

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

16 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 16 ISSUE-1, FEBRUARY 2025

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**



www.the-criterion.com

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

An Estimate of the Role of Women in Matua Religion and Society in North 24 Parganas and Nadia District

Tejen Mandal

Research Scholar,

Department of Political Science,

Adamas University, Kolkata, West Bengal.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14973862>

Article History: Submitted-27/01/2025, Revised-05/02/2025, Accepted-22/02/2025, Published-28/02/2025.

Abstract:

Now-a-days almost every political philosophy speaks of social equality but it is very difficult to transform the ideal of social equality into reality. Exploitation has been continuing in different forms from the remote past. Matua religion has a strong claim to be considered as a rational and humanitarian religion in terms of its philosophy and ideology. Unlike many other religions it has always been loud and clear in rendering its unequivocal support for the people belonging to the marginalized and deprived section of the society and at the same time unhesitatingly condemned all forms of inequality prevalent in social, political, economic structures of the Indian society for years. In today's politically gendered spaces of social milieu how the relationship between men and women has been examined in philosophical understanding of Matua religion - is of great importance as far as the burning question of women emancipation and empowerment is concerned.

Keywords: Woman, Society, Religion, Equality, Politics.

INTRODUCTION

It is interesting to note that there is no gender difference in nature except in human society. Man always tries to dominate over woman in every possible way. This is an ancient

tradition. It is an established fact that "No religion in the world guarantees the absolute equality of genders"(Bala 68). Nowhere in the world (in India too) the right and dignity of woman are guaranteed. No religion has done it.

In the USA women's franchise was recognized in 1920, but the movement for acquiring this right started in 1861. In England it was recognized in 1920 but the movement started in 1832. It was recognized in New Zealand in 1893 followed by Norway in 1913, Italy in 1945, Japan in 1947, India in 1950 and Switzerland in 1971. But the women's day was first observed in India in 1931(Mukhopadhyay 56). So, on the whole it may be said that women rights have nowhere been recognized in the world from the remote past.

In the history of the world, religion has preceded the state and has been regarded as one of the main driving forces of human society. Problems, therefore, originate from the conspiracy of the religious leaders and preachers. The state has, off course, tried to eradicate religious superstition but with limited success. Even today incidents like Widow-Burning (Sati-daha), human sacrifice, dowry death and Triple Talaq are often reported in the newspapers.

Christian priests say that women are emotional and therefore they are easily influenced by religion. Hence, they should not take part in politics. On the other hand, man has been called the master of woman in *Koran* (Mukhopadhyay 56). Besides, in Islam the equal right of brother and sister on their paternal property has not been recognized. The triple Talak system in Muslim society is also an insult to woman. In Hinduism though the term 'Hindu' does not occur in any ancient Sanskrit or Bengali book (Bala 68), it has been stated at 32 number verse in the *Geeta*, "even women, the low caste people and Vaishyas and Shudras can achieve salvation by remembering and serving me (Lord Krishna) (Mandal 140). The sage Manu in his *Manusanhita* says that women are deprived of the access to the Vedas and Smriti. They are Sudranes from birth. Whenever a woman sees a man, however ugly, she wants to mate with him. So, the sole object of woman is to serve their respective husbands. They will live

with their fathers in childhood, with their husbands in youth and with their sons in old age (Bairagya 242). All other religions echo almost the same thing. Taslima Nasrin, in spite of being herself a woman, has been tortured and hooted down from her country for raising her voice against Islam. But her protest was restricted to personal level. But almost 200 years ago Harichand Thakur was also persecuted by the Hindu religious leaders for fighting against the irrational and superstitious beliefs of Hinduism. But ultimately, he triumphed over his opponents by dint of his courage, honesty and greatness.

