

# The Role of Matua Movements in the Annihilation of Caste-Based Inequalities in Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

*Harichand Thakur is known to the members as the founder of Matua philosophy. He always advocated egalitarianism, social reform, and spiritual awareness. The core value of the Matua philosophy is to reject caste-based discrimination from society. He suggested his followers chant Harinam over celibacy and lead a life of dignity. The departure from the Vedic ritual and instructions encourages the Matua community to overthrow the Brahminical authoritarian supremacy. This social group contests caste discrimination, untouchability, and rigid customs and also emphasizes the important role of women in the family and society. Matua's philosophy opposes the marriage prescription of caste-based interrelationships and focuses on marriage and family harmony. The movement emphasizes elevating the marginalized Namasudra community through education and economic empowerment. Through this study, B. R. Ambedkar's Dalit movements are considered in the theoretical background. The study utilized probability sampling and targeted middle-aged and elderly individuals to gather insights into Matua's history, morality, and ideology through dialogues with community members and leaders. Guruchand Thakur, son of Harichand Thakur, asked his followers to acquire education and entrepreneurship qualities. He also inspired social mobility by adopting it in business, teaching, and public services. His attempts to unite spiritual devotion with practical reform challenged deep-rooted inequalities. The Matua movement redefined religion as a tool for social change through inclusion, education, and political engagement.*

**Keywords:** Matua; Harichand Thakur; Namasudra; Casteless society.

## INTRODUCTION:

The caste practice of Hinduism has prevailed for a long time. The lower strata people belonging to the Shudra and outcast groups have suffered in their social lives. The Matua follow the Matua philosophy in their way of life in the hope of salvation in social life. Their social interactions with each other and their interrelationship need to be investigated carefully. Social customs, norms, values, and practices are complex and cannot be avoided

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or changed in social life. The rigid caste system is always a threat to leading a social life of social justice and equality. In the case of social ceremonies like birth, marriage, and death, it depends on the caste position. The caste position of an individual defines life opportunities. On this ground, it seems a significant social issue how the Matua community expresses their social life by challenging the caste hegemony. Matua's philosophy and Matua's social reform movement seem to be champions of egalitarianism. Matua's religion is based on truth, love, and purity. Matua believes in two words: Bhakti (devotion) and Mukti (salvation). They think deep devotion can bring salvation (Bhakti ta e Mukti). The Matua religion ensures the equality, freedom, and alliance of each person who belongs to Matua. Matua does not practice untouchability in their daily life. As a civilized man, untouchability must not be considered a sign of modernity. It is absurd that the upper caste hates the lower caste based on birth. In this study, the role of Matua's philosophy and practices has been portrayed to understand the social formation of caste-based discrimination and exploitation.

#### **THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:**

This study focuses on the religious practices of the Matua community and how their cultural and social practices challenge caste-based discrimination in society. Moreover, it emphasizes the role of education and economic mobility in bringing socio-political empowerment to this specific community. This social research aims to explore the social reform movements and their impacts on the marginalized community.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The Matua movement has been documented by various researchers. Though there is significant social research on the Matua movement, it is essential to do further research. The history and social experiences are very different from one region to another part of society. If we look into the existing literature on the Matua movement in the Indian subcontinent region, we will get ample adverse experiences of this community. From the researcher's work, there is a pattern to unveil the suffering of the Matua movement, its aims, and ideology of the movements, the relation between the religious doctrine and the suffering of the Namasudra caste, and self-respect consciousness comes from this Matua movement.

The Dalit scenario of four South Asian countries, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, is depicted in the writing of Jodhka & Ghanshyam (2010), who focused on untouchability and caste-based discrimination.

Subedi (2010) also describes the type of caste and the changing pattern of the caste system in Nepal. Subedi argues that the division of labor and caste system is changing in Nepal because Dalit and Untouchable castes are advancing in land ownership, wealth, and education. Many untouchables have changed their hierarchical status based on their new economic and political status.

Riswan's (2014) study concerns the social class and caste scenario in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, the entire social class is divided into four categories: upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, and poor class. The Sri Lankan caste system is not acute but represents social class, political power, and wealth.

