



The effect of active politics on Matuaism

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Abstract

The relationship between politics and religion is reciprocal. Politics influences religion, and religion impacts politics. In fact, politics has an influence on every walk of life. Matuaism is not only a religion but also a community and a movement. It is a Protestant faith in opposition to the Vedic religion, a social movement against hierarchical society, and a political movement in favour of the rights of the oppressed class, particularly the Namasudras. Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur, in their respective times, inspired the Matuas to participate in politics. Without political power, a community cannot secure its rights. As a result, Orakandi in Bangladesh and Thakurnagar in West Bengal became holy religious places. Numerous social movements and political activities have taken place in these places. However, Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur did not engage in politics in any sense. They never raised their voices for their rights through politics. They always sought their rights through simple requests and protests, without directly joining or creating a political party for the Matua community. They used religion to support social movements and politics. However, after their deaths, their followers and descendants joined politics and formed opposing groups within the Matua community. The Thakur family of Thakurnagar has split into two groups. One group, led by Santanu Thakur, supports the BJP, whereas the other group, led by Mamata Thakur, supports the TMC. The differences have sometimes led to division among people who belong to Matua sects. When family members of the Matua sect take part in direct politics, it leads to division among people who belong to Matua sects, which also affects the spiritual aspect of Matuaism.

Keywords: Matua, Active politics, religious aspect, West Bengal, Harichand, Guruchand

Introduction:

Aristotle sees politics as the “master science.” “Man is by nature a political animal,” according to him. It means politics encompasses the state, the family and social groups to create a good society. Thus, for Aristotle, politics encompasses every feature of an individual’s life. D. B. Easton defines politics as “the authoritative allocation of values” for a society. Hence, we can conclude that politics encompasses every aspect of an individual’s life. Politics does determine religion because it influences society. Just as religion influences politics, politics influences religion too. Politics also determines caste, just as caste determines politics. Matuaism was established by Harichand Thakur (1812-1878), and thereafter, his son Guruchand Thakur (1846-1937) established the Matua religion as a protest against the Brahmanical social order and Vedic religion.

Most of the Matuas are Namasudras, mainly living in the districts of Faridpur, Barishal,

Jessore and Khulna in East Bengal. They shifted to West Bengal after Partition due to religious persecution. After that, they occupied various parts of West Bengal and India, mainly Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Malda, Jalpaiguri, etc. However, people in Faridpur residing in Orakandi and people living in West Bengal residing in Thakurnagar are best known for their work. These two regions are considered holy by the Matuas, and they visit these places for their well-being. Harichand Thakur was the one who founded Matua Dharma. He was a protester against the Vedic religion, which mistreated and insulted people belonging to the lower sections of society. He criticised Vaishnavism for ignoring family life and for being a hypocritical religion. He also criticised Buddhism for considering Brahmins the highest class and for its complicated moral ideology (Halder, Mahananda, p. 22). Harichand Thakur gave importance to family life, as expressed in the saying, 'Hate kam mukhe nam.' He asked his followers to chant the name of 'Hari' while working. Matuaism favours an egalitarian society. Guruchand Thakur gave importance to education for people of the lower castes in Bengal. He opened over two thousand schools and spread education among the Namasudras and people of other lower classes (Pal, Krishnendu, p. According to the teachings propagated by my father, Matuaism encompasses the social, religious and political aspects of life. He always encouraged the Matuas to be socially and politically active. He used to say, "Je jatir raja nei sei jati taja nei," which means that a community without a king has no leader. He also said, "Je jatir dal nei se jatir bal nei," which means that a community that does not form a party has no strength. However, he never joined any political party. In the Vatican, the Matuas have installed a statue of Jesus, who is considered to be God. Mead received some justice from the British authorities. We are going to deal with this history later in this post. He didn't align himself with left- or right-wing ideologies. After his death, his descendants became involved in politics. The Thakur family's descendants are active in politics in Bangladesh. Pramatha Ranjan Thakur was elected to the Constituent Assembly with Congress's support. He joined the Indian National Congress. He and his descendants also joined the TMC and BJP. This has caused a rift in the Thakur family and among the political parties. In the meantime, the Matua community has split into three groups. One supports Sansantu Thakur and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), while another supports Mamata Tagore and the All-India Trinamool Congress (TMC). The third group does not support either Thakur. They choose the parties they want to support them politically.