In order to rise above the contemporary social disorder, the Matua religion upheld the importance of the family life. Harichand Thakur, the founder of Matua religion, categorically says that family life is the most important of all and the rest of Brahmacharya, Vanprastha and Sannyas are secondary subjects. He lays maximum stress on work or productivity and in this way, he enhances the honour of woman (Sarkar 8). Women are the better half of men, like the negative-positives of science; in the absence of one, the light does not shine. He condemns those who retire to forests by deserting their near and dear ones (mother, father, wife and children). They are irresponsible escapists and therefore they deserve no respect. In his opinion the attainment of divine bliss is not all very difficult. One can easily attain this only by leading an ideal family life (Biswas 60). He strongly advocated monogamy and condemned polygamy and strongly advised his followers to stick to the practice of monogamy (Haldar 12). Harichand said that one can become a Brahmachary, a Vanprasthi and a Sanyasi only by living a proper family life with one's wife/husband. This is where one can become a Saint and 'Hari' can be found (Sarkar 32, 73).

Traditionally the women members of the families eat the half-eaten and left ones of the male members of the families. Women also bow to men. But in Matua society men and women share their meals from the same pot. This system amazed the Brahmins. Moreover,

overcoming discrimination requires service in every life (Sarkar 107, 83). People are for people. All people are God (Sarkar 11).

Guruchand Thakur rightly noted that the lack of education is the root cause of all social evils. He himself took the initiative to spread education and at around 1931 he set up more than 1500 pathshal (primary schools) (Haldar 8) which were attended (man, woman, Namah, Paundra, Teli, Mali, Kumbhakar, Malakar, Kapali, Mahishya, Kamar, Das, Chamar, Tanti, Muslim) mostly by those who hailed from the lower castes while the entry to the schools of Vidyasagar was mostly restricted to the children hailing from the higher castes. All the 35 girls' schools established by Vidyasagar were attended only by the girls hailing from Brahmins and other higher caste families (Biswas 49). He advised that to go without food is better than to go without education. He also laid emphasis on female education because an educated woman trains her children in a better way (Haldar 362).

Guruchand set up a primary school for girls first in Taltala of Orakandi and at the same time (1908) a high school and called it Shanti-Satyavama (Haldar 456). Harichand Thakur told her wife (Shanti Devi) "I shall teach men and you women" (Mahanta 267). Besides this, Guruchand Thakur, in co-operation with Mrs. Mead (the wife of Dr. C. S. Mead) set up a technical institute at Orakandi with a view to training women in different trades (Sarkar 198). Guruchand Thakur also played an important role in introducing the re-marriage of the widows. At the Mahabaruni Festival Guruchand advised his followers to introduce the re-marriage of the widows in their respective villages (Haldar 253).

In this connection it may be said that Vidyasagar got the law of the re-marriage of the widows passed in 1856 but Vidyasagar's attempts in this field were confined to the upper castes. In 1910 Guruchand Thakur first celebrated the re-marriage of a widow. He who first married a widow was Dhananjay Biswas of Matibhanga village of Barisal. Mr Biswas also got his widow-sister married again to one Shrinath. Next Rasiklal Biswas (MLC) and

Manomohan Das (MLA) of Kishorganj also married widows. In 1914 Tinkari Mia of Terokhada Upajila(Khulna district) and Malancha Saha married widows without the presence of Brahmin Priests (Mandal 145). Devichand Mondal, another follower of Guruchand brought about the marriages of 30 widows in a single day. Radha Pagol, other followers of Guruchand used to hold an annual fair (Khejurtala of Pirojpur) in the month of Falgun for bringing about the re-marriage of the widows. It was a month-long fair in which marriages were celebrated according to Matua customs (Mandal 145).

Hari-Guruchand made their followers aware of the rules of keeping good health. They advised to bathe in the morning, eat boiled rice, lie on mats and consult doctors at the time of illness. They also advised to refrain from child-marriage and maintain cleanliness (the marriageable age of man is 25 and in case of woman 18) (Halder 72). One must not mate with one's wife when she is not in menses. One must also remain strictly faithful to one's spouse. The principle of monogamy must be adhered to verses (Halder 568). Harichand Thakur was also aware that women are exploited for cheap labour. He wanted to put an end to it and for this he wanted to raise the price of Nakshi Katha stitched by women (Mandal 144).