Divya Vaid (2014), in an article, indicates the social mobility of the caste system in India. She narrates that the social mobility of castes comes in two ways: group-level mobility and individual-level mobility. Lower castes want to upgrade their position by imitating higher caste rituals, lifestyles, and social and cultural patterns. Vaid has explained that the social status of caste groups can be changed with the change of social mobility.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in his books, criticized the caste system in India and discussed the abolition of caste from Hindu society. Ambedkar conceived the idea that Manu did not provide the law of the caste system and the Caste system was created by the Brahmin class to dominate the whole Hindu society. Ambedkar wanted the reformation of the Hindu religion through the equal right of the priesthood, destruction of the caste system, and destruction of the rules of the Hindu Religion that were written in sacred texts “(Annihilation of Caste, 1936, and “Castes in India, 1916).

In his writing, Jyoti Rao Phule (1873) acutely criticized the caste system, a radical theory of caste and Hindu religious tests. Phule believed Hinduism was nothing but Brahmin exploitation. He thought Brahmins were a foreign race who invaded this land by force and made Indigenous people their slaves.

In the article, Mukherjee, Sipra (2018) draws the hagiography of Harichand Thakur, founder of Matua Sampradaya (Matua Community). She argues that Matua's faith directly opposes Brahmanism, the Vedas, and the beliefs of Hindu orthodoxy. Most Matua belong to the scheduled caste, which was earlier known as Chandal.

The Matua Movement's religious philosophy, rooted in the teachings of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur, is a focal point of Matua literature. Sarkar (1916) and Halder (1943) depict the spiritual and socio-political dimensions of the movement, emphasizing its commitment to equality and protest against caste oppression. Scholars like Mukherjee (2018) and Walker (1999) frame the Matua faith as a critique of Brahmanism, advocating social reform and rejecting orthodox Hindu practices. Bandyopadhyay (2011) highlights the movement's role in fostering upward mobility through education and economic initiatives.

The Matua Movement represents a profound challenge to caste hierarchies, blending socio-political activism with religious reform. The literature collectively underscores its transformative potential in advancing Dalit empowerment and advocating for a more equitable society.

#### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

The research focuses on social reform movements. In this research, B.R. Ambedkar's theory of caste annihilation is drawn to analyze the movement. His academic arguments on the annihilation of caste hierarchy influence the Matua community to carry on the struggle in their social life. This phenomenon can be analyzed through structural functionalism, where the social reform movements challenge the caste structural hierarchy by establishing an egalitarian society through these movements. From the conflict perspective, this study reveals to us how the social and economic oppression of the Matua community forces them to engage with this social reform movement. As Max Weber suggested in his thesis on the

Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, it places importance on work and investment for the betterment of worldly life. In the same way, the Matua movement encourages the followers to engage in honest trade and occupation to achieve financial stability and a higher social status. Through this study, B. R. Ambedkar's Dalit movements are considered in the theoretical background, and the pattern of the Matua movement emphasizes education, economic self-sufficiency, and the rejection of Brahminical dominance.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

From the above literature review and theoretical perspectives, the research aims to find out the following questions:

1. How does Matua's philosophy redefine religious practices and social norms to contest caste-based discrimination?
2. What role do education and economic mobility play in the socio-political empowerment of the Matua community?

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The methodology employed in this research involved an in-depth qualitative study of the Matua Movement in the village of Gurguria, located in Fakirhat Upazila, Bagerhat district, Bangladesh. The village, predominantly inhabited by Namasudra and Rajbangsi communities, provided a unique socio-cultural landscape for examining the Matua sect's educational, reformation, and anti-Brahmin movements. Data was collected over one and a half months through structured and semi-structured interviews, participant observation during festivals like Mahotsav, and engagement in social rituals. The study utilized probability sampling and targeted middle-aged and elderly individuals to gather insights into Matua's history, morality, and ideology through dialogues with community members and leaders. Extensive literature review, including primary texts such as Sri Sri Lilamrta and Sri Sri Guruchand Charit, supplemented by field observations, offering a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between religious doctrines and social movements. This explanatory and descriptive case study highlights the evolving dynamics of the Matua community, encompassing traditional, progressive, and newcomer perspectives, as well as varying stances on Brahmanism and monotheism.

