



**International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)**

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.8

Volume-XII, Issue-II, March 2026, Page No. 566-574

Published by Scholar Publications, Sribhumi, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: [10.29032/ijhsss.vol.12.issue.02W.255](https://doi.org/10.29032/ijhsss.vol.12.issue.02W.255)



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## **Matuaism: An Incomparable Educational Perspective of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur Antara Halder**

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Received: 20.03.2026; Accepted: 24.03.2026; Available online: 31.03.2026

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### **Abstract**

*During the nineteenth century of pre-independence India, undivided Bengal was heavily burdened by British rule and the well-established caste system; during that period, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur emerged to protect the lower-class Dalit, Namashudra people. He worked tirelessly to disseminate the light of education among the Dalit desolated Namashudras and the entire untouchable lower castes through the Matua religious educational movement following the instructions of his father, Sri Sri Harichand Thakur. His tireless attempts to promote education did not leave much of an impression on educational history. As a result, the researcher attempted to reveal the scholastic perspective of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur through Matuaism in the study paper. Therefore, in this study, the primary objective of the researcher is to determine the nature of Matuaism, with memoirs and educational perspectives of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur. The researcher used the literature review approach as the methodology of the study. Lastly, as a result of the investigation, the researcher has discovered that the incomparable contribution of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur in the field of education is indeed rarer than in that era.*

**Keywords:** Matuaism, Enlightenment, Chandala, Namashudra, Downtrodden, Untouchables, Unprivileged, Educational perspective, Ideologies, Social upliftment, Awareness

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### **Introduction:**

The land of India has historically always been delighted with different languages, religions, and traditional ancient cultures. Accordingly, to maintain the diversity of this country with a rich legacy, the post-independence Indian Constitution has also inserted the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity to protect all people regardless of their caste, color, or religion (Sack,1990). However, over the years, certain castes, religions, and races have succeeded in fighting to maintain their survival, while other castes and classes are on the verge of extinction. Similarly, around the middle of the nineteenth century, constantly rising untouchability, high-low distinctions, and social conflicts afflicted British Indian society. At that time, Sri Harichand Thakur, a youthful, wonderful soul who had attained enlightenment, founded the Matuaism congregation to preserve the Namasudras of uniform

Bengal (Mondal, 2022). Also, the socio-economic condition of the lower caste untouchables, especially the village people, was awful. Where upper caste Hindus treated them as if they were animals, subjecting them to horrific, barbaric torture. Another major factor was that, before British authority, the Muslims in India dominated the nation for more than eight hundred years, which caused the Hindu culture and virtues to fade to a large extent, leaving only the rule of exploitation in the community (Biswas & Kanjilal, 2017). Under such restrictive social conditions, Sri Sri Harichand Thakur was born in 1812 AD in the hamlet of Orakandi in the Faridpur region of undivided Bengal. His father and mother were Jashomanta Biswas and Annapurna Devi. He was exceptional from boyhood, as evidenced by his leadership abilities, spiritual strength, and capacity to heal maladies by touch and reciting phrases. Although his father was a devotee of the Vaishnavism sect, he could not accept pseudo-Vaishnavas from the beginning of his life, but believed in earning respect for his divine, miraculous work among the impoverished people of the lower classes. But because of his exceptional attributes, sometimes he has been considered to be another impersonation of Lord Chaitanya. Through his Matua religious organization, he mobilized an immense number of individuals to preach his message and teachings, and twelve of his devotees later took the initiative to spread his gospel among the vast population of Bengal and India (Biswas & Mandal, 2020; Biswas & Kanjilal, 2017). It is apparent from the aforementioned that Sri Sri Harichand Thakur's substantial ambition was to unify the Dalit, marginalized, destitute untouchable-Chandalas using this religion based on Matua philosophy to construct a classless, colorless society with the principles of spirituality as the main gateway to emancipation. However, when he had achieved the pinnacle of social reform in 1878, he died in Bangladesh's Faridpur area. Afterward, the eternal sleep of Sri Harichand Thakur, his son, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur, took on all of the tasks of eradicating caste prejudice, untouchability, and socioeconomic inequality and improving the lower castes.