It is essential to manage Matuaism, which includes the social, religious, and political forms of the Matua people. The three areas of Matuaism need to be managed correctly to support the Matuas properly. The social form of Matuaism mainly includes the Matua family. These areas include: Socially – The Matua family advocates the educational upliftment of Matuas, anti-caste assertion, and the economic development of Matuas. Religiously– The spiritual needs of the Matuas need to be met. Brahminical religious culture should be demolished. Politically – The Thakur family needs to propagate the ideologies of Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur. This family also tries to uplift lower-caste people. Paradoxically, the Thakur family has joined parties that are against their ideology and Matuaism. The Matua family is giving more attention to their political activities than to the religious side of their beliefs, which has caused considerable problems in the social and religious fields of Matuaism. How this engagement in politics affects the spiritual side of Matuaism will be the focus of the current study.

Review of Related Literature:

The literature review is a summary of the current writings on the dissertation topic that helps forthcoming researchers understand the broader debate on the theme and identify the research gap. It provides insight into the previous work of scholars. The researcher has consulted a few historical books related to the castes, religion and politics of Bengal. The researcher has also consulted many articles, journals and government documents. In this context, a few essential books and journals may be mentioned: (i) Sarkar, Tarak Chandra, *Sri Harileelamrita* (1916); (ii) Halder, Acharya Mahananda, *Guruchand Charita* (2009); and (iii) Bandyopadhyaya, Sekhar, *Caste Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872–1947* (first published in 1997 by Curzon Press). The following are the books and journals by authors I have gone through: Bipul Kumar (2016), **Namasudrer Itihas**; Kapil Krishna Thakur, **Matua Andolan O Banglar Anunnata Samaj**; and Swapan Kumar Iswas, **Hari-Guruchand**. Some of the other authors are Praskanva Sinharay, Dr. Sanchita Ray, Carola Erika Lorea, Rajat Roy, Prodip Mandal, Kanu Halder, Jyoti Biswas, Dr. Tejen Mandal, Pinkan Biswas, Dr. Milan Mandal, Arpita Pandey, Krishnendu Pal, Dr. Sujit Mondal, Quazi Nurul Hamim, Swati Sengupta Chatterjee, and Manosanta Biswas. The above authors have shown the social, religious, and political movements of the Matuas. They did not just depict the life histories, philosophies, and social, religious, and political movements of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur in depth. No significant new construction has been observed to describe the influence of the active involvement of the members of the Thakur family in the religious aspects of Matuaism.

Research Gap:

Many works have been done on the Matua community. The existing literature illustrates the socio-religious movement led by Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur, mobilisation based on the caste system, the political identity of refugees, and the political importance of the Matua community in West Bengal. Moreover, studies show the importance of the Matua Mahasangha in electoral politics and the increasing involvement of political parties with the Matua vote bank. However, research has mostly focused on historical development, social reform, caste identity, and political mobilisation.

Limited research has been conducted on the political impact of proselytizers on Matua unity, worship and religion. The active involvement of Thakur's family members in a political party during the election had no negative impact on the harmony and religious practices of the Matuas. Secondly, no study has been conducted on the perceptions of general Matua devotees regarding the political and religious orientation of the Matuas. This study aims to bridge this gap in the literature by examining how active political engagement impacts the religious aspect of Matuaism and how political divisions within the Thakur family impact the unity, religious consciousness, and spiritual experiences of Matua devotees.

Objective:

- To examine the historical relationship between politics and the Matua movement in Bengal.
- To analyse the extent of political participation by members of the Thakur family and its implications for the Matua community.
- To investigate the perceptions of Matua devotees regarding the impact of active politics on religious identity and spiritual unity.

- To assess whether political divisions within the Thakur family contribute to fragmentation within the Matua community.
- To evaluate the effects of active political involvement on religious activities, institutions, and spiritual guidance within Matuaism.
- To suggest policy and community-based measures for preserving religious cohesion while maintaining political representation of the Matua community

Research Questions:

RQ1. How has politics historically influenced the development of the Matua movement in Bengal?

RQ2. What are the implications of the active political participation of the Thakur family for the Matua community?

RQ3. How do Matua devotees perceive the impact of active politics on religious identity and spiritual unity?

RQ4. To what extent do political divisions within the Thakur family contribute to fragmentation among Matua followers?

RQ5. How does active political involvement affect religious institutions, spiritual guidance, and religious activities within Matuaism?

