

**Matuaism:A Historical Review on the Political Thought of Sri Sri
Guruchand Thakur**

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Abstract:*The policy that the king adopts to run the state is politics. According to Aristotle's Politics that "The state is the highest form of community and aims at the highest good." According to Kautilya, the author of the book Arthashastra, the meaning of state policy or politics is diplomacy. According to Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, one of the architects of modern India and the architect of the Constitution of India, Political power is the Supreme power. He asked for the capture of political temples (Powers). He added that political power is like that the master key by which it is possible to open all closed windows and doors. In the Indian subcontinent, it can be observed that those who have been involved in politics or are still there have always become wealthy, healthy and powerful. They don't have any economic shortages. It has been found that those who are from the lower strata of the society or the lower castes and the female class are relatively less inclined to do politics and their economic misery is also high. Dr. Ambedkar of Maharashtra, a member of the so-called lower caste, understood very well how much it is necessary for people from the lower castes to come into politics. Similarly, Jogendra Nath Mondal of Barishal ("in the ten years from 1937 to 1947, he was the undisputed leader of the Namasudras") and Guruchand Thakur of Orakandi, two Namasudra community figures of undivided Bengal, were also able to realize this. However, not the political issue of Jogendra Nath Mandal, the main purpose and topic of this research paper of mine today is Historical Review on the Political Philosophy or Thought of Guruchand Thakur which is discussed and thoroughly analyzed below.*

Keywords : Guruchand, Historical, Matuaism, Political Thought, Religion, Reviewetc.

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Introduction

At present, politics is not being left out in the case of birth, death and marriage. Some do direct politics and some do indirect politics. The welfare and well-being of the people of the country depends on politics. Since politics determines all aspects of the people of the state, it is very important for every conscious person to participate in politics. Those who do politics encourage their sons, daughters and family members to take part in it, but discourage others in the society. Perhaps, the reason for this is that they only want to enjoy the various privileges and powers of the society or country. It can be seen that even if they do politics with the backward classes or castes, they refuse to come to politics and sometimes even scare them. But Guruchand Thakur never so. Since he was born into the family of a so-called lower caste Chandal or Namasudra community in Bengal like Ambedkar of Maharashtra and was established through various social reforms like his father Harichand. Guruchand Thakur (also known as Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur) was born on March 13, 1846, in the village of Orakandi in Gopalganj district of the Bengal Presidency of British India. His father Sri Sri Harichand Thakur was a great social, religious reformer and founder of the Matua Mahasangha. Guruchand's mother was Shanti Devi. Like his father, Guruchand Thakur was also an Indian social reformer who works for the upliftment of the untouchable peoples in the Indian society, especially in the Bengal Presidency.

Objectives

The main objectives of this research paper are to focus on the political philosophy of Sri Guruchand Thakur and political information of the Namasudra Community as well as other backward communities of undivided Bengal at the same time. Most of the peoples of the community are unconscious about their politics and they lived in different remote areas or villages of Bengal, specially in East Bengal. Most of them were engaged in agriculture. Only a few were involved in business and government jobs. For ages, they had been subjected to various forms of exploitation and deprivation by the upper caste people. Because there was a lack of education among them. On the eve of the British rule in India, they also exploited economically by the local land lords or local Zamindars. Politically, they were not particularly united. Guruchand Thakur realised that without political power, it was not possible to improve the lower caste people, especially the Namasudras. Therefore, the main theme and purpose or objectives of this research paper of mine is a historical review on the political philosophy of Guruchand Thakur.

Literature Review

The mirror of any country or any society is literary work. Literature is also the pride of that country. Literary works gives us vital information about the certain period that what had done. Literary works play a very important and significant role in knowing about a country or state, its

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people, the country's religion, race, caste, creed, community, social, cultural, political and economic condition. It not only bears the data about any societies, states, countries, lands, but also gives us any particular or general communities in a specific period, as well as provides us with all the information. Before writing this research paper, I studied some historical literary texts in depth, which were written in both Bengali and English language. As well as I have studied about the society, culture, religion and political condition of the lower caste people of Bengal, specially the Namasudras of East Bengal through different Govt. Gazetteers, Reference Books, Magazines, Patrikas, periodicals & proceedings, tracts & treaties, besides several Research Articles and Sri Guruchand Thakur. A few name of the important books are mentioned here like, Sarkar, Tarak Chandra, Sri Harileelamrita (1916), Haldar, Acharya Mahananda, Guruchand Charita (2009), Byapari, Manoranjan, Itibritte Chandal Jiban (2014), Mukherjee, Shipra, translated Interrogating My Chandal Life : An Autobiography of A Dalit (2018), Ray Jibes, Barishaler Jogen Mondal (2010, First Published), Ray, Bipul Kumar, Namasudrer Itihas (2016), Bandyopadhyaya, Sekhar, Caste Protest and Identity in Colonial India : The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947 (First published in 1997 by Curzon Press) and more others. I also met with some Namasudra writers to do collect actual information about the Namasudra community, Hari-Guruchand Thakur and their activities etc.

