



## Role of National Education Policy for Educational Development of Schedule Caste with Special Reference to Namasudra

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### Abstract:

*The Namasudra is a Scheduled Caste community that originated in undivided Bengal (now Bangladesh and West Bengal). Today, the majority of the Namasudra population is spread across West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Meghalaya. This community is recognized as socio-economically disadvantaged and is listed under the Scheduled Caste category in the Indian Constitution. This paper focuses on the educational upliftment of the Namasudra community. The Namasudras hold a significant position within the Scheduled Caste population in India. The paper also examines the role of the National Policy on Education in advancing the educational progress of Scheduled Castes, with particular emphasis on the Namasudra community.*

**Keywords:** *Scheduled Caste, Namasudra, Education, National Policy.*

### Introduction:

In the Indian Constitution, the Namasudra community is recognized as socio-economically backward and is classified under the Scheduled Caste group. They are primarily found in West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Jharkhand in India and in regions of Bangladesh such as Faridpur, Gopalganj, Bagerhat, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Jessore, and Khulna. In the early 19th century, a significant decline occurred within the Brahminical Hindu and Vaishnav traditions. During this troubled period in India (1812-1878), Sri Sri Harichand Thakur led a revolt against the Vaishnav and Brahminical religious practices. He also opposed the oppression imposed by Brahmin landowners (zamindars) and their associates. As a result, the marginalized Chandals gradually began supporting his movement. Thakur, transcending the prevailing mindset of the time, reached out to the downtrodden Chandals, offering them hope and encouraging them to overcome their fears. He helped establish a community for them, providing a sense of identity through his own Matua religion, while also resisting religious conversions. Thakur became the first leader to advocate for the rights of the Chandals, a group that had long been denied basic rights. His movement focused on promoting peaceful, domestic lives for the Chandals and emphasized the importance of their land rights. By uniting them under their shared religious identity, he inspired the Chandals to join his movement for justice and social empowerment.

The early 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century (1812-1937) marked the beginning of a new era in East Bengal, where religion, socio-culture, education, economy, and politics began to converge for the upliftment of the downtrodden people. From the historical perspective of their struggle for freedom from social injustice, the significant contributions of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and his son, Guruchand Thakur, stand out as a bright landmark. Building on the united strength of religion, Guruchand Thakur launched the second phase of his movement to open the previously closed doors of opportunity for the oppressed people. One of his key initiatives was the education movement, which he began among the marginalized communities of Bengal, inspired by the vision of his father, Sri Sri Harichand Thakur. At the time, there were no educational opportunities available for the oppressed people in Bengal. In response to this, Guruchand Thakur became a pioneering hero, starting the education movement to provide access to education for the downtrodden, under the united strength of the Matua faith.

**Objectives:** The major objectives of the study are-

1. To identify the educational Participation of Namasudra Community
2. To find out the various recommendations of NPE for educational development of Scheduled caste.
3. To find out the present educational status of Scheduled Caste in India.

**Methodology:** Secondary survey method has been followed for the present study. The data has been collected through documentary survey (census report, books, journal, etc.)

### **Historical Background of Namasudra Community:**

These communities have a rich history of emergence and evolution, yet they remain economically disadvantaged compared to other castes. Two prominent ethnologists, James Wise and Herbert Risley, believed that the term 'Namasudra' was derived either from the Sanskrit word 'namas' (meaning adoration), signifying people who were obliged to show obeisance even to the Shudras, or from the Bengali word 'namas' (meaning below or beneath), which would indicate a lower grade of Shudras. According to Sashi Kumar Baroi Biswas, the word 'Namasudra' has two interpretations: first, namaskar or paying obeisance, referring to people who paid respect to the Shudras (Shudrangnamati); and second, to be avoided, meaning they were shunned by the Shudras (Namah Shudrena). Another commentator on the term, Naresh Chandra Das, suggested that Namasudra refers to Shudras who were subjects of obeisance, which seems to be the most widely accepted explanation. In this context, Naman means respected, and Shudra refers to a lower caste group in the traditional caste hierarchy. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, in his study *Caste Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudra of Bengal, 1872 to 1947*, argued that the Namasudra community was once known as Chandala or Chandals, who primarily lived in the districts of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Following the partition of India in 1947, many of them were forced to migrate to West Bengal. Other synonymous terms for the Namasudra community include Chandal, Charal, Namasud, and Namah (Roy 2018).

### **Educational Participation of Namasudra:**

The revolt that occurred in 1872-73, known as the Chandal Movement, originated in the Faridpur district, specifically in the village of Amdanga. Both Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur played pivotal roles in this movement. According to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, "The first significant step toward spreading education was taken in 1880, when a pathsala (school) was established in Orakandi with the exclusive purpose of educating Namasudra children." In 1881, during the funeral ceremony of Iswari Gayen's mother

in the village of Duttadanga, Khulna district, Guruchand Thakur first called for an education movement aimed at uplifting the downtrodden. Guruchand Thakur realized the importance of education through his own life experiences. He believed that education was the only means to bring a person from darkness to light. Furthermore, he understood that education could foster equality and, as a result, marked it as the key to progress. He launched his movement with the central demand for education for all, encouraging even parents to beg, if necessary, to ensure that their children received an education.