### **THE STUDY AREA:**

The selected area belongs to Fakirhat upazila, under the Bagerhat district in the Khulna division. The population of the Upazila is 1,37,789, whereas the Hindu population is 35,799, which covers 30% of the whole population of FAKIRHAT (BBS: 2001 and BBS 2011). Among all the Hindu population in this upazila, the majority of the population belongs to the Namasudra caste, and the rest of them are Vaishya, Kayastha, Baidya, Rajbangshi (fisherman), degraded Brahmin, and minimal number Rishi (cobble). Kayastha and Baidya are considered higher castes, whereas Namasudra, Rajbangshi, and Rishi are considered lower castes. Pure Brahmin and Kshatriya are absent in this region. Agriculture, Shrimp cultivation, and fishing are the main occupations of lower-caste people. The fieldwork area

is under the Mulghar Union. Most of the lower caste, 60%, considered themselves Matua (field observation: 2018).

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **THE MATUA PHILOSOPHY:**

Religion is consciousness of ultimate reality, not a theory about God. The religious genius is not a pedant or a Pandit, not a sophist or a dialectician, but a prophet, sage, or Rishi who embodies in himself the spiritual vision. The aim of all religions is the practical realization of the highest truth. (Radhakrishna, 1975). Matua are Unitarian and believe Lord Harichand Thakur as their God. Matua always respects other religious beliefs and their doctrine. Matua's Holy Scripture says, "Ja Jahre Bhakti kore Sai Ter Ishwar" (He, who devoted someone, is his God.) Bhakti Baad or Devotionalism the main theme of Matua Philosophy. Hari is the devotee's body. Matua thinks that Hari is the one who removes the darkness of the mind. Matua shows self-dedication and self-sacrifice to Hari. They take the dictum of Lord Harichand Thakur: "all the religious rules and performance are false and ineffective except kindness to the creature, propensity to name and confidence to mankind." No benefit would be gained, nor would virtue be achieved, with religious performance. (Sarkar, 1916). They think, "Ram Hari, Krishna Hari, Gauranga Hari, Harichand Asolo Hari, Purna Brahma Hari (Lord Ram, Lord Krishna, and Gauranga are also part of Hari, but Harichand is the original Hari).

Matua Niti Rani Roy, 55 years old, and a housewife, said, "We believe that God is not abstract, rather he remains in the body of humans. Devotion is the only way to get the grace of God. Many Hindus claim that Matua is not a specific religion; it is only a branch of the Hindu religion. It is nothing but a sect. However, I oppose their statement and think Matua's religious philosophy is not connected with the Hindu religion. Matua opposes the ideology of Vedic ritual and Brahminism. Matua Dharma is called "Sukma Sanatan Dharma (subtle Hindu religion). A subtle entity is the main element of word creation. Brahminism polluted Hinduism, and the caste system created inequality among men and division of labor. Brahmins dominated other castes based on the caste hierarchy for a long time. The four age-based life stages are discussed in Hindu religious texts. It seems that Matua's ideology is the combination of both maternal action and spiritual devotion. Those four ashramas are Brahmacharya (celibacy), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (retired life), and Sannyasa (renounced life). Lord Sri Harichand told his followers that Grihastha (householder's duties) is the ideal stage for man. Lord Harichand advised this follower that, "Girah-dharma girah-karma Karbi sokol, hate Kamm mokihi Nam Bhakti Prabal" (All will do household work and need intensive devotion to do work by hand and to remember the name of Hari by mouth). Hindu religion encourages otherworldly life, but Matua philosophy opposes this ideology and encourages worldly philosophy.

**Picture 1.1: MATUA IS PLAYING TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT AND DOING MATAM**

*Source: Fieldwork, 2018*

Lord Harichand Thakur focuses more on family life. Family is the best place of fulfillment in religious life. Lord Harichand Thakur opposed the idea of Brahmacharya (celibacy). According to the Vedic ritual, celibacy is an integral part of the Hindu religion, but it creates de-sexualization of men and women. It is believed in the Hindu religion that women and wealth are the main obstacles in the path of Bhakti. Matua Dharma does not accept desexualized ideas for achieving religious fulfillment; instead, it encourages a marriage system to fulfill proper sexual behavior. Matua looks down upon adultery. Guruchand Thakur instructed the Matua devotee to refrain from adultery. Matua's philosophy encourages controlling sexual desire and obeying strict sexual discipline. They considered uncontrolled sexual desire to be the greatest of six enemies. The Matua religion is the religion of the householder because Matua considered women to be equal partners in family life. Women are essential for maintaining society and they are a source of reproduction. Matua thinks that all religious practice should be done with own wife. This is why the Matua religion is also the religion of the householder.

