

EVOLUTION OF IDEOLOGY IN THE MARGINAL COMMUNITIES: NAMASUDRA-MATUA

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ABSTRACT:

The Namasudras are one of the Scheduled Castes of India; they are primarily inhabitants of Greater Bengal. In the context of Partition, due to the division of Bengal, they became divided. Through the ideology propagated by Harichand Thakur and the leadership of Guruchand Thakur, they emerged as the Matua community. Now the questions are- has any ideological evolution actually taken place among this marginalized population? However, it is not beyond question whether all Namasudras are Matua? or whether all Matuas are Namasudra? Just as society and culture are deeply interconnected, similarly, Namasudras and Matuas have often coexisted in terms of social position. Not only Namasudras, but over time people from various castes and communities have embraced the Matua faith. In the context of time and place, the Matua religion has, in a sense, evolved into a religion of universal humanity; and the Namasudra society has also undergone transformation.

Keywords: Namasudra, Matua, Society, Caste, Religion, Marginal

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

India is a composite of diverse races, religions, languages, customs, traditions, cultures, and heritage. The history, civilization, traditions, and culture of this country have been shaped by its collective people. However, not all sections of society have been equally represented in that history. The numerous castes and tribes that constitute this vast India each possess their own distinct histories.¹ The Namasudras are a caste group within the Hindu community. This group is primarily spread across Greater Bengal; at present, they reside in the Indian state of West Bengal and in Bangladesh.² In addition, they are scattered in smaller numbers across different parts of the country. The Matuas are a sect within the Sanatan Hindu religion, predominantly belonging to the Namasudra caste. They are recognized as one of the Scheduled Castes of India.³

The religious doctrine introduced by Harichand Thakur and later expanded by his worthy son and capable organizer, Guruchand Thakur, is known as the Matua religion. In a broader sense, the followers of this faith are called Matuas.⁴ The earliest progenitor of the Matua religious tradition is considered to be Ramdas Brahmachari. In the 16th century CE, Ramdas Brahmachari, a resident of the Mithila region, was a practitioner of Shakti worship. During that time, the wave of collective spiritual awakening led by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had spread from one end of the subcontinent to the other. When Ramdas visited Nabadwip, he was initiated into Vaishnavism. In other words, he transformed from a Shakta into a Vaishnava. However, he arranged the marriage of his son, Chandra Mohan, with a girl from the Namasudra community. Five generations after Ramdas, the advent of Shri Shri Harichand Thakur took place in 1812, in the village of Safaldanga under the Gopalganj subdivision of Faridpur district. The religious doctrine propagated by Harichand Thakur came to be known as the Matua religion.⁵

In Dr. Ambedkar *Rachana Samgraha* (Vol. 7), published by the Government of India, on pages 144–45, the system of varna determination is described as follows: for the needs of collective social life, an individual's varna was determined according to their physical ability, mentality, and occupation, and there was also scope for reclassification. Two separate groups, led by Manu and the Saptarishis, were responsible for determining people's varna for a specific period. The Saptarishis decided who would be Brahmins or who were eligible to become Brahmins, while Manu selected the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. After individuals were chosen for these three varnas, those who remained were considered Shudras.⁶ This system can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, varna was assigned for a limited period, after which it was reviewed, and individuals could move up or down within the varna hierarchy. In the second phase, this selection or determination of varna was fixed for the lifetime of an individual; that is, once a person's varna was determined, they were regarded as belonging to that varna for life. In the third phase, varna became hereditary, and the varna system transformed into the caste (jati) system. This caste system became firmly established during the period of Brahmanical dominance.⁷ Another important change also occurred within the varna system over time. Initially, Manu and the Saptarishis determined the varna of adults. In that sense, they functioned somewhat like an interview board, and the system was relatively flexible and loosely structured; later, this system was altered. In Aryan society, Shudras or people of lower varnas could never become Brahmins. Beyond these four varnas, there were additional groups such as Chandalas and Swapakas, whose social status and rights were not recognized.⁸