RQ6. What measures can be adopted to balance political participation and religious cohesion within the Matua community?

Research Methodology:

The latest research has a descriptive and analytical design that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods. Information from primary and secondary sources contributed to this research. The necessary information was collected from Matua people through structured interviews, surveys, and participant observation. Simultaneously, in the secondary research, information was extracted from books, articles, national reports, census records, newspapers, and other published files on Matua history, religion, and politics.

To select respondents with adequate knowledge of Matua religious and political affairs, a purposive sampling technique was employed. The sample includes 100 respondents who are inhabitants of Matua-dense areas of Nadia and North 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal. Among them, 40 are religious functionaries (Dalpatis, Gosais and Pagols), 40 are educated Matua devotees, and 20 are actively involved in politics.

The recorded information was classified, tabulated and analysed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistical tools, including frequency distributions, percentages and graphical representations, were used to interpret and analyse the quantitative data. The qualitative responses from the personal interviews and observations were analysed thematically to identify the major patterns, perceptions and experiences of the impacts of active politics on the religious dimensions of Matuaism.

Guided by truth and fairness, the study consisted of voluntary participation and informed consent. Through confidentiality and anonymity towards the surveyors throughout the study, the process was maintained.

Political History of The Matuas:

Most religions became popular and were spread under the protection of kings and influential people. Emperor Ashoka patronized Buddhism. In India, Muslims introduced

Islam. The Matua sect of Hinduism emerged from the lower castes. The political atmosphere of India during the pre-independence period was not like that of the post-independence period.

Before India was declared a free country, ultimate power rested with the British rulers. Zamindars were representatives of the British rulers and friends of the upper-caste people. Due to the domination of the upper caste and the other evil deeds of upper-caste people, lower-caste society was downtrodden. As members of the lower-caste Matua society of East Bengal, they did not have any faith in upper-caste-dominated organizations, such as the Indian National Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. Also, as European society was more egalitarian than Indian society, they tried to approach the European rulers to get their minimum demands fulfilled. The first mass protest movement organized by Harichand Thakur was his march to the Jonasur Nilkuthi. The Naeb and some people of Padmabila did not like the religious activities of Harichand Thakur and Dasarath Biswas and considered them immoral. Women were not permitted to take part in religious activities. When Dasarath was fined 10 rupees and caned with a shoe by the Naeb, he could not accept the fine and took the matter to court. Dasarath challenged the fine and either brought the person responsible to court or paid 20 rupees and supported their religious rights. As a result, the Naeb and others lodged a complaint with the Jonasur Nilkuthi and arranged a meeting with Dirk Saheb. Harichand Thakur, who took a group of around 200 people with him, intervened between 1837 and 1850, causing the Jonasur people to approach Dirk Saheb. Harichand Thakur's followers approached Dirk Saheb of Jonasur, and Saheb was not rude to Harichand Thakur (Sarkar, Tarak, pp. 111-116). This was the first political movement of the Matuas in pursuit of their identity and the right to practise their religion. Guruchand Thakur earned a reputation worthy of the son of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur. Throughout his life, he tried to put his father's ideology and ideals into practice. In 1872, the first census was held in India. The Namasudras were listed as Chandals by the census authorities (Roy, Sanchita, 2019). They felt insulted by this designation, which was imposed on the Namasudra and Matua communities. In 1873, the Chandals of Bengal socially boycotted the people of the upper castes to protest their suppression and exploitation. They decided not to serve any upper-caste people unless their social status was recognized (Biswas, A.K., 2016). Guruchand Thakur wanted to stop the debasement, humiliation and excesses inflicted by upper-caste Hindus on low-caste Hindus and people from lower castes. To organise this community, he organised the "All-Bangabashi Namasudra Conference" at the house of Dattadanga in the Khulna district in 1882. The conference was headed by Guruchand Thakur himself. They formulated many rules for the organisation. In 1906, Dr C. S. Mead visited Orakandi to preach Christianity. Guruchand Thakur received direct help from Mead Saheb. Mead Saheb helped Guruchand Thakur meet Sir Lancelot Hare, the Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam. Guruchand Thakur acquired special favours in matters of jobs and education from Sir Lancelot for his community (Mandal, Pradip, 2023). This EduRev content is from the "Gurudev Tagore: The Greatest Man of the World" Notes & Videos section. Guru Chand was an industrious, patriotic and kind-hearted man. In 1908, at Guruchand's request, Dr C.S. Mead set up an English-medium high school at Orakandhi. Guru Chand Thakur declined Sir Surendranath Banerjee's offer to join the Swadeshi and Boycott movements against Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal in 1905. He opined that these movements were a luxury for the people