### **Objectives of the study:**

The researcher examined the following objectives for the research study,

- To present a holistic vision of the idea of Matuaism,
- To depict the educational ideologies of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur toward the Matua community and other untouchable communities

### **Methodology of the study:**

The investigators aimed to conduct the study by collecting data using various kinds of literature reviews.

### **Matuaism:**

The class system was the most rigid concept in undivided India and continued to exist as the main gateway to satisfying the greediness of the upper classes. To preserve the ruling class's high social position in society, a class of people was classified as the lower class, untouchables, and subjected to ongoing oppression. They are also excluded from all social rights, dignity, and identity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sri Sri Harichand Thakur appeared as the sole individual in integrated India who gained consciousness about the social, economic, educational, and religious oppression associated with the underprivileged and isolated Hindus of Bengal. Instead of indulging in an overt, reckless protest, he implemented a theological reformist policy called "Matuaism" (Mondal, 2022). Since he recognized the social

conditions of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century AD and became acquainted with the fact that religious beliefs are the most delicate matter to which people are habitually over-sensitive. In contrast to the widespread Vedic principles, the Brahmanical caste and division system of Hinduism, the Matua religion arose in the community as an opposing entity. This religious sect was formed notably by Sri Sri Harichand Thakur as an initial ethic of combining 'work and religion'. Later, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur transformed the Matua Sangha into the Matua Mahasangha by adopting the ideals of power/ possibility and devotion along with 'work and religion' / 'dharma-karma', targeting the educationally deprived condition of society. The Matua Sangha launched the fight for educational rights along with social and political rights of the Chandala community through reform measures such as lower-caste women's freedom, inter-caste marriage, caste disparity, and so on (Mandal, 2021; Bala, 2013).

In East Bengal, Matuaism, as a sect of religion to safeguard Namashudra, the lower caste, ignored and despised people, grew so widespread that the Brahmanical system, which was extremely popular at the time, was outright forbidden for the Chandala group. The community of Matuas is a notably monotheistic sect known to be encouraged to practice spiritual meditation and a lifestyle of celibacy from within an honest family life. By forbidding the class structure and adhering to the doctrine of karma, the Matua religion safeguarded the self-esteem and spiritual awareness of the Chandala race. Sri Sri Hari-Guruchand Thakur, through their Matua educationally religious reformation, not only imparted learning opportunities to Namashudra people but also provided an exceptional opportunity for the entire lower-class community, including Muslims, to become educated (Pal, 2018). That apparent Matuaism ethos is a religious sect idealized by the principles of righteousness, sincerity, endearment, pureness, and equality that brought together the lower caste Chandala region of the community. Furthermore, because Matuaism, launched by Sri Hari Thakur in British India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century based on ideals of devotion, love, equality, and brotherhood regardless of caste, caste, creed, or gender, was a later part of Vaishnavism preached by Chaitanya Maha Prabhu in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, therefore the Matua community has been also regarded as new Vaishnavism (Biswas & Kanjilal, 2017; Halder, 2015). However, the main aim of the Matua religion is to teach men and women simultaneously about domestic happiness and spiritual liberation instead of devoting oneself to meaningless thoughts and being instructed to indulge oneself in work or karma until one attains a certain level of religious discipline (Biswas & Mandal, 2020).

### **Educational Ideologies of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur towards the Matua Community:**

Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur emerged as a remarkable, dedicated educationist who, through various initiatives, demonstrated his lifelong devotion to education. His ongoing attempts to enhance the standards of the education system by figuring out the challenges of contemporary society without being trapped in the conventional education system demonstrate his sincerity. Therefore, regardless of caste, religion, or class, to transmit the light of education from the Namashudra community to the whole population of Bengal, the exceptional ideologies he preached throughout the matua educational reformist movement in his entire life journey, highlighted below-

