

Impact of Social and Cultural Globalization: The Transmission of Namasudras in West Bengal, 1947-2011

Krishna KantaDhali

Assistant Professor of History, Gobardanga Hindu College

Abstract: *Social and cultural globalization refers to the growth of the worldwide system, both in size and complexity. That system includes state governments, national governments, their governmental and intergovernmental organizations as well as government- independent elements of global civil society such as international non-governmental organizations and social movement organizations. One of the key aspects of the Social and cultural globalization is the declining importance of the state and the rise of other actors on the political scene. Political globalization is one of the three main dimensions of globalization commonly found in academic literature, with the two other being economic globalization and socio-cultural globalization. It refers to the transmission of ideas meanings and values around the world in such a way as to extend and intensify social relations.*

Keywords: Government, Globalisation, Dimensions, Culture

Asocial interaction is any relationship between two or more individuals. More ever social relations derived from individual agencies form the basis of social structure. Fundamental inquiries into the nature of social relations feature in the work of sociologists such as Max Weber in his theory of social action. Social-relations are marked by the common consumption of cultures that have been diffused by the internet, popular culture media and international travel. The circulation of cultures enables individuals to partake in extended social relations that transcend national and regional borders. The creation and expansion of such social relations is not merely observed on a material level.Social and cultural globalization involves the formation of shared norms and knowledge with which people associate their individual and collective cultural identities. It allows increasing interconnectedness among different populations and cultures. In this paper I interrogate the following issues:

- a) How does Namasudra Political Movement get associated with, and developed by the influences of social and cultural globalization?
- b) How can globalization be witnessed in changes such as politics in West Bengal?
- c) How can globalization be responsible for the creation of the global civil society in Namasudra in West Bengal?

Globalization is not new but in present situation some features as space and time are shrinking borders between countries and the strict geo-political regions are gradually disappearing affecting the various nation states in the present century. Globalization has an inalienable connection with modernization. Industrialization and urbanization are its natural by-products. Developments of science and technology, modernization of transport and communication network, have a considerable impact in every sphere of life and the corresponding cultural paradigms. We think that the development processes through

globalization make the people of the world contented and prosperous by eradicating illiteracy, poverty and inequality, thereby allowing for a general sense of integrity. Yet quite the opposite conditions prevail in reality. The unequal and uneven processes in the distribution of gains and losses, or surplus profits and diminishing returns, affect the economically weaker sections of the society, forcing communities to resort to migration. As it is apparent from available information, the globalization processes, succeed in creating a gap between developed and underdeveloped, between rich and poor, between have and have-nots in certain countries.¹ In India, impact of globalization is not equal in each segment of the society, specially the poor marginalized scheduled caste people. These communities are not centered round religion alone, but act as foundations of socio-political movements, too. The inspiration of the various cultural and literary activities operating in layers of their consciousness are significant promotional factors leading to the consolidation of such movements located primarily in the remote hinterlands of Bengal.

To cite an instance, the Motua community of Orakandi presently located in Faridpur district of current Bangladesh, with Harichand and Guruchand Thakur as its chief propounders, constituted a social movement within the Namasudra or Motua community. With this connection in mind, the international folk culture and motua culture specialist professor Dr. Tushar Kanti Chattopadhyaya says, "As Sri Chaitanya is the leader of the renaissance of sixteenth century and Raja Rammohun Roy of the nineteenth century; Hari Thakur is the pioneer of the Renaissance of the neglected and backward folk society at a critical juncture of the history of Bengal".² The social movements that began to assert 'Chandal' identities in Bengal started in the 1870s and had very clearly identifiable geographical locations and this community was at the forefront of this movement. The Namasudras of erstwhile East Bengal, lived mainly in the districts of Bakarganj, Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna, Dhaka, Barishal but were also scattered in other eastern and central Bengal districts.³ The other Scheduled Caste group that was also organized with basic systematic ideological concepts were the Poudra-Kshatriyas of south Bengal. But they were rather less in number and organisationally not as powerful as the other groups. The Namasudra, Rajbanshi and Paundra-Kshatriyas are three major communities in Scheduled Castes. But the other Scheduled Castes of Bengal were demographically so dispersed and economically so backward and dependent that do not see much of their presence in organized Scheduled Caste politics in the Colonial period. So when the Scheduled Caste political movement started in Bengal in the early twentieth century, the Namasudras provided the majority of its leaders and supplied its main support base. For this community, their geographical location was a major factor behind successful social mobilization but they lost the spatial capacity as a result of Partition. However, even before Partition, in the last days of the Raj their movements lost homogeneity and were heading in a variety of directions as a result of the interplay of a complex set of historical factors.