of his community and that they would gain nothing from them. Dr C.S. He had their community termed Namasudra instead of Chandal in the census report. In 1920, Gandhiji requested Guruchand Thakur to join the Non-Cooperation Movement through Chittaranjan Das. He refused to join it because Guruchand Thakur believed that they were deprived of education and equal social status and were economically backward, so there was no point in joining the Non-Cooperation Movement. Guruchand Thakur fought against the zamindars in 1921 for exploiting the farmers, which later led to the Tebhaga Movement. He formed the Namasudra Development Association and asked them to establish such an association in every village.

Guruchand Thakur emphasised that the Namasudras could never hope to gain power. He urged other lower-caste communities to join politics unitedly. In the 1937 Bengal Assembly election, 12 Namasudras were elected from the 30 reserved seats. Of these 12, 10 were followers of Guruchand Thakur, who won the election as an independent candidate. The remaining two were from Congress. Guruchand Thakur never involved himself in partisan politics. He believed that the upper castes dominated Congress and other political parties. They would never bother to uplift the lower classes. But Pramatha Ranjan Thakur, the grandson of Guruchand Thakur, was gradually leaning towards the Indian National Congress. Shree P. N. B. Thakur set up the Bengal branch of the BC League in 1928. He formed the party as a political opponent to the Bengal Provincial Scheduled Caste Federation, which was formed by Jogendranath Mandal. The Thakur association was affiliated with the Indian National Congress. He felt that Muslims and Dalits had different interests. He was more insightful than Jogendranath in this matter. Thakur knew that religion was stronger than caste for individuals as a marker of identity. This was evident during the Partition. Sharana Muslims made many Dalits homeless in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) because of their religion. The politics of the different castes weakened, and Dalits turned towards Hindutva. As a result, Thakur became a member of the provincial assembly of Bengal in 1937 and 1946 as an independent candidate. Through his speeches, he became a milestone for the depressed classes. He and his followers were elected from a Bengal constituency to the Constituent Assembly in 1946. He was supported by Congress. The speaker raised his voice against untouchability and in support of the rights of depressed-class people. After the independence of India, he left East Pakistan and settled in Thakurnagar, West Bengal, India. Thakur was selected as a Scheduled Caste candidate representing the Congress, alongside Smarajit Bandyopadhyay, from the Haringhata Assembly Constituency in 1957. He was also elected as a member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly from the Hanskhali Assembly Constituency in 1962. He served as the Minister of State in the Tribal Welfare Department from 1962 to 1963. He first began speaking up for the refugees coming from East Pakistan and demanded that they should be given a proper place for rehabilitation. He furthermore secured a berth in the Lok Sabha from the Nabadwip constituency in 1967 on a Congress ticket. But he had also realised that he would not receive a warm welcome from the high-caste-ridden political party. As a result, he began withdrawing from active politics. Later, he became involved in social service. Argala Thakur and a few associates founded the Matua Mahasangha in 1988. Pramatha Ranjan Thakur's wife, Binapati Devi, or Baro Ma, was not involved in organised politics and fought for the unconditional citizenship of refugees and Matuas. A dharna was organised at Metro Channel, Kolkata, in 2010 against the Citizenship Act of 2003, which

denied citizenship to refugees and Matuas. All the parties attended this gathering. The president of the Matua Mahasangha, Binapani Devi, arranged the historic event. But last year, on 21 September, the Left Front Government introduced the Hari Guruchand Award for the first time, which was given to Kapil Krishna Thakur. The Matua matriarch, Binapani Devi, appointed Mamata Banerjee as the chief patron of the Matua Mahasangha on 14 April 2010. At Thakurnagar railway station, she also modernised the station. She promised to extend railway facilities to the Matua community. The differences within the Thakur family came out into the open for the first time then. The then Left Front government had given 20 cottahs of land in Rajarhat-New Town for the construction of the Harichand-Guruchand Research Foundation.