Matua philosophy also admits of the equal right of son and daughter on paternal property. Both the husband and the wife are entitled to inherit each other property on the death of anyone (Mandal 141).

In Matua society women play equal role with men in social festivals. Sandhya Sarkar and Uma Sarkar deserve special mention in this field. They even play the role of priests even when they are in menses. They dance and sing in festivals with men. No difference is made but unlike the Hindu Tantriks and Bostoms, Matuas never indulge in debauchery (Sarkar 109). Physical attachment with widows is also forbidden in Matua society (Halder 574).

Harichand Thakur was always eager to keep up the prestige of women. Once one Dasharath (a Matua) held a Kirtan programme in his house where both men and women were enjoying themselves. But the local Brahmins regarded it as a perversion. They complained to the local Nayeb who victimized Dasharath. Harichand Thakur was informed of this. He held a mock court which was composed entirely of women. This incident is attested in the book called 'Harililamrita' (Sarkar 110). In this way Harichand protested against Dasharath's victimization.

In Matua society women are allowed to take part in politics. Nearly 150 years ago Guruchand Thakur said, "Women must be brave if they want to bear brave children. They should not be afraid of tigers and lions" (Halder 569). Women must also struggle against all obstacles, one of which is patriarchy. Hence women also must be strong. Guruchand Thakur said, "Nobody respects the weak. So, try to be strong" (Halder 573).

He also said that political power is one of the main pillars of progress in human life. When it is acquired, education, culture, health, money (governmental service, business), race, religion, etc. everything becomes easily available and that is the only goal of the Matua people (Halder 349).

A survey was recently conducted on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district. The results of the survey are as follows:

Table No 1

Distribution of respondents on the basis of educational qualification:

Education	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia			Total	
	M	F	T	M	F	T	20	%
	%	%	%	%	%	%	0	
Illiterate	06 12	06 12	12	00 00	00 00	00	12	06
Below Madhyami k	25 50	36 72	61	26 52	39 78	65	12 6	63
Madhyami k and above, but below Graduate	08 16	07 14	15	10 20	04 08	14	29	14 .5
Graduate	09 18	00 00	09	09 18	05 10	14	23	11 .5
Post Graduate	00 00	01 02	01	03 06	02 04	05	06	03
Others: (Doctor/En gineer/LLB	02 04	00 00	02	02 04	00 00	02	04	02
Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table-1 shows that the educational qualification of both male and female respondents in North 24 Parganas and Nadia are below Madhyamik level. Only 75% women are below Madhyamik level.

Table No 2

Distribution of respondents on the basis of occupation:

Occupation	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia		Total		
	M %	F %	T%	M %	F %	T%	200	%
Agriculture	03	00	03	15	02	17	20	10
	06	00		30	04			
Small Business	09	03	12	09	03	12	24	12
	18	06		18	06			
Labor/Masson/ Carpenter	19	02	21	04	01	05	26	13
	38	04		08	02			
Sewing	02	10	12	00	00	00	12	06
	04	20		00	00			
Hawker	02	00	02	00	00	00	02	01
	04	00		00	00			
LIC Agent	01	00	01	00	00	00	01	0.5
	02	00		00	00			
Banker	01	00	01	00	00	00	01	0.5

