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**Socio-Cultural Life of the Namasudra Community in  
Cooch Behar District of North Bengal in  
Post Partition Period**

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**Abstract:** B.R. Ambedkar said, ‘there is nothing fixed, nothing eternal, nothing sanatan, everything is changing and change is a law of life for individuals as well as for society’. Numerically the Namasudras constituted the second largest Hindu caste group in the British province of Bengal and the largest in its eastern part. The present work attempts a detailed study of The socio-cultural life of the namasudra community in Coochbehar district of North Bengal. Social scientists say, North Bengal is a miniature version of India. There are many opinions among scholars regarding the origin and history of the Namasudra Community. The Social status of the Namasudras among Bengali Hindus were very Low. They were once called Chandals and considered Untouchables. Dr. Wise, has mentioned in his writing that the Namasudras were the only powerful and well-organized Caste of the Lower Caste who used ‘Kayathi Nagri’, the common written Language of Dinajpur. This diverse group was united by Sri Sri Guru chand Thakur and Sri Sri Harichand Thakur. In the 2011 census, these Chandals were fully recognized only as Namasudras. The Matuas had the greatest influence among the Namasudras. Numerically, the Namasudras were the largest Hindu Caste in East Bengal. Among the large Namasudras of refugees who arrived in North Bengal, The Namasudras were one of the main population. According to statistics, the number of refugees in West Bengal is still more than 8 million. Although most of the people of the Namasudras Community came from East Bengal, they have changed and refined over time and have taken the present from North Bengal and Cooch Behar district. This Namasudras Community has its own rules, customs, rituals, worshiped festivals, food habits, clothing ,attire, professions etc. The people of this Namasudras group follow various cultural traditions.

**Keywords:**Cooch Behar,Namasudras, North Bengal, Partition, Migration, Rituals, etc.

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## **Introduction**

From ancient times to the present day, people of various races, tribes, castes and religious have lived in North Bengal, as well as Cooch Behar. The history of any caste or nation is intertwined with the history of the entire human race. The Namasudras are one of the majority community among the Bengali Hindu Castes. It is important to explore how the Namasudras caste emerged among the Bengalis, who were one nation and one language and how they descended from Brahmin society to the lower strata and acquired the title of Sudra. There are many opinions among scholars about the origin and history of the Namasudras Community. Analyzing the name Nama Sudra, it is seen that the new word Nama Sudra is made up of two different meanings: 'Nama' and 'Sudra'. That is, Nama:+Sudra:=Nama:Sudra. The word Nama: means to bow, while the word Sudras means the four letters of the Aryan alphabet. There-four, the name Nama Sudra means those who have attained purity even after bowing. According to Manu, the Chandala race originated from the womb of a Brahmin in the womb of a Sudra. They are Namasudra, who are boatmen and farmers. They belong to the Chandala or Charal. According to H.H. Riseley the Namasudras who were earlier known as 'Chandal' have been identified as non-Aryan caste of Bengal, B.C. Allan in his Dacca District Gazetteer referred to the Namasudras as the most numerous Hindu Cultivation caste who are believed to have been autochthones of the Bengal delta. It is also narrated that Bamdev, the son of Vasishtya deva, the kullo Priest of Ayodhya king Dasharatha, was cursed by his father for failing to provide water from the sacred tank at the time of his death. Among Bengali Hindu, the Namasudras had a very Low social status. They were once called Chandala and according to ancient scriptures, the Chandala were considered untouchables. Manu described them as outcast, meaning those who lived outside the borders of villages or cities. Over time the people named Chandala have been engaged in agriculture, fishing and boating in Bengal. However, the Namasudras claim to be the sons of Namasudra or Lomsha muni and that is why they are called Namasudras. Some consider that Namas or Lomsha muni to be the progenitor of the Namasudras.

## **I**

The social movement of the Namasudras against the hatred and contempt of the upper castes for a long time in Bengal began in the Faridpur Bakharganj region in 1872-73. Later, an organized movement took place by converting to religion according to the Vaishnavism trend known as Matuas introduced by Shri Guru Chand Thakur. He said, "He who has no party has no Power, he has no name." Shri Shri Harichand Thakur united this ancient population of Bengal called Chandala, Charal etc, which was divided into many groups. After Shri Shri Harichand Thakur, under the continuous movement and leadership of his worthy Son Shri

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Guruchand Thakur, Chandala was called Namasudra in the 1872 Census. Then in the 1881 census, it was recognized only as Namasudra race. Numerically, the Namasudras were the largest Hindu Caste in East Bengal and the second largest in the entire state of Bengal.