In ancient Bengal, the Namasudras were known as “Chandals.” Among the inhabitants of Bengal, the Namasudras were numerically one of the largest groups. Before the 8th century, although they were “extremely numerous” among the non-Brahmin population of Bengal, they existed outside the Hindu fourfold varna system as the “Chandal” or “Chāral” caste. During the colonial period, at the time of the census, Census Commissioner E. A. Gait remarked about the Namasudras: **“The Namashudras or Chandals are the great race caste of East Bengal.”*” By the end of the nineteenth century, the Namasudras were the largest caste within Hindu society in Eastern Bengal and the second-largest caste in united Bengal after the Mahishyas. According to the 1911 census, Namasudras constituted 17.56% of the total Hindu population of Eastern Bengal, which increased to 18.34% in 1931;¹⁰ thus, a significant portion of the Hindu population consisted of Namasudras. More than half of the total Namasudra population lived in six districts: Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, Bakerganj, Dhaka, and Mymensingh. Faridpur district had the highest concentration, with nearly one-fifth of Bengal's Namasudras residing there. Based on occupation and economic condition, the Namasudras were divided into various sub-groups, such as Haliya or Halbahī (engaged in ploughing), Ghasi (grass cutters), Kambo (palanquin bearers), Karal (fish sellers), Baggal (itinerant traders), Karatia (carpenters), Nuniya (salt producers), Jaliya (fisherfolk), Shiuli (toddy collectors from date and palm trees), Dhani (rice processors), and others.¹¹ The 1901 census shows that 64.90% of Namasudras, and in 1911 about 62.75%, were dependent laborers. However, 4,600 Namasudras in 1901 and 5,432 in 1911 were recorded as paying land revenue. According to the 1911 census, 70 individuals among the Namasudras worked as teachers and 499 as medical practitioners; other professions included traders, merchants, clerks, craftsmen, legal agents (mukhtars), and postmasters.¹² In 1941, 6.27% of the total Namasudra population of undivided Bengal lived in West Bengal; by 1951, their number in West Bengal stood at 2,324,723, increasing further to 2,581,549 in 1961.¹³ According to the 2001 data in West Bengal, 25.2% of Namasudras lived in Nadia district and 24.9% in North 24 Parganas—meaning more than half resided in these two districts. The remaining population was distributed across other districts: 8.9% in Jalpaiguri, 7% in Bardhaman, 5.2% in Cooch Behar, 4.6% in South 24 Parganas, 4.8% in Medinipur, and the rest in other areas. About 75.5% of Namasudras in West Bengal lived in rural areas, while 24.6% lived in urban areas. Around 38.3% were dependent on agriculture, whereas

61.7% were engaged in non-agricultural occupations.¹⁴ The Namasudras are not merely an “untouchable” agrarian laboring community devoid of culture; they possess a distinct identity and unique characteristics. According to Swami Pranabananda, among the Scheduled Castes, the Namasudras of Eastern Bengal are the true Kshatriya community. Nirmal Chandra Chattopadhyay noted that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose used to say that the Namasudra community of Faridpur was as brave and strong as the Sikhs of Punjab. Satish Chandra Mitra wrote that in ancient times, this Namasudra community had supplied shield-bearing soldiers (dhali troops) to kings such as Pratapaditya and Sitaram; even today, titles like “Dhali” and “Sardar” among many families reflect that martial heritage. The renowned folklorist Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya stated that the Namasudras are protectors of the land, patriotic, and worthy of reverence—“Namashudra.” Such a deeply devout community endowed with both spiritual and physical strength cannot be insignificant.¹⁵ Despite the obscurity surrounding their present identity, it is widely acknowledged that the Namasudras possess the characteristics of a warrior people, and traces of a Kshatriya lineage can be discerned. For example, Mahesh Mondal, a resident of Rasulpur village in the Jessore district, served as the commander of the 52,000 shield-bearing troops of Raja Pratapaditya.¹⁶

