



The Social Activities of Guruchand Thakur as Reflected in the Writings of Shrimat BicharanPagal

Dr. Pradipta Acharya

Asst. Prof, Dept. of History, Shambhu Nath College, Labpur, Birbhum, West Bengal, India

Received: 25.11.2025; Accepted: 27.11.2025; Available online: 30.11.2025

©2025 The Author(s). Published by Scholar Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract

This work revisits the significant contributions of Bicharan Pagal, a pivotal figure in the documentation of the Matua religious and social reform movements, through his book Sri Sri Hariguruchand Charitra Sudha. Pagal, who authored over eleven books, remains largely underrecognized in academic discourse despite the critical role his writings play in understanding the socio-economic upliftment of the Matua communities led by Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and his son, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur. The Sri Sri Hariguruchand Charitra Sudha, written during the lifetime of Guruchand Thakur, offers an invaluable and contemporaneous account of the Thakurs' efforts in elevating the Matua community, both socially and economically. This book is considered one of the most reliable sources for comprehending the profound impact of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur's leadership on the socio-religious landscape of the Matua community. Despite the lasting influence of their work, there is a lack of scholarly attention on how Pagal's writings have captured and preserved their legacy. This study seeks to highlight the importance of Pagal's documentation in understanding the Matua movement's history, the Thakurs' social activism, and the enduring legacy of their efforts in shaping the community's identity and philosophy. Through this reexamination, the study underscores the need for greater scholarly focus on Pagal's contributions, which offer critical insights into the lives and works of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur, central figures in the Matua socio-religious reform.

Key words: Harichand Thakur, Guruchand Thakur, C.S. Mid, Mahananda Biswas, Matua, BicharanPagal, Mahananda Halidar.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are known as a particularly important period in the history of India. On the one hand, the collapse of the Mughal rule for 200 years, the fall of the Nawabi rule in Bengal, the establishment of British rule, etc., brought the eighteenth century to the threshold of an era. Similarly, the nineteenth century also has considerable claims in the history of Bengal and India from various aspects. During this time, on the one hand, the Indian public and the native royal family, angry with the oppression of the British, organized various movements and rebellions against them (Chandra et al., 2016), on the other hand, as a result of English language education, the renaissance in Bengal, the emergence of social reformers like Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar, the introduction of railways, the establishment of medical colleges, and the conflict between the old-fashioned people who believed in an outdated ideology and the new Bengalis who believed in

modern ideas, etc., all of which initiated a social reform movements in different parts of Bengal and India (Ahmed, 1965; Dhar, 1987). However, most of the discussions of the period in question are limited to the discussion of the life of the upper class of society or the urban people centered in Kolkata.

However, the discussion about the social status of the lower classes, their socio-economic and political life or the daily struggles of life of the marginalized people during the period in question has found very little space in the writings of the history of this period (Bandyopadhyay, 2023). From the very beginning of the writings regarding the marginalized peoples of India particularly of Bengal this deficiency has been largely felled. Yet, it must be said that in the 19th century, when we were discussing regarding the path breaking historic social activities of people like Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, we should also discuss the contribution made by Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and his worthy son Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur for the marginalized or downtrodden peoples of Bengal in this time (Mukherjee, 2018). The continuous efforts made by Shri Shri Harichand Thakur and his son Shri Shri Guruchand Thakur for the development of the social, economic, religious, educational life of the Dalit people belonging to the lower class community or more accurately, the Nama Shudra community of the regions like Khulna, Jessore, Chittagong, Dhaka, and Mymensingh of present-day Bangladesh occupied an important place in history (M. Biswas, 2015, 2018; Sinharay, 2015).

The books of Tarak Chandra Sarkar (Sri Sri Harililamrita) and Mahananda Haldar (Sri Sri Guruchand Charit) on Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur deserve considerable mention (Haldar, 2023; Mukherjee, 2018; Sarkar, 1916). In their two books, various social and religious activities of the two great people have been narrated. Mahananda Haldar's writings have practically become the main religious texts of the Matua community (J. Biswas, 2023; Sinharay, 2015). He describes various works of Guruchand Thakur in one by one by maintaining his various works year wise. He did not categories his writings in various songs or Gitika. However, people read it in rhyming forms. Another primary source on the works of Harichand Thakuar was Sri Sri Harililamrita (Sarkar, 1916). He wrote his book on three parts/khandas i.e. Adi Khanda (early part), Madhya Khanda (Middle part) Anta Khanda (End part). Each part is divided into various sub-parts. In this book Tarak Chandra Sarkar wrote about the various works of Harichand Thakur mainly in rhyming format.