	02	00		00	00			
Advocate	01	00	01	00	00	00	01	0.5
	02	00		00	00			
Rail	00	00	00	02	00	02	02	01
	00	00		04	00			
Clerk	04	00	04	07	00	07	11	5.5
	08	00		14	00			
Teaching	02	00	02	02	03	05	07	3.5
	04	00		04	06			
Quack Doctor	04	00	04	02	00	02	06	03
	08	00		04	00			
Army / Navy	02	00	02	01	00	01	03	1.5
	04	00		02	00			
Nursing/Ayaa	00	04	04	00	00	00	04	02
	00	08		00	00			
Animal Husbandry	00	01	01	00	00	00	01	0.5
	00	02		00	00			
House wife	00	24	24	00	35	35	59	29.5
	00	48		00	70			
Private Teaching	00	00	00	06	04	10	10	05
	00	00		12	08			
Biri Bounding	00	04	04	00	00	00	04	02
	00	08		00	00			
Bee Keeper	00	00	00	01	00	01	01	0.5
	00	00		02	00			

Midday meal cook	00 00	01 02	01	00 00	01 02	01	02	01
Social Service	00 00	01 02	01	00 00	01 02	01	02	01
Kavial	00 00	00 00	00	01 02	00 00	01	01	0.5
Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table 2 shows that 59% are engaged in home making in both the districts. Although works of the very few are related to agriculture, small business, sewing, nursing/ayaa and labour category.

Table No 3, Distribution of respondents on the basis of income:

Monthly income of family	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia			Total	
	M %	F %	T %	M %	F %	T%	N=200	%
No income	04 08	25 50	29	05 10	35 70	40	69	34.5
Less than 10,000/=	26 52	20 40	46	27 54	08 16	35	81	40.5
Less than	10	05	15	07	02	09	24	12

20,000/=	20	10		14	04			
Less than 40,000/=	04	00	04	07	03	10	14	07
Above 40,000/=	06	00	06	04	02	06	12	06
Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table-3 shows that most of the women do not have any income as they are engaged in homemaking and even if they are working, the monthly income for most of the women is below

10,000/-. In case of male respondents in both the districts, average income is less than 10,000/-.

Table No 4, Distribution of respondents on the basis religious belief as Matua is a Hindu Religion

Hindu religion & Matua religion	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia			Total	
	M	F	T	M	F	T	200	%
	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Yes	28	11	39	17	09	26	65	32.5
	56	22		34	18			

No	22 44	39 78	61	33 66	40 80	73	134	67
Do not know	00 00	00 00	00	00 00	01 02	01	01	0.5
Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table 4 shows that 79% of women in both the districts could not differentiate between Matua religion and Hinduism; confused.

Table No 5, Distribution of respondents on the basis of Baruni-bathing (in Kamanasagar):

Kamanasagar	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia			Total	
	M %	F %	T %	M %	F%	T %	200	%
Yes (for freshness)	42 84	4 9 9 8	91	46 92	47 94	93	184	92
No	08 16	1 0 2	09	04 08	03 06	07	16	08

Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		
--------------	-----------	-----------	------------	-----------	-----------	------------	--	--

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table-5 shows that 96% Matua women of North 24 Parganas and Nadia districts bathe in Kamanasagar on Baruni Tithi to wash away their sins.

Table No 6, Distribution of respondents on the basis of registered card of 'All India Matua Mahasangha':

'All India Matua Mahasangha'	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia			Total	
	M%	F%	T%	M%	F%	T%	200	%
yes	23	17	40	16	04	20	60	30
	46	34		32	08			
no	27	33	60	34	46	80	140	70
	54	66		68	92			
Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table-6 shows that 79% of Matua women in both the districts do not have the recognition letter of 'All India Matua Mahasangha'.

Table No 7, Distribution of respondents on the basis of Dal/Dalapati:

Name of Dalapati	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia			Total	
	M%	F%	T%	M%	F%	T%	N=200	%
have not Dalapati	26	19	45	23	31	54	99	49.5
do not know	52	38	55	46	62	45	100	50
Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table-7 shows that 50% of Matua women in both the districts could not refer the name of their Dal/Dalapati.