Research Methodology

Research Method is the scientific method by which primary and secondary data are collected and also the way of approach and procedures adopted in acquiring data. The primary data or sources or materials were collected to reach the main themes, purposes or objectives of this research paper from the All India Matua Mahasngha, initially whose founders and directors were Hari-Gurchand Thakur. Secondary data also has been collected from different books, journals, periodicals, magazines regarding socio-economic, cultural and political status of the Namasudra community, Hari-Gurchand Thakur. There are another research, is called survey research. Servey research is a method for collecting, analyzing, interpreting and elaborating data. It's a legal procedure. Through this, anyone can move towards any goal. That's the best way. Of course I have already used this legal and scientific method before going on to write a specific research paper. There is no doubt that all the information in this regard has been collected through primary sources, secondary sources and interview methods .

Political Thought of Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur

Guruchand's meeting with Lieutenant Governor of Bengal

Guruchand Thakur strived for socio-religious development as well as the political rights of the lower castes or untouchables and gave various orders and advice at different times for political awareness. He called upon the people of the lower castes to participate in active politics. He realized that a caste lagging behind in politics could never be rich, powerful and influential.

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Politics is the way forward for any caste or class. He thought lagging behind in politics means being backward in terms of socio-religious and economical aspects. In order to gain political rights, Guruchand attended various meetings with representatives of the British Government of India and was also successful at times. In 1906, Dr. Cecil Silas Mead, a resident of Australia, came to Orakandi and Faridpur, the birth place of Guruchand, to preach Christianity. He was a member of the Baptist Mission. It was this Mid Sahib who helped Guruchand Thakur politically at various times to achieve the rights of the lower castes. At the end of 1906, c. With the help of C.S Mead, Thakur met sir Lancelot Hare, the then Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam. In this meeting, he highlighted the issues related to the education and employment of the untouchable or lower caste or Chandal or Namasudra people of Undivided Bengal. Soon after, Governor Sir Lancelot Hare announced a special privilege in the field of education and various jobs to the only Chandal or Namasudra community. This meeting and success of Guruchand Thakur with the then Governor is clearly known from the Sri Sri Guruchand Charita written by Acharya Mahananda Halder. As he wrote that

*“Eheno Prokare, Laat Dorbare,
Portiere Dilo Goti.
Holo Jagoran, Namasudragon,
Rajkaryo Paay Bonge.”³*

Namasudra Conference and other Scheduled Castes

On October 31, 1906, sir Lancelot Hare, with the initiative and cooperation of Guruchand Thakur, submitted a draft proposal to Lord Minto, the then Governor General of British India, for the development of the lower caste people. According to this draft proposal, the Morle-Minto Reform Act of 1909 announced a special privileges in the field of education and employment for the 31 so-called lower caste people of Bengal. It was mainly at the initiative of Guruchand Thakur that this act first provided for the presence of an elected representative of the lower caste and a nominated representative in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Until then, no such special political privileges were provided for the lower castes in other presidencies or provinces of India. It was with the earnest efforts of Gurchand that the government created a separate ‘Bengal Scheduled Castes Act’ for these 31 lower caste people of Bengal only. Guruchand Thakur and the organized Matua movement were the main sources of the special arrangements made for the people of the lower castes in education, government jobs and the legislative assembly. That’s why Mahananda Halder says in his Guruchand Charita,

*“Taposhil Jati Modhye Ja Kichu Hoyeche,
Harichand Kalpo Brikhhe Sakoli Faleche.
Hari Kalpo Brikhhe Fale Sonjeebonee Fal,
Se Fal Bilay Guru Parom Dayal.
Se Guru Parom Guru Guruchand Naam,*

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Shoto Kashi Tulyo Jar Orakandi Dhaam.”4

Guruchand Thakur was able to understand very easily that in India, which is divided by thousands of castes, creeds and tribes, nothing can be achieved without a politically organized movement. He woke up day and night to create a path (way) to their liberation by energizing the people of the backward or lower castes. The wave of movement that started among the lower castes in Bengal under the leadership of Guruchand later spread all over the country. From the seventies of the 19th century to the 3rd decade of the 20th century, Guruchand Thakur was the pioneer of various social reforms and the main hero or figure of the liberation of the lower caste people of Bengal. In 1923, the ‘All Bengal Namasudra Conference’ was held in Khulna city. The conference was presided over by Guruchand and also explained to the Namasudras how to do politics. Mahananda Halder has given proper evidence of this in Guruchand Charita, such as :