In 1907, under the leadership of Sri Guruchand Thakur, several schools were established in Orakandi, including a higher English medium school named Dr. C.S. Mead School. He also founded a girls' school, which was later named Shanti Satyavama Girls' School. In the same year, Guruchand Thakur advocated for job reservations for the Namasudra community and was successful in this effort. As a result of his movement, his elder son, SashiBhushan, secured the post of sub-registrar, Kumud Bihari Mallick became a Deputy Magistrate, and Tarini Chandra Bala was appointed as a government doctor. Following suggestion of Guruchand Thakur, the Namasudra Suhrid Patrika began publication from Orakandi, with Aditya Chowdhury as its editor. In 1909, under Guruchand Thakur's leadership, widow remarriage was introduced within the community. In 1911, as a result of his efforts, the Chandals were officially recognized as Namasudras in the census. That same year, inspired by Guruchand Thakur and initiated by Purnachandra Mallick, Gopinathpur High School was established. In December 1913, Guruchand Thakur was awarded a silver medal by the British Government in recognition of his social work. In 1916, Sri Sri Harlilamrita, written by Rasaraj Tarak Sarkar, was published from the Sri Dam Mudi Lane Press in Kolkata, thanks to Guruchand Thakur's efforts. The publication was supported by poet Haribar Sarkar and Guruchand Thakur's second son, Sudanya Kumar. The book, which cost around Rs. 500 to publish, was sold for Rs. 3 and became a core text for the Matua community. In 1919, Guruchand Thakur presided over an assembly of the downtrodden community in Dhaka. In 1921, he was the president of an assembly of farmers in Firozpur. In 1927, Guruchand Thakur sent his grandson, P.R. Thakur, to London to study law and become a barrister. His other grandson, Bhagabati Thakur, was also sent to London to pursue a PhD in Philosophy, becoming the first PhD degree holder from the Namasudra community (Biswas 2017).

Progress of Scheduled Caste's literacy In India from 1961-2011 Census Year 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2011  
Scheduled Caste 10.27, 14.67, 21.38, 37.41, 54.69, 66.1 and General 28.3 34.45 42.57 52.21 65.38,  
74(Various Census report of India from 1961-2011.)

### **Recommendations of NPE for educational development of Scheduled caste:**

In 1986, the Government of India introduced the National Policy on Education and the National Education Policy to improve the educational landscape of the country. This policy emphasized the need to address the educational needs of all sectors, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other Backward Classes in India.

1. Abolition of tuition fees: Tuition fees have been abolished in all government schools across states, at least up to the upper primary level. Many states have also removed tuition fees for SC/ST students up to the senior secondary level.
2. Provision of incentives: Various incentives, such as free textbooks, uniforms, stationery, and school bags, are provided to these students to support their education.
3. The key programs of the Department of Education, namely Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Lok Jumbish (LJ), Shiksha Karmi (SK), and the National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education, prioritize regions with significant populations of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs);

4. Seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in central government institutions of higher education, including IITs, IIMs, Regional Engineering Colleges, Central Universities, Kendriya Vidyalayas, and Navodaya Vidyalayas. In addition to reservations, there is also a relaxation in the minimum qualifying cut-off criteria for admission to universities, colleges, and technical institutions.

5. To enhance the academic skills and linguistic proficiency of students in various subjects and improve their comprehension levels, remedial and special coaching are offered to SC/ST students.

6. Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates are granted a relaxation of up to 10 percent in the cut-off marks for the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) test. Additionally, all SC and Scheduled Tribe (ST) candidates who qualify for the JRF are awarded scholarships.

7. Every year, fifty Junior Fellowships in Sciences and Humanities, including Social Sciences, are awarded to SC/ST candidates who appear in the National Eligibility Test (NET) and qualify for Lectureship.

8. The University Grants Commission (UGC) provides a 5% relaxation in marks at the Master's level for SC/ST candidates for appointment as lecturers.

**Present educational status of Scheduled Caste in India:**

General and Scheduled Caste Literacy Rate in India, Census 2011

Sl no	State Name	General Literacy Rate (%)	ScheduledCaste literacy Rate(%)
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	86.3	-
2	Andhra Pradesh	67.4	62.28
3	Arunachal Pradesh	67.0	-
4	Assam	73.2	76.99
5	Bihar	63.8	48.65
6	Chandigarh	86.4	76.45
7	Chattisgarh	71.0	70.76
8	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	77.7	89.42
9	Daman & Diu	87.1	92.56
10	Delhi	86.3	78.89
11	Goa	87.4	83.73
12	Gujarat	79.3	79.18
13	Haryana	76.6	66.85
14	Himachal Pradesh	83.8	78.92

15	Jammu and Kashmir	68.7	70.16
16	Jharkhand	67.6	55.89
17	Karnataka	75.6	65.33
18	Kerala	93.9	88.73
19	Lakshadweep	92.3	-
20	Madhya Pradesh	70.6	66.16
21	Maharashtra	82.9	79.66
22	<u>Manipur</u>	79.8	76.09
23	<u>Meghalaya</u>	75.5	68.57
24	Mizoram	91.6	92.43
25	<u>Nagaland</u>	80.1	-
26	Orissa	73.5	69.02
27	Puducherry	86.5	77.90
28	Punjab	76.7	64.81
29	Rajasthan	67.1	59.75
30	Sikkim	82.2	77.54
31	Tamil Nadu	80.3	73.26
32	Tripura	87.8	89.45
33	Uttar Pradesh	69.7	60.89
34	Uttarakhand	79.6	74.41
35	West Bengal	77.1	69.43
36	Telangana	66.46	58.90

It is found that literacy rate of scheduled caste is less than general literacy rate of most of the state in India.

### **Conclusion:**

The National Policy on Education plays a crucial role in the educational development of Scheduled Castes, including the Namasudra community, by providing opportunities to overcome barriers and achieve educational upliftment. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes several key measures for the benefit of Scheduled Castes, such as: Reducing opportunity costs and fees for pursuing higher education. Increasing financial assistance and scholarships for socio-economically disadvantaged students. Developing bridge courses to support students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

These initiatives aim to promote inclusivity and equitable access to education.

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