Despite acknowledging the utmost contribution of the two books, it must be said that less discussion has been paid on the writing of Sri Bicharan Pagal on Harichand and Guruchand Thakur. Bicharan Pagal, the writer of the great book '*Shri Shri Hariguruchand Charitri Sudha*' was the father of Mahananda Biswas, one of the devotees of the Matua religion, was the contemporary of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur. In his book he mainly upholds the activities of Guruchand Thakur along with his father Harichand Thakur. He categorizes each and every stage of the life and works of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur into nine parts or Gitika. In each part he talked about the various lilas or events of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur in very lucid way. However, it is a pity that, despite the immense historical importance the book of Bicharan Pagal historians paid less importance on his writings. So, in this work the present researcher is trying to uphold the greatness and various social activities of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur and the Matua religious movement under their able leadership. As Bicharan Pagal was under the

close observation of Sri Guru Chand Thakur, this book has become a tangible document of Guru Chand Thakur's biography. Therefore, as a book, it seems to deserve considerable discussion.

Bicharan Pagal was born in Taltala, in present-day Gopalganj, Bangladesh, as the grandson of Ramnikashi Biswas. His father, Srinath Biswas, was the youngest son of Ramnikashi, and his mother, Solokamani Bala, was the daughter of Akrur Chandra Bala from Krishnapur, also in present-day Bangladesh (Pagal, 1944, p. 62). Born in the early 19th century, his exact birth date is uncertain, but his life extended into the latter half of the century. The name 'Pagal' (meaning "mad" or "eccentric") was given to him due to his intense, unorthodox spiritual practices and his passionate devotion to the Matua faith. He was known for his deep mysticism, engaging in ecstatic worship and profound spiritual experiences that led many to perceive him as eccentric or even mad (Halder, 2024). However, his behavior reflected his deep commitment to the movement's non-conformist ideals.

Through his writings Bicharan Pagal spread the greatness of Guru Chand Thakur Mainly in Barisal and its surrounding areas. Bicharan Pagal was a devoted devotee of Guru Chand Thakur. From his writings we could know that when a large number of devotees gathered at the Baruni fair, Bicharan Pagal worked there as a sanitation worker. Impressed by his service in the said mela, Guru Chand Thakur called him and asked him to write and praise his father. But Bicharan Pagal was illiterate, so when he was given the responsibility of writing, he faced a lot of ridicule, but a person named Upen Biswas, a great devotee of Guru Chand Thakur, took the responsibility of the writing on his own shoulders (Pagal, 1944). With his help, Bicharan Pagal narrated and wrote 21 books, many of which are not available today (Pagal, 1944, p. preface).

It is from the writings of Bicharan Pagal we come to know that after the death of his father Guruchand Thakur took the responsibility of upholding the socio-economic condition of the Namasudras on his own shoulders. Guru Chand Thakur realized that the development of any community is not possible without financial prosperity. But the problem that loomed large before him was that this community was backward both in education and trade. In this situation, Guru Chand Thakur himself took the initiative to spread education among the people of the Namasudra community. The realization of Guruchand Thakur about the ignorance of the Namasudra community also reflects in the writings of Maha Nanad Halder's book "Sri Sri Guru Chand Charita" (Dhar, 1987; Halder, 2023).

It is known from the writings of Bicharan Pagal that Guru Chand Thakur took a hands-on approach to uplift the Nama Shudra community by personally engaging with them in trade (Pagal, 1944). He ventured out to trade alongside them, offering guidance and teaching them the skills needed to conduct business successfully. His primary focus was on empowering the community by encouraging them to expand their trading activities, which would, in turn, help strengthen their financial independence and improve their social standing (H. Biswas & Singh, 2024). Through this practical involvement, he sought to create long-term economic stability for the Nama Shudra people.