*“Ei Sanmelon Hote, Namasudra Kon Pothe,
Chalona Koribe Rajneeti.
Jaa Bole Doyamoy, Sobha Modhye Pathh Hoy,
Taate Sobe Janalo Sonmoti.”5*

Guruchand with C.S Mead

According to the decision of the Namashudra Conference of Khulna city (1923), in 1926, an All Bengal Depressed Classes Association was established with other lower caste people. It was also led by Maharshi Guruchand Thakur. He used to say that he did not understand and did not want to understand which of the politics was left-wing or right-wing. He only always strived for the various betterment or upliftment of the uneducated and wealthless people of the lower castes. So, that’s why he got the help of Dr.Mead Sahib. It was for him that Sahib once came to Orakandi and Faridpur. Guruchand Thakur also realized that without the help of the royal power, any progress of the Namasudras and other lower caste people was not possible in any way. For this he held the hand of Dr. Mead, the royal representative. Guruchand Thakur asked the Namasudras and the people of the downtrodden of society to remain united and very closed. He also suggested that they should be involved in the same politics. He gave a message of movement from house to house. He talked about holding small meetings from house to house for their betterment or improvement or upliftment. Ample evidence of this is clearly found in the Guruchand Charita such as :

*“Ghare Ghare Andolon Proyojon Holo,
Sabha Koro Sabha Koro Probhujee Hankilo.
Ek Sathe Sobe Mili Korilo Mantrona,
Ekota Thakile Jabe Sakol Jantrona.
Ek Thaaai Boso Bhaai Probhu Bheer Dilo,
Probhur Ichhate Sabha Dattadanga Holo.”6*

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Guruchand Thakur was a very self-conscious person in the political field. He never wanted to let people of his own community come to the British government in a bad limelight. Because he realized that they had been without help for a long time from the upper caste peoples of Bengal. In the eyes of Bengalee Bhadrlok society, they were the Chotolok. They have no such thing as wealth. Education and health are not good either. For ages, the upper caste people have held them back on various issues. They have no rights and respect in society. Respect and rights were not given. They are without political consciousness. In the eyes of the people of the upper caste society, they are only considered untouchables. The upper caste people never came forward in their misery. They were badly treated by the the upper caste peoples. Again, Guruchand realized that once they were badly noticed by the British soccer, it would not be possible to improve them in any way.

Guruchand's Thought about Swadeshi and Boycott Movement

Therefore, while Lord Curzon, then the Governor General of British India declared for Bengal divided in 1905, the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement against the partition started in Bengal, but Guruchand Thakur, great leader of the Namasudras, refrained from joining the movement with great intelligence in the contemporary circumstances and asked the people of his caste or followers to refrain. He very discreetly understood like Sukanta Bhattacharya, a notable poet of Bengal who wrote,

*“Khudhar Rajye Prithibee Gadyomay,
Purnimachand Jeno Jhalsano Ruti.”⁷*

It means in the realm of hunger, the moon of the full moon is like a burning bread, it is not possible for the hungry people to enjoy the beauty of the full moon, to them it seems like the sparkling bread that they can eat. Guruchand Thakur like the poet very wisely realized that there was no such thing as Swadeshi and Boycott of the lower caste people. These are all the political and economic instruments of the so-called upper castes. For this reason he declared In a loud voice in order to protect the interests of the people of the lower castes, especially the Namasudras of undivided Bengal that,

*“Kotha Chilo Desh Mata Se Dukhher Dine ?
Dur Kore Dilo Dekhi Apon Sontane.
Tyajyo Putra Mora Sobe Mata Nahi Chini,
Kon Shoth Aasi Kane Dey Matri Dhwoni.
Moder Karone Mata Noy Dayabotee,
Upekhshito Sontaner Nahi Kono Goti.
Bhaai Bhaai Rob Tuli Aaji Jara Aase,
Mukhe Modhu Buke Bish Karjyosiddhi Aashe.”⁹*

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Guruchand's Thought about Non-cooperation Movement

In 1920, the leaders of the Indian National Congress and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, launched Non-cooperation Movement against the British government. Although the movement totally failed in many parts at the end but spread to different parts of the country. According to Kausalya's Arthashastra "Movement within the country was strictly controlled." (9) British Government also did that. However, the province of Bengal was no exception. The Congress leaders may have known very well about a majority of the untouchable Namasudra community in East Bengal. They were also aware of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur. They also understood that Guruchand Thakur was the undisputed leader of the Namasudra community of that time. In consultation with Chittaranjan Das, Birendra Nath Shasmal and others Gandhiji wrote a letter to Guruchand Thakur through Chittaranjan Das requesting him to participate in the anti-British Non-cooperation Movement. A detailed description of this can be found in The Guruchand Charita of Acharya Mahananda Halder. In the words of Mahananda Halder :