In Bengal, around the middle of the nineteenth century, a powerful religious community known as the Matua sect emerged. In its early phase, the founder of the Matua religion, Harichand Thakur (1812–1878), though born into a Namasudra Vaishnava family, propagated a protest-oriented devotional ideology.¹⁷ Although the majority of followers of Matua religious philosophy were Namasudras, not all Namasudras were Matua; conversely, members of other lower castes and even a small number of conservative upper-caste individuals were also found among the Matua followers. After Harichand Thakur, under the leadership of his son Guruchand Thakur (1846–1937), the Matua movement transcended its purely religious boundaries and entered the socio-economic and political spheres.¹⁸ During this period, without engaging in extreme opposition to Brahmanical culture, the Matua movement succeeded in making the Namasudras and other lower-caste communities understand that the socio-economic dominance of the upper castes was the principal cause of their loss of identity and low social status. As a result, from the early twentieth century, largely due to the dedicated efforts of Guruchand Thakur, the groundwork was laid for movements centered on self-respect and the formation of a distinct socio-cultural unity.¹⁹ There was no practice of inter-dining among different social groups, and in many cases, intermarriage was also absent. For a long time, the backward Namasudra community—oppressed by upper-caste domination and deprived of rights—gradually gained strength and confidence through the influence and inspiration of Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur.²⁰ At Thakurnagar in West Bengal, the principal center of the Matua religion in India, a statement published on the cover of the Matua Mahasangha journal describes the religion as follows: “Matua is a socio-economic religion with a spiritual outlook based on the uplift of the downtrodden classes, including ideal family life, and aimed at their ultimate salvation through the eradication of casteism, untouchability, and social and economic disparities.”²¹ Many examples of Guruchand Thakur’s contributions to social development remain significant even today. He undertook numerous initiatives that were far ahead of his time. One such notable effort was the formation of the Namasudra Welfare Association. With the aim of improving the condition of neglected, oppressed, and exploited communities, he took practical steps to show them a path toward liberation. He devoted himself wholeheartedly to the advancement of the Dalit community in education, culture, trade, commerce, and agriculture.²²

A descendant of Harichand Thakur, Promoth Ranjan Thakur established a Matua pilgrimage center at Thakurnagar in West Bengal, modeled after Orakandi in Bangladesh. Today, it is the principal pilgrimage site for Matuas in India. Centered around Thakurnagar, Matuas spread across regions such as West Bengal, the Andaman Islands, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Maharashtra have been striving to

revive both their movement and religious practices.²³ According to information obtained from a leading daily newspaper, Anandabazar Patrika, at present the Matua community is present in about 74 legislative assembly constituencies in West Bengal, with a total population exceeding 15 million (1.5 crore).²⁴ However, although the Matua movement is often interpreted as a movement of the Namasudras, not all Matuas agree with this view. According to them, it is essentially a movement of the marginalized and backward classes; the predominance of Namasudras is only because the movement originated in regions largely inhabited by them.²⁵ It is noteworthy that when attempts were made to describe Guruchand Thakur, the principal architect of the Matua movement, as merely a Namasudra leader, he opposed such characterization. This becomes clear even from the ‘Guruchand Charit’-

“Namashudra kule janma hoyeche amar.
Tabu boli ami nahi namar ekar.
Dalit pirito jara dukkhe kate kal,
Chhusne chhusne bole joto jolchol.
Shikkha hara diksha hara ghore nai dhan,
Ei sobe jani ami aponar jon.”²⁶

In 1911, the Namasudras submitted a memorandum to the Census Commission demanding that the imposed name “Chandal” be changed to “Namasudra.” Due to opposition from upper-caste scholars, this demand was not initially implemented. Eventually, Namasudras across Eastern Bengal and Assam began district-level campaigns and signature collections. Under the initiative of Guruchand Thakur and his followers, two memoranda were submitted to the then Governor and the Census Commissioner.²⁷ Additionally, efforts led by Ramkinkar Ray of Dhaka, Nagarbashi Majumdar, and Raghunath Sarkar also resulted in the submission of memoranda to the Census Commissioner, demanding that the Chandals be renamed as “Namasudra.”²⁸ Despite resistance from upper-caste Brahmin scholars, through a united movement and strong demands, legal recognition was ultimately achieved for the name “Namasudra,” replacing the derogatory and humiliating term ‘Chandal.’²⁹

The Matua religion appears to have integrated religion with household life. This differs fundamentally from the concept of the householder stage in the traditional Chaturashrama system. Here, the term “Garhasthya Dharma” (household religion), formed by combining “household” and “religion,” carries deep significance. The majority of Hindu philosophers have regarded the life of renunciation (sannyasa) as the highest ideal and have propagated the view that the ultimate aim of life should be the observance of celibacy (brahmacharya). In contrast, the Matua religion does not support abandoning home and social life in favor of ascetic withdrawal to the mountains; rather, it interprets a moral and disciplined household life itself as a form of brahmacharya.³⁰ In religious practice and interpretation, the Matua faith has liberated women from a position of inferiority and granted them equal status alongside men within household life. In the Matua scripture ‘Shri Shri Harililamrita’, it is stated that—

“Mala tepa phonta kata, jol phela nai.
Hate kam mukhe nam mon khola chai.
Shohoj garhasthya dharma shorbo dhormo shaar,
Grihike bilabe mukti Shri Hari amar.”³¹