Matua believes in Atma darshan or self-revelation of the body. Bhakti is the only way to know the image of God. Devotion to Hari and Harinam purifies the human mind. The Matua religion is called "Veda-tit religion or Loka-Yat Dharma" because it opposes the rule and regulation of the Vedas. Holy Matua text says, "I am ready to eat the remaining food after being eaten by a dog, but I will not show respect to the rules of the Vedas." Matua does not advocate idolatry and Brahmin domination in society. They also oppose the hegemony of Guru-bad and initiation. Hindu philosophy believes that the Guru is the mediator between disciples and God. Guru has spiritual power and he can lead the path of spiritual salvation. Guru is called the second Lord in the Hindu religion. No one would get salvation (Mukti) without receiving initiation (Diksha) from the Guru. But Matua repudiates the importance of the Guru in life for salvation. Harichand Thakur says, "Diksha Nai Karbi Na tirtha partisan, Mukti spring Sunya Nai sadhana bhajan." (No need to receive initiation from a Guru, do not go to Pilgrimage, no desire of Mukti (salvation). Only Harinam can bring spiritual salvation to disciples. Guruchand Thakur says that, although Guru chanted the sacred mantra into the

ears of disciples, all other mantras except Harinam are meaningless. Matua does not obey the Brahminical order in their life. Brahmins considered themselves to be the supreme creatures of God, and they neglected others as inferior. Matua considered that everyone should have equal rights and opportunities in the world, whereas Brahmin created differentiation and classification of humans based on birth. Matua philosophy says about Matua,” Ved Bidi Nahi jane, nah mane Brahmin (Matua need not necessarily know about Vedas and obey Brahmin). Matua is working to remove untouchability from society. Sri Guruchand says, “Those books written by Brahmin are nothing but sarcastic, that are advertising machines of Brahminical identity.” Lord Harichand says to his followers, “Where do you see Brahmins? Where Vaishnav, all are self-seeking hypocrites, full of love, Rituals, mantras, and habits veil the scheming soul, devote yourself to work with purity your goal.”

**Picture 1.2: THE BAND OF MATUA IS GOING TO MAHOTSAV**



*Source: Research field, 2018*

Untouchability is the creation of Brahmins, and they are discriminated against in society only because of caste. Brahmins give the rules and regulations for worshipping deities. Matua does not have to believe in a deity. Matua says, “What do we care for, Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswar? We know only you (Hari).”

Matua does not believe in purity or pollution. They consider a fresh mind needed only for worship of God. Hindu religious ritual is based on innumerable mantras (sacred spells, charms). In Matua's philosophy, there is no mantra except Hari-Bol. It is written in their holy Matua text that, not counting beads, streaking foreheads, or the dripping of holy water, you should only do your work with your hand by chanting his name on your lips and need an open mind.

#### **MATUA SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT:**

Matua is trying to create a new form of religious doctrine in society. Indeed, Matua is not a recognized religion, but there are many Matua who still believe that Matua Dharma is a separate religion because of its religious doctrine. Dalit and Untouchable people get their

shelter in Matua Dharma. Matua's philosophy is gaining popularity among downtrodden people. The goal of the Matua movement is to ensure the socio-economic and political upliftment of oppressed people who are socially excluded from society and have low honor. The Matua movement is giving one platform where caste discrimination is absent. Guruchand says, "I will consider all human beings living in the world as belonging to one race."

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is the leader of the Renaissance of the 16th century. Many historians consider that Raja Mohan Ray was the father of the Indian Renaissance. "Lord Harichand Thakur is the pioneer of the renaissance of the neglected and backward folk society at a critical juncture of the history of Bengal (Chattopadhyay, 2010). He brought social reform by stopping child marriage, polygamy, polytheism, casteism, and untouchability. Once upon a time, a widow was considered the plague-spot in society. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar introduced the practice of widow remarriage in Bengali Hindu society. After that, Guruchand Thakur first started widow remarriage in the Namasudra community and other Dalit castes. Guruchand says, "To the development of Namasudra, we start widow remarriage." Matua does not practice polygamy. Harichand Thakur strictly ordered his followers not to marry a second time if their wives were alive. He firmly declared, "he who marries single women, and maintains the household practice, is the true ascetic. Harichand Thakur professed that, among all religious practices, the best practice is the practice of a Householder.