#### **Ideology of Household Education:**

Recognizing the discrimination and harshness suffered by the lower castes in participating in educational activities in undivided Bengal, which had been afflicted by the Western

culture of education under British control, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur spoke of using domestic household education as the key to spiritual and all-round development. He for the education of the oppressed also demonstrated that the guardians and sometimes in the master's should impart the experience and cultural understandings of previous generations to the children in their residence to enhance the learning experience within the household. Also, the destruction of six foes/ ripu's or the evils of spiritual life through educational practices followed by Griha dharma (Biswas & Mandal, 2020). That is illuminated in the following quotation from Acharya Mahananda Haldar's book Sri Sri Guruchand Charit,

*"Grihodharmo sresto dharmo janibe nipun, Grihodharmo moddhe roi sorbobidh gun.*

*Grihasrome bhor kori sorbojib roi, Shastrete byakhane griho sorbo tirtho moi.*

*Grihasrom rokhyo hetu kormoi prodhan, Sukorme sufol fole pape akalyan".*

(Shri Shri Guruchand Charit - pp. 46)

These phrases indicate that 'household' is the best religion and has many virtues, so in the scriptures, home is the sacred place where all people live. The 'law of karma' is the key to saving abode, and the benefit of good deeds results in evil in sins.

### **Ideology of Fraternity:**

Through the Matua educational movement, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur unified the Namashudra community of East Bengal into a single entity, in which lower-caste individuals and other impoverished members of the Bengal population stepped forward to build a classless, educated society (Walker, 2016). As a result, the religious educational movement of Matuaism unites all people, regardless of caste or religion, by the idea of brotherhood. He encouraged the fraternity to abolish caste differences in all parts of society and advised everyone to be bound by brotherly love, by the Matua religious community. As demonstrated by the following statement,

*"Manush soman sobe, bhratibhabe robe bhobe. Prem priti bhalobasa sathe.*

*Sobar sukher lagi hobe sobe anuragi, Sobar mongol hobe jate".*

(Shri Shri Guruchand Charitamrito - pp. 45)

### **Ideology of Character Development:**

The character of the people who live in society is one of the most significant forces in the quest for social transformation. A man with excellent moral character is critical in bringing about a tide of social, economic, political, and educational revolutions in response to the requirements of a changing society. In the context of character formation, Sri Sri Harichand Thakur has recommended a path to achieve holiness as a virtuous person by regulating the six wicked senses of the body. He also stated that neither travel nor pilgrimage is required to be righteous and pure, only needed to remove the taint from the mind. The evidence of this can be located through the following lines from the book Sri Sri Harililamrita, written by Tarak Chandra Sarkar,

*"Deher indriyo bos koreche je jon, Tar dorsone sob tirtho dorson" ....*

(Shri Shri Harililamrita - pp. 32)

As Sri Harichand Thakur advocated the building of divine character through the teaching of morals or values, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur said:

*"Pabitra charitro kohe mul bhitti tar, Satya bakyoy name ruchi Jan porospor."*

(Bhowmik & Maiti, - pp. 27)

Meanwhile, the basis of a person's survival throughout his life is his holy character, so he who always speaks the truth has excellent taste.

### **Ideology of Universalization in Education:**

The Dalits of East Bengal gradually became literate and politically aware only on the basis of Matua's religious educational ideals, as society has always had the conservative and cautious features of religion that bind people together (Walker, 2016). Although Sri Harichand Thakur initiated the sect of Matuaism, it was Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur who built the Matua sect based upon universality against Brahmanism's orthodoxy. Where everyone, regardless of caste, religion, or class, relishes equal educational rights.

No matter how many people there are in the world, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur will always recognize them as 'One Nation,' and all admirers of the Matuaism sect, Namshudra, Teli, Mali, Brahmin Kayastha, Islam, and Vaidya are all members of one caste. It is also said that love for humanity is the main human religion above all religions. In the Matua community, irrespective of caste or religion, men and women are all known as the 'Matua' race, and all have equal status and rights, where no one is singled out; even Muslims can participate in educational activities there (Halder, 2016).

### **Ideology of Gender Equality:**

Women are encountered as the gates of hell in Manu Samhita; such highly hateful, inhumane, terrible, and insulting remarks are widespread in society. At that time, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur stood up against the patriarchal social system and came forward to give equal rights to men and women. He provided clear and concise commentary on women's rights and the relationship between men and women in an ideal domestic life, where women were not treated merely as instruments of procreation but as the driving force behind any optimal domestic life (Kabiraj, 2021).