এইজাতিনাহিজানেকরিতেবাণিজ্য। (This nation does not know how to trade).
অর্থাভাবেকোনোকিছুনাহিকরেগাহ। (In other words, nothing is acceptable without doing it.)
অতএবএজাতিকেবানিজ্যশিখাব। (Therefore, I will teach this nation how to trade.)
নৌকাবানাইয়েনিজেমহাজনহব। (I will build boats and become a moneylender myself)
(Pagal, 1944, p. 60)

Several people were particularly helpful in Guruchand Thakur's business. Among them, Mahesh Bepari, Kanai Biswas, Srinath Biswas, Sri Gurucharan Bala, Guruchand Dhali, Ramtanu, Hira, Parikshit Dhali, Jagmohan Hira, Banshi, Bajram Chowdhury, Dwithi Kanai, Yajneswar Das, Kodai Biswas Nilmani, Mahima Charan Das, Dukhram Bala (the boatman), Bhuvan Biswas, Harachandra Chowdhury, Sri Gopal Biswas and others were particularly notable (Pagal, 1944, pp. 60–61).

In his book, Bicharan Pagal not only talked about the trade of the Matuas but also mentioned what qualities they needed to have or what kind of principles or ideals they needed to follow to become an ideal merchant. It is known from Bicharan Pagal's writings (Pagal, 1944, p. 62) that-

“কাহাকেবাগুরুচাঁদদেনঅনুমতি।
(Whomever Guruchand gives permission)
বানিজ্যকরহএবেহয়েশুদ্ধমতি।।
(Do business and be pure in mind)
সচ্চরিত্রধারীহয়েহওসদাগর।
(Be a merchant of good character)
অট্টালিকাহবেতারবরেতেআমার।”
(The building will be mine on his behalf)
.....
“অপরেরধনকিছুনাকরিবেচুরি।
(Do not steal other people's wealth)
কারোসনেকভূনাহিকরবাটপারি।
(Do not cheat anyone)
শুদ্ধচিন্তেশুচিভাবেথাকিবেসতত।
(Be pure in mind and always be pure)
সত্যনিষ্ঠহয়েথাকব্যবসাতেরত।”
(Be honest in business)

After observing the progress of the Nama Shudra community in business and many people from the Nama Shudra community gained special expertise in business and emerged as established moneylenders, Guru Chand Thakur focused on increasing their social status. Among the various social activities of Guru Chand Thakur, the most notable is the struggle to establish the social respect and rights of the Matuas. 1905 AD: When the Prince of England or the wife of the Prince of Wales visited India, on that occasion, various programs were organized under the supervision of the Lat Sahebs (A top rank British Servent) in charge in different parts of India. When Guru Chand Thakur was invited to Faridpur in present-day Bangladesh for one such grand program, he demanded before the English, the establishment of their own social rights there. Bicharan Pagal mentioned in his book that, after the demise of Shri Harichand Thakur, Guru Chand Thakur became only

hope to regain our social status and respect (Pagal, 1944). On the occasion of George V's arrival in India, Guruchand himself attended the meeting held in Faridpur and with the help of Kumud Mallik a devoted, he applied to Lat Sahib for a small settlement, and the magistrates granted it (Mandal, 2022). It is known from the writings that they gained the status of Dijo Namasudras. According to him (Pagal, 1944, p. 103)–

দিজনমশূদ্রমোরাকেহনাজানিত।

(No one knew about the Dwija Nama Shudras)

হীনজাতি বলেসবেউপেক্ষাকরিত।

(They were simply ignored as inferiors)

এজাতিনমঃশূদ্রঅথবাব্রাহ্মণ।

(This caste is either a Nama Shudra or a Brahmin).

পরিচয়হলশুপ্রভুরকারণ।

(Identity is only because of the Lord).

কেহনহেজানেমোরাব্রাহ্মণনন্দন

(No one knows that we are the Brahmin, Nandan)

অজ্ঞানআঁধারেশুধুরয়েছিমগন

(We only immersed in the darkness of ignorance)

জাতিশ্বরগুরুচাঁদজাগাইলজাতি

(The God of the nation, Guru Chand, awakened the nation)

কৃপাকরিজেলেদিলজ্ঞানআলোবাতি।

(Please light the lamp of knowledge).