The idea of untouchability is nothing but the evil practice of domination by the upper caste. Lord Harichand says, "Who is Brahman? Who are the Shudras? All are the creatures of God." The Matua religion makes a universal brotherhood of all caste-based people. Guruchand said, "Awoke up, Namasudra, no one is tiny by his clan and religion." Matua Movement is working to abolish untouchability and establish an egalitarian society. Child marriage and dowry are prevalent in rural areas. In the marriage of Matua, they usually do not take any dowry from the bride's parents. The Matua religion respects women properly, and girls are not a burden in the Matua family. Matua discourages others from marrying his child.

**Picture 1.3: A MATUA MARRIAGE CEREMONY PERFORMED BY A MATUA PRIEST**



*Source: Research field, 2018*

No community can develop properly without education and political power. That is why Guruchand realized the importance of education and politics for the Namasudra. He told his followers, “Those with no king have no power to survive.” Guruchand Thakur encouraged them to participate in politics. Dalit and backward communities need political power to improve their lifestyles. Politics can give a chance to raise the rights and demands.

#### **MATUA MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL MOBILITY OF LOWER CASTE:**

The lower caste people can be a part of the local power structure and achieve social status through upward mobility. Social and economic mobility can be changed with a change in people's occupations. Social status is interlinked with occupations. New economic positions of lower caste and successful upward mobility can make them the dominant caste in society. (Vaid, 2014). Sri Guruchand Thakur told his followers to do business, become entrepreneurs, and earn money honestly. Among all occupations, business is independent and makes people self-reliant. Businesses can make money very quickly. He realized that education and business could bring new social status to the lower caste. That is why he advised his followers, “Devi Laxmi always sits in the business and we cannot prosper in life without her kindness.” He also provided some codes of business conduct to his beloved Matua followers such as 1) try to buy your commodities honestly and one rate, 2) do not finesse with your customers about the product, 3) do not lie with your customers about the quality of product, 4) always ensure the perfect weight of your product that you want to buy, 5) always show good conduct to your customers (Halder, 1943). The villagers of Gurguria are mainly dependent on agriculture. They grow crops and farm shrimp on their lands and ponds. As an occupation, business is going to be popular in Gurguria village. Village people are involved in the business of grocery shops, agricultural shops, poultry farming, shrimp farming, fish feed, and artifacts.

Matua Amal Bala, 60 years old, has been doing the Shrimp farming business for 30 years. His father was a landless farmer. In his childhood, he had to struggle for food. Through his life experience, he told me how business has changed his life. Amal Bala told the story from Guruchand Charit that Devi Laxmi easily comes through business. He thinks Matua are gradually upgrading their social status in two ways; one is receiving higher education and the other is changing their occupation. Our forefathers were the slaves of the Brahmin and other higher castes.

“I started my business with only 10,000 tk. However, every year, he receives 5 lakh BDT from his farm. I do not depend on others. I am not educated, but people call me “Babu” and invite me to many social occasions. I have two daughters. I could not go to school because of a lack of money but now I have enough ability to carry on my daughter’s studies. I realize that one can easily change one's life and bring economic development through Business. Like me, many Matua people are taking business as their occupation. We have Matua Samiti (association) and we deposit 100 taka per week. We now have 200 members in this Matuas cooperative association. In our Matua meeting, we inspire other Matua to do business. Business is not the main occupation of the lower caste. In our locality, business is the main occupation of the upper caste people of Saha, Kundu, and Pal. Until a few decades ago, they neglected us and did not participate in our social program because of our lower caste identity