A large gathering of Matua people took place at Rajarhat New Town to see the land in the presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. That day was 2 February 2011. Although Binapani Devi and Manjul Krishna Thakur were not present that day, Manjul Krishna Thakur was elected as an MLA from Gaighata in 2011 on a TMC ticket and is the son of Binapani Devi. He was also the Minister of State with independent charge of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation, and the minister in charge of Textiles and Micro and Small-Scale Enterprises in the Government of West Bengal. An unpleasant situation arose from Manjul Krishna Thakur's decision to quit as a minister and as a member of the assembly. His brother's death quickened Thakur's entry into the political field, but then he too died. Location-specific Lok Sabha constituency: Bongaon. Location-specific: Bongaon (Mother Teresa Lok Sabha constituency). Subrata Thakur Kallobaito. The disturbances in the family had political repercussions in 2015, when Mamata Thakur contested for the TMC and won the Bongaon by-election, which had earlier been held by her husband, Manjul Krishna Thakur, as a TMC candidate in the 2014 general election. In 2019, the rift between the two parties in the Thakur family deepened. The Lok Sabha election also contributed to this. The BJP had promised that it would provide citizenship to the Matuas and the refugees. In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Thakurnagar and received the blessings of Baro Ma Binapani Devi, and he was joined by a large gathering. To campaign for the Lok Sabha election, Amit Shah also visited Thakurnagar. After that, Narendra Modi visited Orakandi, Bangladesh, the birthplace of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur. The BJP succeeded in drawing the Matua vote bank to itself. The BJP won the 2019 Lok Sabha election in Bongaon through Shantanu Thakur, defeating the TMC candidate. Subrata Thakur was elected an MLA from the Gaighata Assembly constituency in 2011 after joining the BJP. Santanu was made Union Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways after a Union Cabinet reshuffle on 7 July 2021. To increase the TMC faction's influence in Thakur Bari, Mamata Thakur was nominated by the TMC to join the Rajya Sabha in 2024. Also, in 2024, Madhuparna Thakur was elected an MLA in a by-election from the Bagdah constituency. In Bangladesh, the Thakur family has also been active in politics. Sri Shachipati Thakur, the great-grandson of Guru Chanda Thakur, was elected a Member of Parliament (MP) of the then East Pakistan Provincial Assembly in the 1964 election for Gopalganj. Subrato Thakur, the elder son of Himanshu Thakur, was elected chairman of the Orakandi Union Council in Gopalganj in 2003 and later elected vice-chairman of the Kashiani Upazila Parishad in 2009.

Effects Of Politics on Matua Religion:

To understand the implications of the Matua religion, one must first understand the political

history of the Matuas. It has been well described by the research above. As depicted by the same researcher, Matuaism is a religious, social and political movement. The integrity of the Matua community does not depend on any political party or political norms. Harichand and Guruchand Thakur were never politically biased. They organised the Matuas (Bandhgr) to build pressure on the rulers in order to uplift the Matuas and Namasudras. Pramatha Ranjan Thakur was involved in party politics but brought the entire Matua community under his banner. Kapil Krishna Thakur was never very serious about mainstream politics. By the end of his life, Pramatha Ranjan Thakur had again lost faith in party politics and dedicated himself to social work. Baroma Binapani Devi was a great follower of Pramatha Ranjan Thakur. Her name was synonymous with Babima. Baroma Binapani Devi agreed with Mamata Banerjee but never took any immediate position in any political party. Mamata Banerjee was confirmed as the Chief Patron of the Mahasangha. Narendra Modi had once visited Thakurnagar. On that day, Narendra Modi was blessed by Baroma Binapani Devi. Binapani Devi never expressed her interest in any political party. The unity within the Thakur family was completely ruined after Thakur's death in 2014. There is now a division between the TMC and BJP within the family. Following this division, the Matuas have split into three groups. One consists of the followers of Shantanu Thakur and the BJP, another consists of the followers of Mamata Thakur and the TMC, and the third group has distanced itself from Thakur Bari because of its divisions and active involvement in politics. They believe that the Thakur family has joined the race for power with upper-caste-dominated political parties, which goes against the ideology of the Matuas and the interests of downtrodden people. Their actions today support the formation of a new organization based on the ideologies of Harichand Thakur, Guruchand Thakur and Ambedkar. The Thakur family's active participation in politics is largely undermining the Matua community. Any religion exists because its followers keep it alive. According to the believers surveyed, the author tries to find out the present condition of the Matua religion. The sample survey indicates that the Matuas dislike the Thakur Family's active politics. Do you like the fact that the Thakur Family is actively involved in politics? This question was asked to the Matuas.