After 1937, Jogendra Nath Mondal, Mukunda Bihari Mallick, Pramatho Ranjan Thakur, Rebati Mohon Sarkar, Birat Chandra Mondal, Vismadeb Das, Dhananjoy Roy were the most famous and active leaders of this community before and after partition of India. In 1945, the Namasudra leader Jogendra Nath Mandal started the Bengal provincial branch of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Scheduled Caste Federation. He believed that the Dalit and Muslim peasants in East Bengal had similar interests, and so, a Dalit-Muslim political alliance was in the best interest of the. But his pro-Muslim League stance was not acceptable to many of his fellow Namasudra leaders, who were wary of their future in a Muslim majority Bengal. The history of Namasudra and Muslim peasant relationship was not an uninterrupted story of harmony and co-operation; it was regularly interrupted by violent riots. So, around this time, there were two other rival Scheduled Caste organizations, the Depressed Classes League, headed by another

Namasudra leader PramathaRanjan Thakur, supported the Congress, while the Depressed Classes Association, led by yet another Namasudra leader Birat Chandra Mandal, was more directly aligned with the Hindu Mahasabha.⁴ In other words, the Scheduled Castes and the Namasudra community which represented them, remained intensely divided on the Partition issue in 1946-47, and were also strategically aligned with various mainstream political parties, such as Muslim League, Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. The 1946 riots in Calcutta and Noakhali brought further rift that went beyond the ranks of the Dalit leadership and caused even greater damage to their identity politics. JogendraNathMandal remained a minister in the Muslim League ministry of H.S. Suhrawardy, widely believed to be the mastermind behind the Great Calcutta Killing and this made him intensely unpopular among the caste Hindus. Jogendra Nath Mandal, and the Bengal branch of the Scheduled Caste Federation which he was leading, continued to oppose Partition and advocated the creation of a united sovereign Bengal. In such a situation, when the Hindu Mahasabha launched its campaign to partition Bengal in order to create a Hindu majority province of West Bengal within the Indian Union, and Congress endorsed it after the Tarakeswar Convention in April 1947, many Namasudras became actively associated with this movement. Their major concern at this stage was to keep their habitat – the districts of Bakarganj, Faridpur, Jessore, and Khulna – within the Hindu majority province of West Bengal.⁵

Influenced by the political and philosophical thought of Guruchand Thakur (a great leader of Namasudra) a large number of Namasudra leader like PramathaRanjan Thakur, Kukud Bihari Mallick, Birat Chandra Mondal, Rasik Lal Biswas, Dhananjay Roy, Kamini Prasanna Majumdar, Sharat Chandra Majumdar joined the said politics in Bengal. They realised that the social disrespect and social prejudices are the main problems of the Namasudras after 1947. According to one report, 1,870,535 Hindu refugees had migrated from East to West Bengal by February 1949.⁶ But, even at this stage, the Scheduled Caste peasants did not fully migrate, although they felt quite vulnerable. Jogendra Nath Mandal chose to remain in Pakistan and joined the Liaquat Ali Khan ministry as its Labour and Law Minister. He remained in this position until 1950, and all this time, he alternated between representing the larger Hindu minority interests on the one hand and championing the specific Scheduled Caste identity on the other.⁷ It is clear to them that lower castes (namasudras) are the large majorities of Hindus who are continuously deprived by the upper caste. The latter always overlooked the main issues affecting the marginalised people, particularly economic and refugees problems circumscribing their social ignominy.⁸ one of the largest crises engaging refugees in the World was created at the time of India's Independence when almost 1 Crore of the Bengali-speaking people became refugees.⁹ After Independence of India refugee problem posed a very serious threat in World politics. In 1951 at the General Assembly meeting held in United Nations the problem was addressed formally as 'Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees'. This Convention gave birth to the main law deed about the Refugees Issues.¹⁰ United Nation explained and defined "refugees". The Convention declared , "*An individual who, owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the country, of who not having a nationality of being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or unwilling to return to it.*"¹¹