Mahananda Haldar in his writing told that to raise the social status of the Matuas Guruchand met with C. S Mid in Dhaka along with some of his disciples like his son Sri Sashibhusana, Purna, Chandi, Radhanath, Bhismadev, Bidhu, Tarini Charan, Jagyeshwar Biswas along with Bicharan Pagal (Haldar, 2023, p. 210). But when we go through the writing of Bicharan Pagal we come across the name of Anuruddha Kirtania who also accompanied Guruchand Thakur (Pagal, 1944, p. 103). Guruchand Thakur met Lieutenant Governor Lanslot Hair with the help of C.S. Mid and requested him to give special concession to the Namasudras in education and government service and it is through his endless effort thirty-one marginalized class of Bengal got the special privilege in Morle-Minto reform act of 1909. In 1911 A.D. the Chandals of Bengal recognized as the Namasudra Class and thus we come across the various works of Harichand and especially Guruchand Thakur from the writings of Bicharan Pagal (Mandal, 2022).

Conclusion:

This research underscores the often-overlooked yet crucial role of Bicharan Pagal in documenting the history and socio-religious reform efforts of the Matua movement. Through his book *Sri Sri Hariguruchand Charitra Sudha*, Pagal provided a contemporaneous account of the pivotal contributions of Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur in uplifting the Matua community. His writings not only preserve the legacy of their leadership but also offer a rich source for understanding the social and economic transformations instigated by the Thakurs. Despite the significance of Pagal's work, there remains a lack of scholarly attention to his contributions, a gap this study seeks to address. By revisiting Pagal's documentation, this research highlights the importance of his role in chronicling the Matua movement and emphasizes the need for greater academic

recognition of his writings. Understanding Pagal's efforts is essential to fully appreciating the social activism of the Thakurs and the enduring impact of their reform initiatives on the Matua community's identity and philosophy.

References:

1. Ahmed, A. S. (1965). *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818-1835*. Brill Archive.
2. Bandyopadhyay, S. (2023). The Invisibility of Caste in Bengal. *The Oxford Handbook of Caste*, 413.
3. Biswas, H., & Singh, G. (2024). WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THE MATUA RELIGION: THE ROLE OF GURUCHAND THAKUR. *Journal of Educare (JoE)*, 1(1). <https://educare.aliah.ac.in/public/uploads/notice/1735230226Haridas%20Biswas.pdf>
4. Biswas, J. (2023). Caste, resistance, and religion: A critical study of 'Making of Matuaism.' *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X231186262>
5. Biswas, M. (2015). De-Sanskritization and Social Mobilization: An Alternative Socio-religious Movement of 'Matua'-Namasudras of Bengal. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 76, 368-375.
6. Biswas, M. (2018). Caste and socio-cultural mobility in West Bengal: A hybrid cultural elocution of Matua reforms movement. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 10(2), 232-243.
7. Chandra, B., Mukherjee, M., Mukherjee, A., Panikkar, K. N., & Mahajan, S. (2016). *India's struggle for independence: 1857-1947* (Nachdruck). Penguin Books.
8. Dhar, P. N. (1987). Bengal renaissance: A study in social contradictions. *Social Scientist*, 26-45.
9. Halder, M. (2023). *Sri Sri Guruchand Charit*. All India Matua Mahasangha.
10. Halder, K. (2024). Matua Community in Bengal after 1990; Internal Social Structure and the Place of Them in West Bengal Politics. *Authorea Preprints*.
11. Mandal, B. (2022). *Protest, Upliftment and Identity: Rajbansis and Namasudras of Bengal 1872-1947*. Routledge.
12. Mukherjee, S. (2018). In Opposition and Allegiance to Hinduism: Exploring the Bengali Matua Hagiography of Harichand Thakur. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 41(2), 435-451.
13. Pagal, B. (1944). *Sri Sri Hariguruchand Charitri-Sudha*. New Baisakhi Printing Press.
14. Sarkar, T. C. (1916). *Sri Sri Hari Lilamrita* (শ্রীশ্রীহরিলীলামৃত). <http://archive.org/details/SriSriHariLilamrita>
15. Sinharay, P. (2015). Building up the Harichand-Guruchand movement: The politics of the Matua Mahasangha. In *The politics of caste in West Bengal* (pp. 147-168). Routledge India.