The main Namasudras were mainly located in six districts of the eastern region, name Bakerganj, Faridpur, Dacca, Maymensingha, Jessore and Khulna. They lost everything except their clothes and lives after the partition. Namasudras were one of the main group among the large number of refugees who arrived from North Bengal. Between 1950 and 1956, most of the Namasudras of East Bengal crossed the barbed wire and came to west Bengal. Jogendra Nath mandal for bade the Namasudras from leaving East Pakistan and later himself secretary left the country and was identified as a traitor by the lower castes. Groups of refugees coming from East Bengal would select a vacant place and occupy it and they would divide the land among themselves and established colonies overnight. The rapid development of colonies meant that the landowner had little opportunity to exert any resistance. The influx of Namasudras from Eastern Bengal into India in droves had once made them an isolated caste.

The influx of refugees to West Bengal started during the terrible Noakhali riots of 1946. After the partition of the country in 1947 and the riots in February 1950, more refugees came to west Bengal. According to one report, 1870535 Hindu refugee had migrated from East to West Bengal by February 1949. There were various economics, political and religious reasons behind this. Due to discriminatory treatment, fear of life fear of honour etc, the refugees were forced to leave everything behind. After 1947, more than 3 million People took refuge in West Bengal as refugees. At the Bongaigaon railway station, the first batch of Namasudra refugees of about 500 families arrived in the first week of January 1950, and since then, thousand of them began to arrive every day. The way the refugees came to west Bengal as uprooted refugees is very painful. The influx of uprooted men and women, like the flow of a stream, had a profound impact on the health and normal life in this Country.

## II

In the early days of civilization, human nature was nomadic. People had to move from one region to another constantly for the sake of survival. The Hindu refugees from East Bengal did not receive a warm welcome in this Country. They left behind their land and belongings and became refugees over night. Continuity in this critical situation is found in historical , newspapers and the writings of writers ,documents

The inflow and outflow of migrants to the region, which was part of the native state of Cooch Behar after the partition of India in 1947 and a district of West Bengal after 1950, has emerged as a major problem in Cooch Behar and is creating uncertainty, discontent and instability by disrupting the environment, balance and socio -economic development of the

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region. Cooch Behar district of India became increasingly over crowded and burdened with refugees in the post-partition situation.

Most of the inhabitants of Cooch Behar district came from the adjacent Rangpur and Maymensingha district and from those areas of Jalpaiguri district that were divided according to the Redcliff award( which is currently in Bangladesh). Between 1951 and 1971, the Hindu population in this Cooch Behar district increased, one of the reasons being the influx of a large number of Hindus from Bangladesh to West Bengal after the partition of India. A large section of the Hindu population of this district was Rajbanshis etc. In 1961, the total Rajbanshi population in this district was 4,18,893 about 41% of the total population of Cooch Behar. The Namasudras population was 23,429.

### III

Agriculture is the main livelihood of these Cooch Behar residents. Basically, the people of this district earn two meals a day by working in agriculture. According to statistics, the number of refugees in West Bengal is now more than 8 million. The government has taken responsibility for the relief and rehabilitation of 3.1 million refugees out of them. About 5 million refugees have accepted . According to 2011 census 77.94% of the Namasudras had taken agriculture as their occupation . Although the traditional occupation of the Namasudras was cultivation and boating, They could be found employed as shopkeeper, goldsmith, blacksmith, carpenter, oilman etc. They are the victims of objects poverty, hunger, hatred and contempt, children are affected by malnutrition, women are victims of men’s sexual lust. Coming from East Bengal, these Namasudras started establishing colonies in various riverine areas of Cooch Behar district. Their main livelihood is agriculture. So they cleared the river banks and converted them into new land for cultivation. As a result, there is no end to disputes among the locals over land, especially over the banks of this new land. There is a proverb in Bangladesh, “whoever has the power, owns the banks”. As a result, there is a possibility of increasing conflict between the displaced families and the residents of Cooch Behar (locals).As a border district of West Bengal, Cooch Behar has naturally seen a large influx of refugees and their arrival and migration have greatly influenced. The ethnic, communal , linguistic, economics, religious and cultural landscape of the district.

