

Contribution of Shree ShreeGuruchand Thakur and the Matuya Religion to Promote Women Education

Tumpa sarkar

Master of Arts in Education, VinayaBhavana, VisvaBharati University (A Central University), Santiniketan, West Bengal (India)

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Corresponding Author

Email: tumpa93321[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur established the Matuya religion as a religious reformation movement that was started in the integrated Bengal. After the death of Harichand Thakur his Beloved son Shree shreeGuruchand Thakur took all the responsibilities to reorganized the religion in a large and sophisticated manner.

Matuya religion is a religion for education and peace of human civilization. Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur established a new religion to unite the lower cast people and it was called as Matuya religion. Harichand Thakur and later his son shreeGuruchand Thakur exercise this religion to spread out formal education, non-formal education and in formal education among dalit people.

This religion was originated for the upliftment of the oppressed, depressed, untouchables and lower castes people including women. Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur has rightly realized that only education can be used as a weapon to eradicate the prejudices among the lower caste people and make them aware about their social, political rights. So, this religion has given much emphasis both on men and women education.

1. Introduction

The Matuyareligion arouse rapidly in the integrated Bengal province in the ninetieth century with a view to raise the status of the *Dalit* or theoppressed people by Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur and his son Shree ShreeGuruchand Thakur. The philosophy and convention or customs of this religion has been written by famous poet-singer Tarakchandra Sarkar also known as *kabirasoraj* in his famous book – 'Shree ShreeHarililamrita'. The Matuya religion has its great impact for not only promoting the social upliftment among the Dalit people but also to promote women's education and maintaining peace and equality.

2. Literature Review

Sarkar, Tarakchandra.(1917)in his book "**Shree ShreeHarililamrita**" has penned about the life of Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur in a verse form and this book is considered as a sacred book for the Matuya followers.

Haldar.Acharya Mohananda.(2016).In his book "**Sri SriGuruchandCharit**" has comprised the life of Shree ShreeGuruchand Thakur and Matuya religion.

Biswas Thakur, Acharya Debendralal.(1997) has described the greatness of Matuya religion in his book "**GuruchandHarigeeta**"(Prathamkhanda, TritiyaSanskaran). This book is a compilation of hymns about the avatar Shree ShreeHarishchandra, Shree ShreeHarichandThakur , Shree ShreeGuruchand Thakur , author also included the rituals and various miracle and myth of Matuya religion.

Another famous book written by **Thakur, Debendralal.(1991)** titled as "**Boudha Dharma O Matua DhormerSamiksha**" waspublished by SahityaParishad, kolkata. The book has described about the essence of

Buddhist religion and Matuya religion, and a comparison between Lord Buddha and Shree ShreeHarichandGuruchand.

The book written by **Roy, Prohlab.et.al.(2010)** named as "**BanglarShikshabid O SamajSanskarak Shree ShreeHarichandGuruchand Thakur**" that was published by MatuyaShiksha o SahityaGabeshanaParishad was Studied the efforts of Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur for social reformation and contribution for promoting education.

A book written by **Haldar, Suranjan.(2013).** Titled as "**Shree ShreeGuruchandCharitamrita (Prathamkhanda).**"In this book the author has thrown the light on history of *Namashudra* people, Matuya religion and also comprised the biography of Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur.

Another important book from **Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar.(2004)** titled as "**Cast Culture and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal**". In this book the author discussed about the sensitive issues such as social dominance, inequalities, caste system etc.

Mukherjee, Sipra.(2015).in her book "**Creating Their Own Gods: literature from the Margins of Bengal**" has studied various dalit literatures which reflected the burning issues such as cast, Class and inequality of the society.

Pal, Krishnendu.(2018). Conducted a study on "**Contribution of Matuaism in the field of Educational Reformation in Bengal.**" In this article the author has studied the major impact of Matuya religion on education.

Another study was conducted by **Sana, Sanjoy.(2015)**. Titled as "**Backward Classes Movement in Bengal.**" in this article the author has described the struggle of Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur, Guruchand Thakur and their followers for dalit welfare.

3. Objectives

- 3.1. To find out the contribution of Shree ShreeGuruchand Thakur and the Matuya religion to promote Woman education.
- 3.2. To find out the status of women in Matuya religion.

4. Delimitations of the Study

The researcher did not able to collect data through interviews due to lack of time. The study was much dependent on the secondary sources of data.

5. Methodology

It is was a qualitative study. Historical and descriptive research method were used to collect and analysedata for this study.