In 1880, Guruchand Thakur established a school at his residence in Orakandi. The following year, in 1881, at the Namasudra conference held at Dattadanga in Khulna district, one of the principal resolutions adopted in the meeting was the establishment of primary schools. As president of the session, Guruchand Thakur's speech strongly emphasized the need for education.³² Certain superstitions had long affected the Namasudra community—for example, prohibitions against digging ponds, selling fish from ponds, building brick houses, or planting coconut saplings, all of which were considered inauspicious. Efforts were made to challenge and dispel these beliefs through awareness and dissemination of correct knowledge.³³ To address various social problems and promote education, after the 1908 conference, committees were formed in every Namasudra village. Groups of 15 villages were organized into a union or conference unit, and a district committee was established to supervise these unions. Funds were also raised through subscriptions to create a permanent financial base.³⁴ In 1932, the "Hari-Guruchand Mission" was established under the leadership of Guruchand Thakur; it was later renamed the Matua Mahasangha.³⁵ The main objectives of the organization included not only religious activities but also the spread of education, service to the distressed irrespective of caste, creed, or religion, the establishment of shelters for helpless widows, education for poor but meritorious students, relief for famine and flood victims, and rural development. Guruchand Thakur was a pioneer in uniting the Dalit awakening in Bengal. He famously said, "One who has no group has no strength."³⁶ He sought to bring the oppressed Dalit communities, marginalized under upper-caste dominance, into the mainstream. Along with promoting education among the Namasudras, he also advised and assisted other backward communities—such as the Teli, Mali, Kumhakar, Mahishya, Chamar, Pod, Tanti, Malakar, and even Muslims—in spreading educational awareness.³⁷ He was a pioneer in liberating underdeveloped communities from bondage and in spreading education and consciousness among them. Dr. Mead, who was sympathetic toward the Namasudra community, observed that due to the rigid caste structure of Brahmanical Hinduism, marginalized Hindu communities were increasingly inclined toward religious conversion. He attributed the gradual increase in the Muslim population and the conversion of some Namasudra women to Islam to the social degeneration within Hindu society, and sought opportunities to promote Christianity among these groups.³⁸ To him, these marginalized people were like a "mine" of potential converts. In the nineteenth century, the presence of Christian missionaries became noticeable even in rural areas. In such a context, in Faridpur (now in Bangladesh), the Matua religion played a significant role in helping backward lower-caste communities preserve their connection with the Hindu religious tradition.³⁹

Guruchand Thakur abolished child marriage and introduced the practice of widow remarriage within the Namasudra community.⁴⁰ In the Namasudra *Suhrid* journal, protest movements against the oppression, exploitation, and repression by zamindars and landlords in Bengal were regularly published. It also covered movements of Namasudra and Muslim peasants, as well as demands for fair prices for agricultural produce.⁴¹ The Namasudra *Suhrid* played a very important role in awakening consciousness and motivating the Namasudra community, as well as other oppressed sections of society, to participate in peasant movements against the zamindars.⁴² In addition, it published discussions on various issues such as religious fanaticism, superstition, and the oppression, exploitation, and caste discrimination inherent in Brahmanical Hinduism. The poet Tarachand Sarkar (popularly known as Rasoraj Tarakchandra Sarkar) was a renowned kabiyal (folk poet) of Eastern Bengal and the author of the *Shri Shri Harililamrita*. Under his leadership, reforms were introduced in the tradition of kabigan (poetical folk performances) in Eastern Bengal. He freed kabigan from obscenity and established it as a form of healthy cultural expression. He is regarded as a successful pioneer of the Matua-influenced tradition of kabigan. Various information and discussions related to kabigan were also published in the Namasudra *Suhrid* journal.⁴³

Centered around Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur, the Matua religion—one of the major folk religious communities of Bengal—emerged and developed, primarily based on the Namasudra society. Orakandi village in the Faridpur district of present-day Bangladesh was the sacred land (lilabhumi) and principal field of activity of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur.⁴⁴ After the Partition of India, the Matua religious community spread across the entire Indian subcontinent. Thakurnagar (in Bangaon subdivision, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal) developed as the principal religious center of the Matua community in India. Under the leadership of Promoth Ranjan Thakur, the Matua religious community came to be regarded as one of the major religious communities in the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁵ It is known that not only Namasudras but also members of various sections of Hindu society, as well as some Muslims and Adivasi (indigenous tribal) groups, have become part of the Matua religious community.⁴⁶ On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Shri Shri Hari Thakur, one of the largest fairs, the Baruni Matua Mahamela festival, is held.⁴⁷ In analyzing the philosophy and practices of Matua thought, twelve distinctive characteristics can be identified—