Therefore, he acknowledged men and women as equal members of society and gave the message of gender equality through the philosophy of Matua. For this, he claims that education is the only way for people to control men's selfishness, self-centeredness, absolute power, and aggressive dominance in society and culture. Subsequently, he directed the establishment of a balanced lifestyle in domestic life as well as women's social life at par with men's. He ensured the equal participation of both men and women through the Matua religious-educational movement in a patriarchal society and culture (Halder, 2016; Halder, 2019)

### **Ideology of Religious Education:**

Propagation of education through any religious ceremony is the mainstay of Matuaism, an educational religion introduced by Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and fostered by his son Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur. They considered Karma as the main religion in Matuaism, based on equality and humanity as the key to the emancipation of the untouchables. Through this educational religious movement, on the one hand, the basis of the fight against the deprivation and discrimination of the lower castes was formed, and on the other hand, it gave instructions to adopt the path of devotion, religious thought, and action against desire, anger, greed, and lust for the spiritual development of people (Thakur, 2009).

Furthermore, author Suranjan Halder demonstrated throughout his book Sri Sri Guruchand Charitamrita that one would never absolutely acquire religious qualities or values by pilgrimage; instead, one attains true religion by achieving a pure heart through

virtuous behavior and activities while sitting at home. It has also claimed to always emphasize the well-being of every individual by being delighted for everyone's happiness, to devote to varied actions for the benefit of others, and to practice humanity as a daily religion. Humanism has historically been considered to be a universal virtue (Halder, 2016).

### **Ideology of Societal Harmony:**

When the colonial Indian society was heavily afflicted by the rigid caste system and socio-religious organization, it was the efforts of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur that the sub-caste of Namasudras came together into a united Matua community. Through Matuaism, he established Pathshalas in every village for Namasudras and other lower castes to raise social awareness, and for social harmony, he rejected all Brahmanical rituals, customs, Brahmin priests, and Vedic scriptures (Biswas, 2018). As a pioneer of traditional social education, he brought societal enlightenment against subsistent caste stereotypes throughout society. To create social progress by integrating conventional and social education, he delivers the message of learning to survive and earn a decent livelihood. Furthermore, in order to bring about societal consciousness, he fought against social injustices like the dowry system and child marriage (Halder, 2016). Meanwhile, as a consequence of the Matua Silent Revolution, begun by the efforts of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur, the Matua-Namasudras created a cohesive society and dedicated themselves to social literacy.

### **Ideology of Political Awareness:**

Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur encountered politics as the most revolutionary strategy for moving society ahead by advancing humanity and achieving equitable rights. He also stated that politics is necessary for fighting injustice in numerous fields, including education, society, health, and economics (Halder, 2016). Evidence of this is found in the following quotation,

*"Raj-sokti jar roi, sobe tar podashroi, Sei bole hinojon kotoi probol".*

(Shri Shri Guruchand Charit - pp. 124)

In simple terms, countless weak individuals in society have grown extremely powerful due to political authority, so those who have royal power seek safety in them.

*"Raj-sokti bina somaj jage na, Bohut promane pai.*

*Raj-sokti dhore, a bhobo songsare Uccho pode otha chai".*

(Shri Shri Guruchand Charit - pp. 131)

Meanwhile, it is impossible to revive any civilization without political power, so to take the society closer to the epitome of development, he gave the message to rise to high positions by any means.

Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur firmly realized that political consciousness is necessary for the progress of the Chandals as well as the entire human race, so he gave instructions to acquire political power through political education (Walker, 2016). He also emphasized political empowerment through depending on education, just as there is no need to fear anybody or beg at anyone's door if education exists there.

### **Ideology of Health and Hygiene:**

The ideas on the cleanliness of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur are expressed in the following words in the book of Sri Sri Guruchand Charit written by Acharya Mahananda Halder.