The result is displayed below in Figure 1.

Figure 1

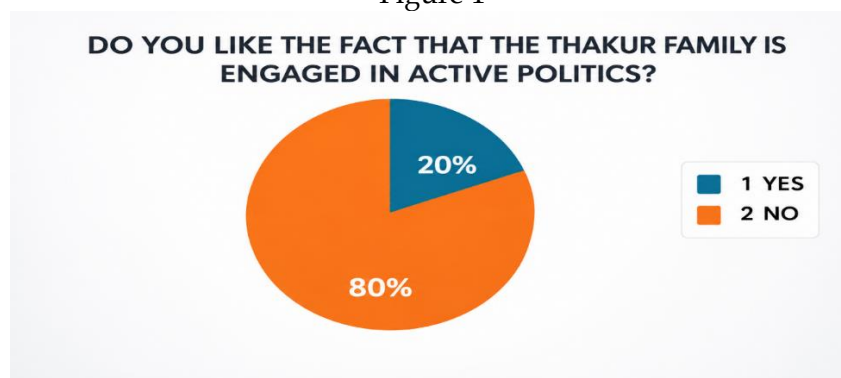


Figure 1 shows the liking of the Thakur family in active politics. Most respondents believe that, due to the Thakur Family's active politics, the Matua community is gradually being fragmented, which adversely affects the Matua's religious identity. Do you think the active involvement of the Matua family in politics severely

undermines the religious aspect of Matuaism? This question was asked of the respondents. The result is displayed below.

Figure 2:

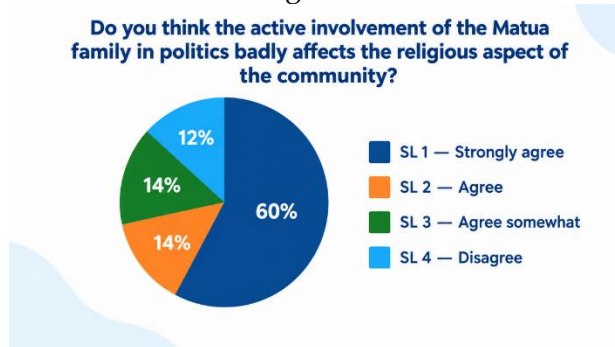


Figure 2 indicates the opinion of the Matuas about the effect of active involvement of the Thakur Family in politics on the religious aspects of the Matua community.

This indicates that the Matuas believe the active politics of the Matua family and its subsequent rift within the family are weakening their religion.

Figure 3

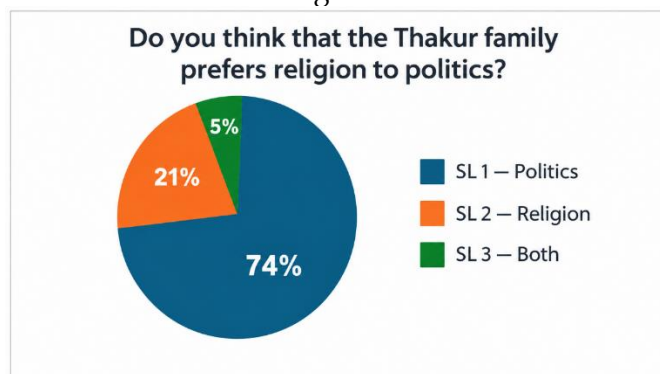


Figure 3 indicates the opinion of the Matuas on whether the Thakur family prefers politics to religion.

This chart indicates Matuas' perception that the Thakur family is now heavily involved in politics, neglecting their religious responsibilities. As Matuas are united around religion, they are concerned about maintaining their religious integrity.

