool, petticoat making, handkerchief making learnt in Orakandi Balika Vidyalaya. Work education was another attachment of education. Guruchand Thakur instructed his followers to keep none of their children illiterate and to send them to school for education even though suffering from acute poverty. Illiteracy facilitates economic exploitation, which was monopolized.<sup>13</sup>

Spreading of education was directly done by Harichand Thakur and his son, Guruchand Thakur, by establishing of different types of schools and indirectly by devotees and followers of Matua religion. Guruchand Thakur set up a lot of associations, foundations and newspaper and magazines for spreading of different types works to reach all types of human being of all castes. Therefore, a lot of newspaper and magazines were set up in East Bengal. ‘*Namasudra Shiksha Samiti*’ was formed by Birat Chandra Mandal. Dr. Banamali Das formed ‘Bhabani Bhavan Chatrabas’ for Namasudra students and ‘Mashirhati school’ was developed for Namasudra development at Panchanan Ghosh lane, Kolkata Mashiyati in 1918. In 1926 ‘*Namasudra Sammelan*’ was held in presence of Madan Mohan Malaviya and Sarala Devi for National level Namasudra society renovation and ‘*Bangio Namasudra Sangha*’ was established in presence of Rashiklal Biswas, Mukunda Bihari Mallik, Birat Mondal at Agailjhara village of Barishal Kanchapara of 24 Paraganas. And mass education was introduced to remove illiteracy from the country but long ago sri sri Guruchand Thakur advocated for education for all even at the cost of starvation of family.

Many newspapers, Journals, Magazines published in Bengal to nourish and flourish the Matuaism Like Pataka (*Monthly*, 1914), ‘*Namasudra Patrika* (*Monthly*, 1920), ‘*Jagran*’, ‘*Adhikar*’, ‘*Bengal Heranta*’, ‘*Samakal, Bharatvani*’, ‘*Republican Federation Co-Ordination Committee*’, ‘*Yug Sankat, Sansaptak*’, ‘*Kon Patha*’, ‘*Atoeb*’, ‘*AdolBadal*’ ‘*Bahujan Nayak*’, ‘*Pon*’, ‘*Lekhi*’ in Kolkata, ‘*Nikhil Bharat*’ in Barasat, ‘*Abbokto*’ at Palta ‘*Madhumati*’ at Helancha, ‘*Surya*’ at Hridaypur, ‘*Matua Mahasangha Patrika*’ at Thakurnagar of North 24 Pargana District, ‘*Matua*’ at BaroChadghar, ‘*Jaidhanka*’ at Chpria, ‘*UtsavBhumi*’ at Ranaghat of Nadia District etc. After Guruchand Thakur, as the main person of ‘Matua Sangha’ Pramatha Ranjan Thakur led the spread of education and established different types of institutions. He himself established Thakurnagar Colony in the district of North 24 Pargana. In 1972 ‘*Harichand Seva Ashram*’, ‘*Harichand Hostel*’, ‘*Harichand Vidyamandir*’ were established at pakhanjor. In 1965 ‘*Harichand Seba Sangha*’, ‘*Guruchand Hostel*’ at

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<sup>12</sup>Rabiprova Sarkar. *Karmabhumite-Tar Uttarsurider Sang*. Thakurnagar: Kapil Krishna Thakur. p.112

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Sri Hari Majumder (prist of Guruchand Mandir, Orakandi, Bangladesh) On the 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2017. at 3.00pm- 4.30pm.

Shaktigar of North 24 Pargana. Matua research Foundation' has been established by Dr. Birat Bairagya, Tuser Chattopadhyay<sup>14</sup>

At present after getting higher education from different institutions many youths generally prefer white colour jobs even to unemployment while Sree Sree Thakur himself took active part in agriculture, business, politics, religion and spiritualism, Farmer, cobbler, sweeper, barber, fisherman, carpenter, etc. He realized that we should not dishonor the people who were serving the society on the ground of their trade only if they honestly stick to their respective professions. They are complementary to each other. Their cost of labour might be less a lot of expenditure for their education for a long period and were to apply their knowledge, but as a man, if not proved guilty of any crime, every one regardless of his trade should equally respect and labour should be productive of services and commodities useful and beneficial to self and society. For these reason, he tried to establish different types of educational institutions.

On the ground of Matua religious movements of educational consciousness and spread of education of Namasudras was born. Harichand Thakur ordered his son, Guruchand Thakur to spread education for the development of lower caste Namasudras's social status. On keeping front of education, Guruchand Thakur lifted up on his own shoulder leading duties of Matua's movements. He identified unlearned and non-educated as the cause of keeping under poverty, sank in the darkness of caste. However, he was in extreme poverty, so, he announced for taking education from village to village by establishment of schools. Having crossed the barrier of centric of Namasudras's community, religious prevention, and his movement of spreading education worked as mantra of all lower caste's consciousness. Bengal's educational movements of Guruchand Thakur transfused lights of hope in the field of entire Dalit community.

In the contemporary time of Guruchand, lights of educational consciousness extended within oilman, wearth, Kapali, Mahishya, Jadab, Das, Blacksmith, Potter, poundra, Malakar, Weaver etc. and even within Muslim community. Spread of education in society of lower castes created two special attentions. First, if education could gain with inside of distress, self-reliance can acquire economically with the help of service and work. Second, with the help of education, illiteracy, development of society, driving out of superstitions, respecters of social honour could be drive out; signifying that only education accepted as an index of self-development. Guruchand Thakur publicized that first education was needful for the consciousness of self-reliance and self honour, after that, acquiring of wealth and properties, and acceptance of governmental works. Though, with the attempts of Guruchand Thakur and followers of Matua donated spread of education and consciousness, it was not be observed such an important change about the subject of educational gaining upto the second part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Having crossed the family centric, 'Matua Mahasangha' did not success more democratically to bring near all in the field of Matua Dharma and social

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<sup>14</sup> Source: Oral discussion with *Santosh Kumar Barui*(Editor of Matua Darpan Patrika) on the 22nd day of July,2018.Durgapur.10:45 am-11:30 am.



movements of social. On keeping ideals of Hari-Guruchand, lots of Matua organizations have introduced in West Bengal, even non-Matua organizations have engaged in planning of educational spread of Guruchand Thakur and self-consciousness. Educational movements of Namasudras and other lower castes not called as the limitations of Matua's educational movements with the help of other organizations: rather, it was the great side of Guruchand or educational movement.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Swpan Kumar Biswas. *Hari-Guruchand*. Delhi: B.N.Saha. 2004. p.2,10,91  
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