

Harichand Thakur and the Matua community

March 31, 2022

In news- Prime Minister virtually addressed the Matua community during the opening of 'Matua Dharma Maha Mela 2022' organized in West Bengal on the occasion of the 211th birth anniversary of Shree Shree Harichand Thakur.

Who is Harichand Thakur?

- Harichand Thakur was a **Hindu monk known for his immense contribution for uplifting the untouchables in the undivided Bengal.**
- He was **born in 1812 in Orakandi in Bangladesh** in a peasant farmer family of the Thakur community.
- Thakur, whose family were Vaishnavite Hindus, **founded a sect of Vaishnavite Hinduism called Matua.**
- This was **adopted by members of the Namasudra community, who were then also known by the common pejorative name of Chandalas and considered untouchables.**
- The sect, **opposed to caste oppression, later attracted adherents from other communities marginalized by the upper castes, including Malis and Telis.**
- Thakur's followers consider him God and an avatar of Vishnu or Krishna and thus, he came to be known as Sri Sri Harichand Thakur.
- After the death of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur, his son, Guruchand Thakur (born 1846), took the lead of Matua Mahasangha. He established number of schools for the education of Dalit community.
- **Guruchand Thakur collaborated with English Baptist missionary doctor Cecil Silas Mead, who worked and lived among the Namasudras, to get the Chandala people recategorised as Namasudras.**

- Under his leadership Matua sect achieved its doctrinal cohesion and major organizational push, as it came to be associated with the **Namasudra social protest movement** started in 1872.
- **Namasudra, also known as Namassej or Namassut**, is an **avarna** community originating from southern and central Bengal.
- They were traditionally engaged in cultivation and as boatmen and lived outside the four-tier ritual varna system and thus were outcastes.

About Matua community-

- **Matua is a sect of depressed class Hindus who are Namasudras, a Scheduled Caste group.**
- **Originally from East Pakistan, the Matuas migrated to India during Partition and after the creation of Bangladesh.** However, a sizable number are yet to get Indian citizenship.
- It is estimated that this Matua sect (SCs) constitutes more than 15% of the overall population in the state of West Bengal.
- The **Matua Mahasangha** is a religious reformation movement launched as a reformation by the followers of Harichand Thakur.
- In November 2018, **late matriarch of Matua Mahasangha, Binapani Devi Thakur was awarded Banga Bibhushan, the highest civilian award of West Bengal.**