Proper maintenance and operation of religious, social, and political aspects are required in Matuaism, a religious, social, and political movement. All religious institutions carry out various charitable works. Some run free medical clinics, some free schools, and some free colleges. But the author does not find these things happening here. Most religious organizations do not engage in active politics, and their religious work is well done. They make their religious institutions attractive by building temples, parks, religious museums, and hotels, as well as food courts for tourists. There are no such activities here. Followers of every religious faith come to this principal center to obtain spiritual joy and discover a spiritual guru through their religious ideology. However, inadequate spiritual assistance is provided here. Do you have any such advice from the Thakur family? This question is therefore confined to the responses obtained from the respondents. The results are displayed below

Figure 4

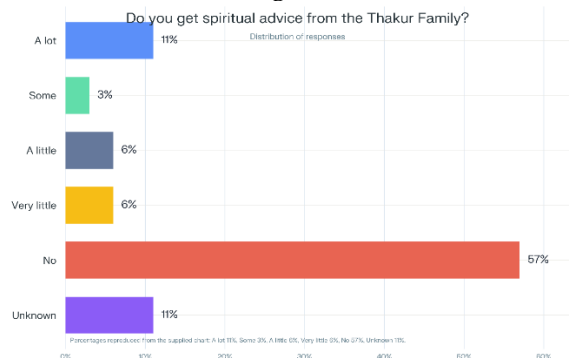


Figure 4 shows whether the Matua devotees get spiritual advice from the Thakur Family

Several respondents gave a negative response in this regard. Nine out of the 35 respondents replied that they received very little spiritual advice, three replied that they received little spiritual advice, and four replied that they did not know. Matuas are dissatisfied with the religious activities of the Thakur family. According to the Matuas, the Thakur family is more interested in politics and is neglecting its religious activities.

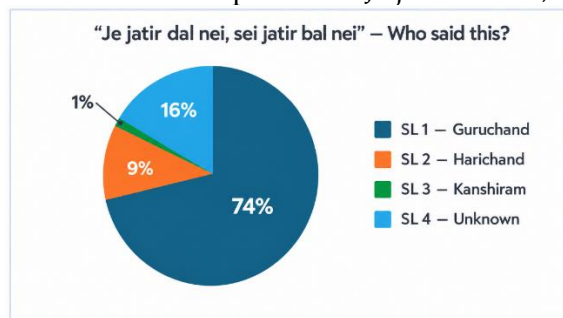
Most of Guruchand Thakur's political ideology is understood by the Matua people, although they feel quite the opposite about Thakur's family.

Who said, "Je jatir dal nei, sei jatir bal nei"?

They put this question to the people surveyed. The outcomes and data are given in chart 5.

Chart -5

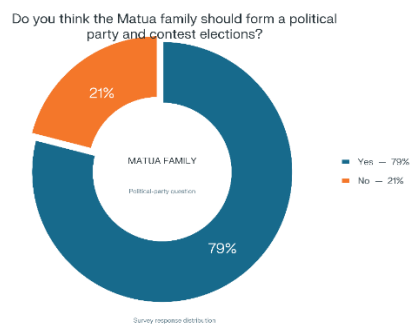
Chart 5 shows the answers to the question: "Je jatir dal nei, sei jatir bal nei"?



Correct Answer known to Respondents is 74%. More or less, respondents know the political ideology of Guruchand Thakur. Thakur encouraged his followers to form a party (Dal). But paradoxically, 80% of the respondents dislike the Thakur family's involvement in active politics. He told them to be the raja, not slaves to an upper-caste-dominated political party. This participation defies the Harichand–Guruchand Thakur ideology. They also feel that this political participation has weakened their religious unity. Are the Matuas against active politics? The answer is no.

Do you think the Matua family should form a political party and contest elections? This question was put to the respondents.

Chart: 6

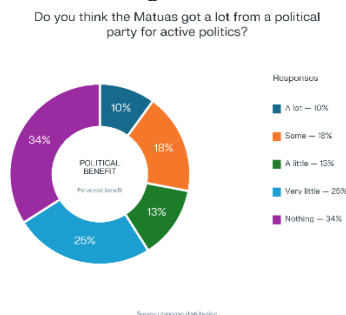


The chart 6 indicates the opinions of the Matuas regarding establishment of own political party.

The question of whether it is practical for the Thakur Family to form a political party remains open. However, 79% of respondents support the formation of a Matua political party. Many of them are aware that numerous Matua candidates won elections as independents before independence. A significant number of Matuas believe that, by uniting with upper-caste-dominated political parties, the Matua community has gained very little from such alliances.

Do you think the Matuas received a lot from the political party for active politics? This question was put to the respondents. The result is below.

Figure 7:



The chart shows the response to the question: Do you think the Matuas received a lot from the political party for active politics?

A large number of Matuas are not satisfied with what they have received from the political party or the government. Some are somewhat satisfied. They believe that what they gained from the political party is less than the harm caused to their religion by their involvement in active partisan politics.