6. Result and Discussion

Shree ShreeGuruchand Thakur was the son of Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur and Shantibala Devi. He was born in 1847 in Bangladesh. Though Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur attained formal education for some months but he vowed to give his son the better education. He struggled a lot to admit his son Shree Guruchand Thakur in the village Path *Shalab* but it was not easy to do so as he was untouchable by the higher cast people of the society and called *Chandal*. Thereafter he decided to admit his son to a *Maktaba* to continue his education.

After grown-up Shree Guruchand Thakur realised that the *Dalit* people were dominating in every sphere of their life in the society. Being illiterate and lack of educational opportunities make them unaware about their rights. To bring out the consciousness of self-respect and raise their status in the society Shree Guruchand Thakur tried to set up schools for *Dalit* children.

"The society where people had not right of education, Guruchand established within them total 2048 schools including primary lower primary, upper primary, middle school and high school within the year from 1880 to 1918 "(Pal, Krishnendu, 2018, p.225).

The dream of setting up a school came true when Dr. C.S. Mead arrived in Bangladesh to promote Christianity. Shree Guruchand Thakur requested his co-operation for establishing schools for dalit children so that they can get a chance to admit in the schools. Then several schools were established by the help of Dr. M.S. Mead, who was an Australian Baptist and his wife Mrs Mead. Their endless efforts successfully established the *NariShilpaShiksha Kendra* at Orakandi to make the widows self-dependent.

Shree Guruchand stated as, "mor *pita Harichandgechhe bole more/vidyashikshaswajatediteghoreghore.*" (Haldar, Mahananda Acharya,2016, p. 108).

Means the father of Shree ShreeGuruchand Thakur told him to give education to the kindred.

Though in Vedic period the men and women both had the equal opportunities to get education but this flow somehow was tried to stop by the name of *Pardah* system during the medieval period in India, where *Pardah* system did not allowed the women to go in front of strangers or others basically in front of men except their husband without covering their faces. The *pardah* system took place mainly in the upper class and middle-class families as most of the women from lower class families had to go out of the house for earnings and therefore *Pardah* system was not a right choice to them. The basic right to education was a dream for most of the girls at that time. Shree Guruchand Thakur was finding a solution about how to educate women.

Guruchand Thakur an intelligent person said the girls to educate themselves first to have a good spouse. Because he realised that before getting marriage the girls should be educated so that she can balanced in her married life in a rational way and her children will get a healthy atmosphere at home. Shree ShreeGuruchand Thakur set up a primary school for girls at Taltala, near Orakandi. He established 'Shanti Satyabhama BalikaVidyalaya', 'TaltalaGadadharBalikaVidyalaya' at Orakandi, work education such as making handkerchief, sewing etc were an integral part of education. By observing the progress in women education various proverbs were said Such as, "*meye Jodi petechao/tobeTaltalacholejao*"(Thakur, Debendralal, 1991, p. 98). It means if you are looking for a bride you should go to Taltala. It doesn't mean that the place was famous for bride rather it is indicating that the girls of Taltala were educated.

Gradually in old Malda district, Bangladesh, various schools were established such as 'Gour Ghosh Girls' High school', 'Jodunath Girls' School', 'Doihari Girls' Secondary School' were established and also many more schools were established both for girls and boys by the efforts of the followers of Matuya religion. Not only the schools but various colleges were established by the cooperation of the Matuya followers. Basically matuya followers were completely devoted in the sayings of Thakur-

***Khaobanakraotekonodukkhonai |
Putra kanyashikshadaoeiaami chai ||***
(Haldar, Suranjan. 2013,p.51)

It means don't feel sorrow whether you have eaten or not but give education to your son and daughter that's all I want.

Thus, Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur the Avatar of Matuya religion encouraged their followers to spread woman education and to build a casteless society where both men and women will have equal rights and opportunities.

7. Conclusion

People may be astonished thinking about how Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur through Matuya religion tried to give women equal respect and equal rights to pursue education when the upper cast people in British India couldn't dare to do so. Not only in education they were also concerned to raise the status of women to form a balanced society. Shree ShreeHarichand Thakur instructed his followers to do their menage with a single wife when the *Kulins* had more than one wife. It shows that they have equal respect without

discriminating. The Women also enjoyed the same position as a male *gonsai* had at that time. The Matuya religion also accepted widow marriage. Thakur said it clearly to give respects all women whether they are known or unknown. As Matuya religion was primarily meant for the poor, subpressed, oppressed people of the society the social support and financial assistance were not gain easily. But to raise the status of women into the society the Matuya religion did a lot and will be remembered forever for its contribution to spread education among the women and chandals in Bengal.

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