*"Noro naari pratosnan obossyo koribe, Deho suddhi chitto suddhi sokoli asibe.*

*Norgone Gurujone koribe pronam, Kon fol prapti nahi guru hole bam.*

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*Snan dane Souchachare susobhyo hoibe, Apabitra bhabe keho kobhu na cholibe.*  
*Rastaghat paikhana kor bondobosto, A sob jinish kintu lagibe prososhto" ...*  
(Shri Shri Guruchand Charit - pp. 569)

Meanwhile, to keep the body and mind clean without any impure behavior, men and women should bathe in the morning and bow down to their elders because no good results are possible to attain without the felicity of parents.

Since the Namashudra and other lower-class communities were treated as untouchables as a caste system prevalent in the society of the time, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur in the nineteenth century advocated the improvement of general hygiene through good manners, rules, and practices to bring about physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being. Because good appearance plays the role of attractiveness, likewise an adequate health and cleanliness regime has the potential to improve one's quality of life.

### **Ideology of Reservation:**

In the middle of the 19th century, Christian missionaries and Sri Guru Thakur, through their combined efforts, achieved the word 'Namashudra' by replacing the Chandal slang in the census book. At that time, to further uplift the Namashudra society, the visionary and futurist great man Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur propagated the ideology of reservation for underdeveloped Bengal province based on their majority in administration and government jobs and opportunities in public representation. In 1909 A.D., a list of reserved castes was drawn up with the first 31 sects from East Bengal, inspired solely by Sri Guruchand Thakur as a result of the Matua educational movement of the backward group (Kabiraj, 2021).

Before that, with tremendous justification and dedication, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur began seeking proportionate representation in all departments for the young of the newly educated class in the administrative apparatus. For this work, in 1906, he also started running a magazine named 'Namashudra Suhrid' (Biswas, 2020). In the decade of the mid-19th century, each of the developments, as well as the movements, took place only in a high upper-class society and there existed no room for the Untouchable Chandala community. Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur was the first and foremost philanthropist who raised his voice for reservation in every segment of society through his Matuaism sect.

### **Relevance of this Study in Contemporary Society:**

Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur worked tirelessly to disseminate education among people of all castes by creating several schools, holding many gatherings, publishing newspapers and journals, and by devotees and followers of the Matua ideology. Among the Dalits and lower caste people, those opportunities are seen as a boon. He rescued the untouchable, ignorant, neglected, and downtrodden people from the darkness and opened the gateway to the light of education. The present and future society must be aware of his educational contribution because history exposes people to the past, eradicates the crisis of the individual's existence, and gives guidance in the direction of living a beautiful and eventful life in the future. Moreover,

- To be aware of the miserable condition of the untouchables, downtrodden labeled as the Chandala community, deprived of education as well as socio-economic opportunities in many sectors of society.

- The present study helps to explore a grand narrative of the struggle for the rights of the Matua community, known as the underprivileged Chandalas of Bengal, which has not existed in history.

### **Conclusion:**

This study demonstrates that many unacknowledged truths about educational ideals of Matuaism from ancient times have failed to find their way into the pages of history. The significant accomplishment of the great compassionate social activist Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur could not occupy such a prominent place in the Indian historical pages as the immense number of milestones captured by the other reformers, Raja Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar, Gandhiji, B. R. Ambedkar, and others had. The number of research investigations on the significant contributions made by Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur and his father, Sri Sri Harichand Thakur, for the educational developments of Dalits is scanty, so the researcher has attempted to bring the main issues to the fore through this study.

Therefore, it is clear from the study that Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur, inspired by the ideals of his father Sri Sri Harichand Thakur, throughout the nineteenth century made an indelible contribution to the education and upliftment of life for the Dalits and the entire human society through his philosophy of Matuaism. Not only as a social and religious reformer, but the radical changes he brought about in the field of education by vehemently protesting the oppression of upper castes and the age-old practice of being deprived of education only because they were Chandalas or Dalits have also earned him a place in history as an educational reformer. Therefore, the researcher of this study is hopeful that this research work will add some fuel to the immense contributions of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur, who also has a place in history as an educational reformer.

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