*"Mahatma Gandhijee Bole Taahader Thaaai,
Taahader Modhye Neta Keho Kigo Naai ?
Neta Jodi Thaaake Sobe Taare Giye Dharo,
Taare Dale Aano Sheegro Jebhabei Paro.
Desh Bandhu Bole Aache Ek Mahajan,
Orakandi Basee Naam Sri Gurucharan.
Thakur Uapadhidharee Jani Namasudra,
Kule Shile Dhanemane Tini Oti Bhadra.
Taahar Pitar Naam Sri Harichand Thakur,
Dharmaguru Boli Chilo Protistha Prochur." 10*

Thus, after much discussion, Chittaranjan Das finally sent a long letter to Guruchand Thakur. Such as :

*"Sei Aanggamote Tobe Se Chittaranjan,
Guruchand Thaaai Patro Korilo Likhon."*

In due course, the letter reached Guruchand and on the contrary, he also expressed the condition and mind of him and his community through a letter. The letter given by Guruchand Tagore to Gandhiji in response to Chittaranjan Das's letter makes it very clear what was the political situation of the Namasudras at that time or why they refrained from joining this non-cooperation movement. He clearly explained how the Hindu upper caste people viewed them. He also made it clear what their rights are in Hinduism. He also made it clear that the Namasudras were deprived of education, initiation and politics forever. Their economic condition is also not good. There are not even two handfuls of food in a day. No one keeps the news. Therefore, there is no question of them joining the Non-cooperation Movement.

"Kagoj Kalom Kali Aanoho Sattwor,

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*Ei Potre Dibo Aami Jogyo Prattyuttor.....
Anunnoto Boli Jato Aache Bongodeshe
Konobhabe Din Kate Behaler Beshe.....
Vidya Shikhsha Beshi Kichu Taara Shekhe Naai,
Rajkarjye Adhikar Taate Nahi Paai.....
Kiba Khay Kotha Pay Kon Karjyo Kore.
Sondhan Rakhena Keho Konodin Tore....”11*

He also wrote many other things about their lives which cannot be said in this short range. Mahatma Gandhi received and saw Guruchand’s letter and told Chittaranjan Das that Guruchand Thakur had said what he was right. He didn’t say anything wrong. There’s nothing to blame. So far, no one has dared to say something very valuable. In the words of Acharya Mahananda Halder :

*“Mahatma Bolen Satyo Eisob Kotha,
Iha Bhinno Aandolon Sob Hobe Britha.
Prokrito Tottwer Baanee Shunilam Aaj,
Er pore Ei bhabe Koro Sobe Kaaj.”13*

Historian Dr. Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya in his book, “Caste Protest and Identity in Colonial India : The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947” said that, “In 1930, at a meeting in Khulna Sadar town, Guruchand Thakur, in his presidential address, emphasized that the emancipation of the lower castes and untouchables would never be completed until they received a share of the political power recently transferred to the Indian people through a series of constitutional reforms.”14

Criticism

Guruchand Thakur’s political ideology or political philosophy can now be questioned by many as to why he and his community did not join the National, Swadeshi-Boycott and Non-cooperation Movements. It’s not unusual to ask questions. It’s nothing normal again. Because first of all, we have to see the time, that is, what era he was a man of. Then we have to see which family he came from. Since in the Indian subcontinent, caste, creed and religion have a distinction or a high and low issue. After it has to be seen how much education and government jobs were in his community and how much they possessed. He didn’t know how to goosebumps. He was a man of straight nature. He was never in the midst of shoe-throwing like the leaders of the Surat split of the Congress. He didn’t like them either. He thought about how his community would improve. But he never thought only about the betterment of his community. He worked for the backward and untouchable people of the society. He also fought for other lower communities of the society. He always thought of improving the quality of life of the proletarian or lower caste people.

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Evaluation

Guruchand Thakur always encouraged people from lower castes or lower classes to join politics. If necessary, everyone has asked to come together and form their own team for themselves. He told them to be king. He declared in a loud voice that those who do not have a party have no power. He also said that the people of a nation in which there is no king never prosper. He advised to do politics at the right time. He probably always believed in the principle that, "*There is a Higher court than the courts of justice, and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts.*"(15) Guruchand Thakur was a very far-sighted person in the politics of the lower caste people and his influence was also outstanding. That's why the Christian Baptist missionary Dr. C. S. Mead has made enough evaluative remarks about him that, "*Guru Charan Babu is a leader of outstanding ability and of widespread influence. In the various activities of my Missionary he has made possible many things that without his backing could not have been carried through. With a liberality of thought, a courage and a foresightedness uncommon among men of the older orthodox school he has sought the uplift of the great Namasudra caste. The owe a great deal to him. So do I.*"(16) Moreover, he never wanted the Namasudras or other lower caste people of Bengal to fall prey to the wrath of the British Government.

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