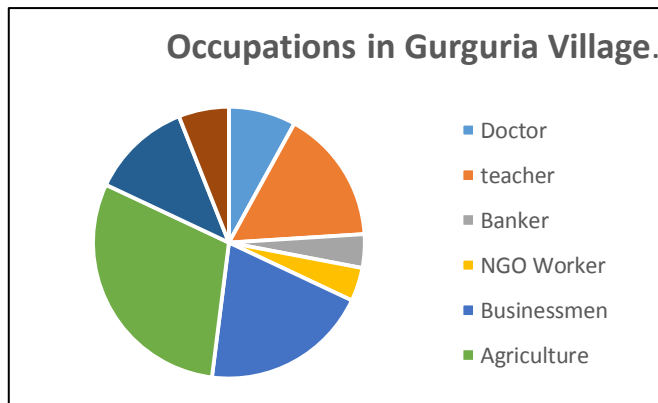
and poor economic condition. Now that outlook has widely changed. Our children study at universities and colleges and get good jobs. We have acquired social prestige in society. They willingly talked with us and visited our house. We realized that economic power is significant for society. We can spend enough money on our children's education. We are playing an active role in society. They cordially invite you to join our program. Now, exogamy is very common in our society. They are willing to marry our daughter. If we confine ourselves to agriculture, fishing, and boating, we cannot change our lifestyle and socio-economic condition.”

**Table 1.1: CURRENT OCCUPATIONS OF MATUA HOUSEHOLDERS IN GURGURIA VILLAGE**

Occupation	Number	Percentage
1. Doctor	4	8%
2. Teacher	8	16%
3. Banker	2	4%
4. Ngo Worker	2	4%
5. Government worker	3	6%
6. Businessmen	10	20%
7. Agriculture	15	30%
8. Others	6	12%
9. Total	N=50	100%

*Source: Field work, 2018.*

This survey conducts among 50 Matua at Gurguria village. Among them 32 were male and 18 were female. It is seen that 30% of Matua people are still involved in agriculture and 20% are now doing business. A significant number (16%) of Matua people are teachers in this village. After getting higher education, Matua became a doctor, banker, and engineer. Thus, upward social mobility and social status are rising with the change of occupation and education.

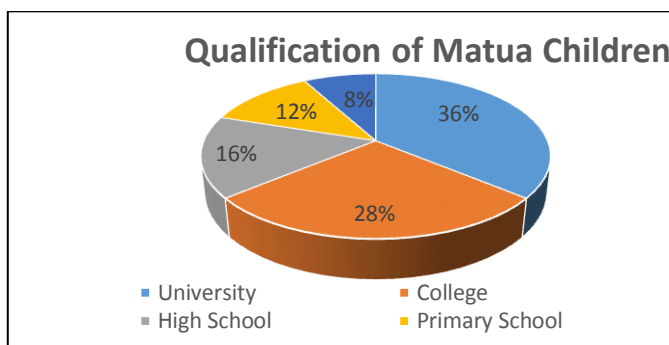


The literacy rate of Gurguria village is satisfactory and increasing. Fifty years ago, only 2%—3% of people signed their names. But now, above 50% of people are educated (field observation, 2018). Matua highly encourages their children to pursue education.

**Table 1.2: EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF MATUA CHILDREN IN GURGURIA VILLAGE**

Qualification	Number of Students	Percentage
University (Bachelor and Master’s)	18	36%
College (H.S.C or 12 <sup>th</sup> class)	14	28%
High school (S.S.C or 10 <sup>th</sup> class)	8	16%
Primary School	6	12%
Do not study	4	8%
Total	50	100%

Source: Field Work, 2018.



This chart shows that Matua is conscious of their children's education. The female children’s education rate is higher than that of male children. It is seen that 36% of Matua children have Bachelor's and Master's degrees, 28% of students are studying in college, 16% are in high school, and 12% are in Primary school. The dropout rate is very low. Among them, only 8% of children fail to continue their studies because of the poverty of their parents. The Primary schools and higher secondary schools are very close to Gurguria village. Matua encourages their daughter to pursue education. Women's awakening is also a part of the Matua movement. Women's awakening in Hindu society is impossible without the proper education of women.

Matua gradually understands that education is the only weapon that brings about social status and change. Education helps individuals acquire knowledge and brings higher prestige to society. Through education, one can gain a higher income, which helps bring upward social mobility and social change. Lord Guruchand told his followers, “No talk without education, acquire higher education in your heart, education is religion, education is your work, leave everything and highest try to take education, no matter if you die or live but you must acquire education” (Bicharon, 1948).