The Namasudras are social and independent minded. Earlier, the rate of female education among the Namasudras was not high, but now the rate of female education among them has also increased. The Namasudras leaders began to realize that education and employment were necessary for the economic development of the community because these were new sources of social status. The fact that the Namasudras Caste is a large and powerful caste in terms of language and literary culture is widely reflected in its folk culture. Although most of the people of the Namasudras Community came from East Bengal, they have changed and

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refined over time and have taken the form they have now in North Bengal, namely Cooch Behar district as discussed below.

This Namasudras Community has its own rules, customs, rituals, worshiped and etc. Along with this, there are food habits, clothing, attire, professions. The fact that the Namasudras Community has maintained its uniqueness in its tradition and cultural in the course of Bengali development can be easily guessed in its work, religion and various vow Ceremonies, Most of the Namasudras Community migrated to this region from present day Bangladesh, bearing the burden of partition. This financially weak community has chosen agriculture, the profession of their ancestors, as there profession. However, due to the population, agriculture is no longer possible for every one to make a living, so now days many are engaged in alternative professions, such as government, various companies, factory workers, masons, carpenter, garage workers etc.

## IV

The society of the region in question is mainly rural. Although there are sub-division and block-based cities, those who live in those cities are some how connected to the rural society. People of different religions live together. The Matabbar or civil system still exists in the society. However, after the advent of the Panchayat system, the importance of Matabbar has decreased a lot. A few decades ago, the picture of a family of fifty-one was observed. Now a days, it is not seen much. Today, the custom of calling 'Goa mill' before a festival is seen. The house where the festival is held is required to as the house of Kam. In the Namasudras society, beliefs such as Tuktak, Mantra Tantra, Jharkhand fuk, Oil para Jal pada etc are still seen in their localized society. The roots of the folk culture of the Namasudras Community in North Bengal, namely Cooch Behar, are intertwined with the birth, death, marriage of the caste-tribe and the various worship parvans, rituals and fasts prevalent throughout they year. The people of this large Namasudra Community have developed various cultural structures on their own initiative which are still seen in rural Bengal today. Such as- Pushura, Surya Puja songs, Del, Charak Puja, Baidya dance, Bhallabulla, Gokhnath puja, Tinnath mela or Pagal mela, Buri puja, Vastu puja, Manasa Puja, Bhai Chhatu, Natai puja, Hal Yatra and many more. Folk festival are not only joyful events, they have several social values. Besides, the busy life throughout the year is mainly based on agriculture, these common people organize Dehattava, Pushura, Ashtasakhi, Bhatiali etc. Singing events for entertainment. The life style of this region is rural in nature. And this rural life is mainly inherited from the primitive Ashtik group. Those who celebrate the festival may not always be aware of the social significance of the festival. For them , celebrating the festival means maintaining the tradition or following the customs and behavior. Now a days, the rituals of celebrating the festival have changed. But the primitive ideas remain alive in it. Folk culture is the term used

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to describe the various folk beliefs, folk songs etc. That have been created and are flowing at their own pace in the folk society for a long time due to the will of the people. Folk literature is one of the components of this folk culture. This folk literature is full of rhymes, riddles , proverbs, folk tales, folk dramas, mantras, folk music etc.

Apart from West Bengal, namely Cooch Behar, Namasudras live in the provisions of Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andaman, Madhya Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Maharashtra, Delhi etc. In 1977, the Left front government came to power and tried to solve this refugee problem. In 1977, the newly formed left front government was able to woo the landless farmers of the lower Caste and scheduled Caste communities of West Bengal by providing them with financial assistance for two decades.

## **Conclusion**

Playwright Sachindranath Sengupta, in the introduction to his play ‘This Independence’, says- those who have been forced to leave East Bengal today did not come with property, emptiness, on to burden West Bengal. If they can use the energy and mental resources they have brought, the state can be truly strengthened. But the new comers are suffering all kinds of losses because the state is not able to do the work they should have been assigned. The pain of losing loved ones, the anguish of memories and the unbearable attraction to their roots still remain deep in the hearts of this Hindu Namasudras Community that has emigrated. The bond of language and religious binds people’s emotions more than National Unity.

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