Conclusion:

Religion shifts shape to fit new situations and the changing environment of a society. With the rise of religious tourism, the main Matua religious center needs to be developed to meet the demands of tourism. Because the Matua family is busy with personal matters, they are not interested. They should spend more time nourishing the souls of Matua devotees. The religion of the Matua is the main cementing force of Matua society. Political leaders often engage in petty politics and rivalry among themselves, neglecting their religious responsibilities. So, if they are incapable of properly addressing religious issues, the unity among the Matuas is seriously hampered and disrupted, causing the Matuas to become

politically unimportant. However, what did the Matuas get from the political party? This is the most critical question. The Matuas did receive some benefits. The political party established a university in the name of Harichand-Guruchand, P. R. Thakur Government College, a holiday on the birthday of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur, the Matua Welfare Board, the Namasudra Welfare Board, and carried out some development work in Thakurnagar under the TMC-led government.

The BJP-led Centre passed the CAA in 2019. Still, there have been debates about it. The refugees from Bangladesh who are coming into India now have been reassured by Home Minister Amit Shah that they are safe in India. They will not be sent back until 2024. But people from the Matua community are dissatisfied. Almost all Matuas are refugees from Bangladesh. The Indian government did not provide them with well-structured rehabilitation. Only a few have received support. They had to struggle and fight for their livelihoods again. Even if a particular number of Matuas got jobs from the government due to the reservation policy, in reality, a large number of them are still economically backward. This upliftment movement is mainly due to economic causes, and thus they are not satisfied with any of the political parties. The demand for a separate political party from the Matuas is yet to be clarified. They did not support the upper-class-dominated party. They frequently used to say that Guruchand Thakur never, ever supported those parties. But at the same time, we must also remember that the situation during the time of Harichand and Guruchand was different from that of today. It was only in 2004 that there was a strong party system, even though the Congress National Party was well organised. Even in the 1960s, independent candidates would win elections. But when it came to the parties' power and strength, the party system had become very strong after independence. Now, winning as an independent candidate has a very low chance. So, everyone would join a major party of the upper castes, as it would be highly beneficial. For example, consider a family whose members are all followers of the BJP; they would join the party. Tens of thousands of Matuas are being wooed by the Unionist Party, which is backed by the upper castes of the Central Left and is against the ideals of Thakurbari. To take advantage of any political opportunity, however, the duties of religious leaders take precedence. The Thakur family sought maximum benefits from the Bengali Hindu population because of the various instances of religious persecution by the Muslim community and some Muslim-appeasement policies of the TMC. Their political attitude towards the TMC and Bengali Hindus naturally leans towards the BJP, in order to protect the Matua religion and the Thakur family's status as religious and political leaders. The course of action that the Thakur family must take to manage the religious aspects of Matuaism properly and keep their political activities aligned with the BJP is to consider all of the following: The BJP would also be following this approach. The Matuas would get the maximum benefit in such a competitive environment. But this policy also has a drawback. The rivalry between the Santanu Thakur-led BJP group and the Mamata Thakur-led TMC group would increase. As a result, the gap between the Matuas would also increase. Matua unity would, therefore, be in a state of disarray. In the long run, the Matua community would lose its importance for major political parties due to the breakdown of Matua unity and the parties' decreasing influence over them. Secondly, the Matua family members will unite and align themselves with a political party. It will be more fruitful than the first one. However, Harichand and Guruchand Thakur would not like parties dominated by the upper castes. Moreover, a

significant number of educated Matuas are becoming attracted to the social and political beliefs of Guruchand Thakur. They will maintain their aloofness.

The third option is preferable to the first two. A unified Matua family will constitute a political party in the name of the Matuas and the depressed classes. They will set up an electoral alliance with one of the major national political parties. If they do not form this electoral alliance, the party will not be able to perform satisfactorily in the elections. After the Partition, the Matua community has been dispersed. Its distribution is unequal from district to district. Its proportion is quite large in North 24 Parganas, Nadia, Jalpaiguri and Malda. If they set up a political alliance and organise their campaigns jointly, they can win over 50 seats in the Assembly. This can help retain Matua unity and partially fulfil Guruchand Thakur's aspirations.

Thakur's devotion to the Matua community could increase their bargaining power when choosing political partners during government formation. They can get help from other political parties because of this. But all these options are dependent on the Thakur family. What they do for the Matuas and on their behalf will decide whether these options materialize or not.

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