**Picture 1.4: AS A PART OF SOCIAL WORK, MATUA GOLOK CHANDRA ROY IS GIVING MONEY TO POOR CHILDREN IN THE YARD OF SRI SRI HARICHAND TEMPLE**



*Source: Research field, 2018*

Matua Sumitra Rani Roy, 70 years old, is a retired banker in Gurguria village. Her father was a small farmer, and her grandfather was a boatman in his village. My mother worked as a maid in other houses. From her memory, she said, “We are three brothers and two sisters. My father had to struggle to manage our educational expenditure. I and my two brothers and I completed our Master's degrees from Bagerhat P.C. government college, and my other two siblings completed college level. Our father always spoke about the importance of education and encouraged us to study. I still remember my advice that “you are born in Namasudra, people called by bad name Chandal, higher caste people do not well behave with us, Brahmin considered us as untouchable and shun us, our caste is neglected, so education is the only way to set up your new social status in society, dear daughter, continue your study and work for our caste development.” Sometimes, my father's Guru (Spiritual teacher) came to our house and advised us to study. I received my primary education from Pathshala<sup>i</sup>.

I did not face any caste problems there because most of the students there belonged to our caste. But when I studied at Bagerhat College in 1965-1968, some of my upper caste friends insulted me by saying, “Chandler Maya (daughter of Chandal). I was hurt by hearing this. From there, I determined I had to become educated, achieve social status, and bring economic development to myself and my caste group. After getting a job in the Bank, I decided to help the poor students in our village. During the Baruni Mela<sup>ii</sup>, I gave some money and clothes to poor students in our village. It is insufficient, but I aim to encourage them to study. I am also a member of the Gurguria Sri Sri Harichand Sheba Ashram<sup>iii</sup>. The Department of Social Services of the Bangladesh government registers the Harichand Temple. Every year, this temple organized social service programs such as 1) Providing money to destitute women, 2) providing stipends to poor children, 3) bearing the educational expenditure of orphaned school-going children, 4) providing scholarships to poor and meritorious children, 5) and allowance to old aged people. I am thrilled because I fulfilled my father and mother's cherished dream that they had in their eyes. Being educated, I do not try to change my caste but try to be involved in our village's Matua Movement, social work, and development program. I believe that, in my mind, caste is not our problem; the problem

is our ignorance and primitive minds. I am not saying that the Matua movement changed everything in our traditional society, but it has brought revolutionary change and new light to our society. I feel proud to be a part of the Matua movement.” Harichand Thakur realized that Dalit and disdainful people cannot develop in society without education. Education can bring social power and social status to society. Proper education helps to bring upward social mobility. The upper caste in Hindu society is mostly educated and economically developed. Harichand Thakur talked about spiritual freedom and was inspired to achieve mundane philosophy. Matua culture upholds a new value for the socio-cultural enhancement of Dalits by rejecting the prejudice of Brahminism. Education and economic development also help to fight for removing caste and religious superstition from society.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Caste-based inequalities are the source of injustice and exploitation in society. The Matua movement has brought a powerful socio-religious reformative initiative to the lives of the lower castes. The philosophy suggests that the Matua community revolted against the caste hierarchies and Brahminical authority in the social formation of their way of life. The Holy text of the Matua community and their experiences emphasize acquiring education and economic solvency. The spiritual reform brings positive changes in this social group by altering their attitudes toward worldly life. The social mobility of the marginalized social groups is evident through this movement. The Hindus follow a strict caste hierarchy through the practice of social ceremonies like birth, marriage, death, and religious occasions. The Matua emphasizes spiritual fulfillment through an inclusive, egalitarian approach. The movement also upholds gender equality and social cohesion. This movement has disseminated the ideals of the Renaissance to Dalit and formerly untouchable communities in rural Bangladesh, fostering organization and engagement in societal, cultural, and political spheres. The Matua Dharma represents a rebellious ideology that contests the deep-rooted Brahminical hierarchy, rejecting the authority of traditional gurus and the worship of deities. Despite its progressive ideals, the movement has predominantly found resonance in rural areas, where its followers often face negligence and discrimination from members of other higher caste groups. While the Matua movement has successfully prompted social change and contested religious superstitions within Hindu society, it remains unaccepted mainly by mainstream Hindu culture due to its opposition to conservative norms and ideologies.

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- <sup>i</sup> Pathshala is a traditional Hindu school where children are taught pre-primary education and Hindu religious knowledge.
- <sup>ii</sup> Barani Mela is the best religious festival of Matua that is organized on the birthday of Harichand Thakur in April in the place of Orakandi, Gopalganj.
- <sup>iii</sup> Sheba Ashram is a temple of God that provides humanitarian service to people.