1. Establishment of liberal humanism
2. Promotion of an expansive household-based religious life (Garhasthya Dharma) and a home-centered devotional tradition
3. Practice of monogamy and a disciplined moral life
4. Integration of love, devotion, and spiritual energy
5. Synthesis of religion and action
5. Elimination of all forms of discrimination and inequality
6. Awareness of strength and organization
7. Commitment to truth and socio-economic reform
8. Worship not confined to the household, but practiced in open communal spaces
9. Collective rather than purely individual spiritual practice
10. Provision for both worldly and spiritual well-being
11. Awakening and self-expansion of the underdeveloped and marginalized classes⁴⁸

The aforementioned twelve principal characteristics of Matua religious philosophy and practice are also reflected in the text Shri Shri Harililamrita. As follows—

“Muchiya rosik dharma grihakarma diya,
Abotirna Harichand sofolaa asiya.”⁴⁹

“Koribe garhasthya dharma loye nijo nari,
Griho theke nyasi banaprasthi brahmachari.”⁵⁰

“Grihodharma grihokarma koribe sofol,
Hoteka mukhe nam bhakti-i probol.”⁵¹

“Jibe doya namer ruchi manushhete nistha,
Iha chhara ar joto shob kriya bhroshta.”⁵²

A deep analysis of the principles and practices of Matua religious ideology reveals that the path shown by Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur symbolizes a life-oriented and socially conscious outlook. For this reason, Harichand and Guruchand Thakur not only inspired the Matuas with religious

ideals but also organized and enlightened the oppressed masses, fostering mass awareness and efforts toward social reform.⁵³ Under the banner of the Matua movement and the leadership of Hari-Guru, various reform movements were carried out, primarily based on the Namasudra community. These included the eradication of caste discrimination and untouchability, the removal of the derogatory term “Chandal” for the Namasudras, the awakening of women, awareness of health and environment, economic development, self-reliance and accumulation of strength, preservation of moral character, thrift, resistance against injustice and oppression, expansion of education, social solidarity, and patriotism. The overall upliftment of the underdeveloped sections of society was the core ideal of Harichand Thakur. Inspired by his ideals, Guruchand Thakur dedicated his entire life to the awakening of the underdeveloped Namasudras as well as the broader neglected and Dalit communities.⁵⁴ Although the Matua ideology did not remain confined to the circle of devotees or the Namasudra community, it gradually expanded into the wider folk society. Through this movement, the lower sections of society attained a new sense of life and consciousness.⁵⁵

Although there are various opinions among anthropologists and sociologists regarding the origin and birth identity of the Namasudras, there is near consensus that they are the original inhabitants of the districts of Faridpur, Bakerganj, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Jessore, and Khulna in Eastern Bengal. They lived in the marginal low-lying wetland areas (bil regions) of villages, often near forests and riverbanks.⁵⁶ In the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, it is stated: “The number of Shudras devoted to their own religion is the highest in India; from this perspective, it may be said that India is essentially a land of the Shudra religion.”⁵⁷ Sanjib Kumar Das, in his essay Jantana Jekhane, writes that the Matua religion does not recognize distinctions such as Brahmin, Kayastha, Shudra, or Saha; once one becomes a Matua, questions of caste hierarchy cease to exist. All human beings are equal. In Matua belief, no group—whether Brahmin, Kshatriya, Saha, Shudra, Methor, or Mochi—is despised, considered inferior, or hated. The Matuas completely reject the concept of caste by birth.⁵⁸ Guruchand Thakur believed that all human beings belong to a single caste—the human race. In the Matua religious community, the principle is “all are one, there is no caste distinction.” Even though people may belong to different social categories such as Namasudra, Teli, Mali, Brahmin, Kayastha, Vaidya, or even Islam by custom, all are considered Matua.⁵⁹