Table No 8, Distribution of respondents on the basis discomfort in choosing women for leading the Matua religion:

Discomfort in choosing women for leading the Matua	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia			Total	
	M%	F%	T%	M%	F%	T%	N=200	%

religion:								
Yes	03 06	03 06	06	03 06	03 06	06	12	06
No	47 94	47 94	94	47 94	47 94	94	188	94
Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table-8 shows that 94% of Matua women do not feel any difficulty to lead their religious organization in both the districts. But the political scenario is different.

Table No 9, Distribution of respondents on the basis of the opportunity to represent any political party in any election:

Represent in any election	24 Pgs. (N.)			Nadia			Total	
	M%	F%	T%	M%	F%	T%	N=200	%
Yes	14 28	07 14	21	12 24	04 08	16	37	18.5
No	33 66	37 74	70	38 76	46 92	84	154	77
Have not voter	03 06	06 12	09	00 00	00 00	00	09	4.5
Total	50	50	100	50	50	100		

(Source: Survey conducted by the searcher on the Matua people of North 24 Parganas and Nadia district)

Table-9 shows that 83% of Matua women do not get the opportunity to represent any political parties in both the districts.

The overall weak rate of education, income and organization of Matua women have been very easily influenced by the neighboring Sanatan religion, that is now called Hindu religion. For these reasons discrimination, superstitions, unrealistic approach, irrational thoughts, inhuman caste system have already been arrived in Matua society. The social value of women has not been revealed till now and the political empowerment has been hampered. Even if the Thakurbari has created a difference on their political opinion by differentiating in two Brahmanical parties, i.e. TMC and BJP, they have failed to maintain the universal form among the Matua people. Nevertheless, after the death of P. R. Thakur, Binapani Thakur also led the movements of 'All India Matua Mahasangha' on the issue of citizenship. For this, she brought her own daughter-in-law, Mamata Thakur to lead the 'All India Matua Mahasangha' and was able to send her to the parliament on behalf of the TMC.

B. R. Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches)* points out that wherever any social or religious revolution has taken place in the world, it has always been noticed that it has led to a political reformation at the end (44). If the present study is compared with this proposition proposed by B. R. Ambedkar, it becomes quite clear that the political aspiration of the Matua community is still awaited to take its effective shape in the coming days in the political panorama of West Bengal.

Works Cited:

Ambedkar, Babasaheb. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, compiled by Vasant Moon, vol. 1. Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014.

Bairagya, P. "Matua Dharme Naari." *ShriShri Harichand Thakur Swarna Sankalan*, edited by Nitish Biswas & Jagadish Haldar, Aikatan, 2015, pp. 242-48.

Bala, J. *Itihaser Aloke Shri Hari-Guruchand O Matua Andolan*. Nikhil Bharat Prokashoni, 2013.

Biswas, S. R. *Matua Dharma Ek Dharma Biplab*. Chaturtha Duniya, 2014.

Haldar, M. *ShriShri Guruchand Charit*. Matua Mahasangha, 2009.

Haldar, S. *ShriShri Hari-Guruchand Kathamrita*. Dharma Dharmik Prokashoni, 2015.

Mohanta, N. D. *Matua Andolan O Dalit Jagoran*. Annapurna Prokashoni, 2002.

Mondal, R. "Matua Biswase Naarir Abosthan: Ekti Tulonamulak Alochona." *Shri Harichand Thakur O Matua Dharma Andolan*, edited by Kapil Krishna Thakur & Utpal Biswas, Nikhil Bharat Prokashoni, 2012, pp. 139-48.

Mukhapadhyaya, P. D. *Rashtro O Rajniti- Tattwo O Matobadik Bitarko*, VPH Subscription Services PVT Ltd. 2009.

Sarkar, J. K. "Matua Dharma Andolone Shiksha Bhabna." *ShriShri Harichand Thakur Swarna Sankalan*, edited by Nitish Biswas & Jagadish Haldar, Aikatan, 2015, pp. 186-201.

Sarkar, T. C. *ShriShri Harililamrita*, Matua Sahitya Mandir, 2010.