The Namasudras were the largest part of the Refugees who lived in East Bengal. They came to India after 1949-50s riots from East Bengal.¹² According to Indian constitution during the decade of the 50s, most of the refugees belonged to the general caste and after Indo-Pak war 1971, most of the refugees were Scheduled caste Hindus.¹³ A meeting held in Wellington Square, Kolkata on 12 April 1957, Hemanta

Biswas had to appeal to all political parties not to exploit the refugees to achieve their own political goals.¹⁴JogendraNath Mandal at this stage emerged as the major spokesperson for the Namasudra refugees in these camps and his leadership in some ways reduced the level of support for the leftists. But he too could not bring back the caste question to the centre stage of the Namasudra refugees' struggle for rehabilitation. In West Bengal Namasudra movement commenced in 1948 by the Pramatho Ranjan Thakur. This movement gained impetus in many other forms in West Bengal. Public meetings, religious gatherings, spiritual movements, cultural programmes, pamphleteering, autobiographical writings, songs, and little magazines helped to surface their views. The movement sufficed to move beyond the confined social levels to a wider spectrum. Thus, the term "globalization" though not exactly known to the communities of the earlier Indian people, came to affect them rather subconsciously. From 1950s to 1967s Pramatha Ranjan Thakur was the main leader of the Namasudra movement. Namasudra culture and thought spread in the World with the various cultural, philosophical and political activities. After 1971, third world countries moved on with globalisation and India was no exception to the rule..

In 1977 Bengal, when the first Left Front government came to power, the cabinet did not possess a single Namasudra minister. When Kanti Biswas, a Namasudra from the CPI(M) raised a hue and cry about this, chief minister Jyoti Basu asked, "We know the Scheduled Castes are socially and economically backward, but what is the justification to include someone of them as a minister?"¹⁵ Still later, when the Mandal Commission would question Basu about Bengal's castes, he would reply that he knew only two: rich and poor.

The Communist mono-doctrine of class and the fact that its leadership was almost completely savarna, or upper caste, made them blind to the lived reality of caste in Bengal. Unsurprisingly, there hasn't been a single Dalit in the Communist Party of India (Marxist) politbureau since its formation in 1964. The impact of globalization did not bother them since they were closed against it. In fact, so terrible was the plight of Namasudra refugees under Left rule that often they weren't even allowed to settle in the main territory of Bengal, their native space and were pushed farther to the jungles of Dandakaranya in Chhattisgarh and even the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Even worse, in 1979, the Left Front government conducted a mass killing of Namasudra refugees, infamously known as the Marichjhapi massacre. The scenario changed rapidly in the new millennium. Looking to overthrow the CPI(M)'s 34-year-long rule, Banerjee drastically changed the Namasudra power equation. She visited the home of Binapani Devi, the spiritual head of the Matua Mahasangha, and asked for her active support. This direct call to a large scheduled caste was a game changer in Bengali politics and threw the Communists off guard. They had always relied on Namasudra support, but having the Matua identity at the high table of politics was something that the Communists – led by a staunchly savarna bhadralok vanguard – were unaccustomed to. Of course, Banerjee had her own interests at heart. The Communists had a strong cadre base and party structure. The Trinamool, wanted to piggyback on the Matua Mahasangh – an attractive prospect given that massive Namasudra migration from East Bengal has meant that something like a quarter of West Bengal's Assembly constituencies now have significant numbers of Matuas.