Matua religion is a religion of equality, protest, and humanity. It teaches people to love one another, with no place for hierarchy or discrimination. It rises above a caste-based social system. The Matua faith, introduced by Harichand Thakur, brings a message of peace for all. Its great ideal is the “expansive household religion” (Garhasthya Dharma). Inspired by this, people from different communities come together in large numbers under the banner of Matua religion, making it a great meeting ground of unity.⁶⁰ The three pillars of Matua religion are: compassion for living beings (jibe daya), devotion to the divine name (name ruchi), and commitment to humanity (manushete nishtha). Apart from these, all other practices are considered secondary. Matua religion is described as a subtle form of Sanatan (eternal) religion—timeless, free from superstition, grounded in rational truth, and embodying humanism and universal brotherhood.⁶¹ The word “dharma” is derived from the root dhri, meaning “that which sustains” or “that which is to be upheld.” It represents the principle that enables human society to progress and remain organized. This concept of dharma has no inherent connection with external symbols such as rituals, temples, or mosques; rather, it is a dynamic rhythm of life itself. This perspective is articulated by Manoranjan Byapari.⁶² According to Krishnendu Pal of Kachadaha, followers of Harichand Thakur are called Matuas. The word “Matua” means to be absorbed or spiritually intoxicated. Those who live in devotion to the name of Hari are Matuas. They believe in monotheism and do not rely on Vedic rituals. Followers observe twelve commandments or rules, and the religion grants equal rights to men and women. Its core principle is: “Work in hand, the name of God on the lips.” Wednesday is considered sacred, and on that day Matuas gather collectively to

remember Hari, an assembly known as Harisabha. Most importantly, one does not need to renounce worldly life or adopt ascetic practices; Matua religion is practiced through an ideal household life.⁶³ According to Nirmal Chandra Biswas of Bhaduria, Matuas are followers of Hari Thakur, who was born in a Namasudra family. The term “Namasudra” came into use in 1911; before that, they were known as “Chandal.” The 1872 census did not mention the term “Namasudra.” There was a demand that the community be named as a distinct group. According to various researchers, their history dates back approximately 4,500 years. The term “Namasudra” emerged from the combination of “Namas” and “Shudra.” Many scholars also note that the Namasudras were once considered untouchable. Under the leadership of Guruchand Thakur, the Namasudra movement gained strength, and as a result, within the Matua religious framework, Namasudras form a large proportion—though not all Namasudras are Matuas.⁶⁴

According to Bhabanishankar Ray of Jhaudanga, the Namasudras constitute an ethnic community and form an important part of the indigenous population of India. When Ballal Sen was expelled from the Brahmanical society, he performed a Rajasuya Yajna; as the Namasudras did not participate in that ritual, they were ostracized. They were skilled in both agriculture and crafts, and were proficient in various forms of knowledge. They lived in low-lying marshy areas. In the context of zamindari oppression and Brahmanical discrimination, the emergence of Harichand Thakur and the movement led by Guruchand Thakur gave the Namasudras a new hope, and they began to follow their ideals. There are differing opinions regarding whether all Namasudras are Matuas or whether all Matuas are Namasudras. Although there are approximately 100 million (10 crore) Namasudras in India and Bangladesh, not all of them are followers of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur, that is, not all are Matuas. If one considers “true” Matuas, perhaps around 50–60 million (5–6 crore) people may be included. At the same time, other backward communities in India—such as Teli, Mali, Kumhakar, Jola, and Tanti—were also inspired by Matua ideology. Even, according to Shri Shri Harililamrita, some Brahmins such as Piyar Charan Banerjee and Akshay Chakraborty became followers of the Matua faith. During the time of Guruchand Thakur, a Brahmin named Jagadish Chakraborty was also known as a preacher of Matua religion. In some cases, certain Brahmin families have followed Matua religion across generations. Therefore, Matua identity is not confined only to the Namasudras. Matua religion is a religion of universal humanism. It does not recognize caste divisions; anyone, irrespective of caste or community, who is devoted to the name of Hari and follows its ideals is considered a Matua.⁶⁵ According to Swapan Kumar Mondal of Simulpur, the Namasudras of Bengal belong to the Kashyap lineage. For generations, they were deprived of political, social, and religious rights and lived in forests and remote areas in extreme hardship, almost like animals. In response to their deep suffering and cries, after the twenty-eighth manvantara, Kshirod Sai is believed to have incarnated as Hari in the form of Harichand Thakur. The religion he established is known as Matua religion.⁶⁶ According to Rasamay Bain of Manikhira, inspired by the philosophy and actions of Harichand Thakur, the majority of the Namasudra community of that time broke free from superstition and initiated a new social order.⁶⁷

Just as not all members of society or all Namasudras are Matuas, similarly not all Matuas are Namasudras. However, it is undeniable that a large section of the oppressed, humiliated, and deprived people of Bengal has become part of the Matua religious community. It is difficult to determine exactly what proportion of Namasudras are Matuas, but it can be said with certainty that the emergence of Matua religion significantly contributed to the upliftment of the Namasudra community.

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