The gamble worked. Matua support is considered one of the key factors for Banerjee's win in 2011. The contrast with the 1977 Left Front government, and Jyoti Basu's attitude, was stark. During the 2014 elections, Narendra Modi courted the Namasudras, promising them full Indian citizenship – an ironic pitch given that it was a 2003 law passed by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-headed Bharatiya Janata

Party government which had identified Bangladeshi refugees as "D", or doubtful voters. Before that, there were regular, if informal, channels for East Bengali immigrants to take Indian citizenship.¹⁶In this election (2014 Loksabha) , unlike 2011, there was no consolidated Matua backing of Banerjee and many factions of the sect are even supporting the CPI(M). But the start made in 2011 cannot be undone, and Namasudra identity is now a definite factor in West Bengal's politics.

A huge number of followers being Bangladeshi refugees, the community was a safe vote bank for the Left parties that championed the Matuas' demand for Indian citizenship and better living conditions. But the Matuas shifted political loyalties by voting for the Trinamool Congress in the Panchayat election of 2008 and the Lok Sabha poll of 2009. They accused the Left Front government of not delivering on its promises. The cause of the shift, however, was Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's gradual warming to the community's 93-year-old 'godmother' Binapani Devi — popularly known as “Boroma” — and her conversion to a Matua herself. Ms. Banerjee managed to pull off a coup of sorts in 2010 when Boroma declared her the “chief patron” of the Matua Mahasangh, cementing the Trinamool Congress' support base in the community. Leaders of the other major parties — Brinda Karat of the CPI(M), Biman Bose, chairman of the State's Left Front Committee, and Manas Bhunia, president of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress, to name a few — soon found their way to Boroma's Thakurnagar residence as well. What ensued was a contest to shower largesse on the Matuas. Ms. Banerjee promised to upgrade the Thakurnagar railway station, build a stadium and a railway hospital, besides donating money, while the State government instituted a scholarship in Harichand Thakur's name, promised to build a college after him, and allotted land to set up a research centre. The compulsion to keep the community in good humour was reflected in the Trinamool Congress deciding that senior party leader Mukul Ray would share the dais with CPI(M) leader Goutam Deb at a large rally organised by the Mahasangh in Kolkata on December 28, 2010. Boroma presided over the “apolitical” rally, which was attended by senior leaders of other major parties as well. Matua support is tilted in favour of the Trinamool Congress; Boroma's younger son Manjulkrishna Thakur is contesting on a Trinamool ticket from the Gaighata (SC) Assembly segment. Though his mother remains non-committal about supporting any particular party, Manjulkrishna sounds confident about securing a clear majority and bringing “a meaningful change to the lives of the downtrodden and the refugees.” Boroma says: “Who am I to bless anyone or ask others to vote for a specific party? It is God's will to decide. But I want my son to emerge victorious and I might even campaign for him. This political upliftment of the namasudra community is related to the globalization. Namasudra culture, social activities, their own song (like Hari songkirton, kabigan), economic activities, political movement are developed in various new forms by influents of globalization.

Motua cultural and political movement is effected by the Social and Cultural globalisation.The two census reports attached herewith have a lot to reveal.

Table-1

Literacy rate of main scheduled caste community of West Bengal

Community	Literacy rate (2001) (%)	Literacy rate (2011) (%)
Rajbanshi	60,14	70,66

Namasudra	71,93	79,52
Bagdi	47,72	61,41
Shuti	72,10	79,75
Bauri	37,47	50,50
Chamar / Muchi	46,99	60,04

Source: Indian census, 2001 and 2011 West Bengal, source highlights; scheduled caste, schedule tribe, Barna. Indian census 2001, Summary of census source, 2011, table 10.¹⁷

Table-2

Report of main scheduled caste community of West Bengal depends on agriculture

Community	% of scheduled caste community people on agriculture
Rajbanshi	63.45
Namasudra	40.89
Bagdi	69.64
Shuti	44.68
Bauri	60.78
Chamar / Muchi	51.39

Sources: Indian census, 2001 and 2011 West Bengal Summary of census source, 2011, table 10.¹⁸

The data reveals that the literacy rate has increased to a considerable extent for certain scheduled caste communities but the general development requires better scrutiny especially when globalization has continued to strike them from several quarters. The dependence on agrarian economy being comparatively less in the case of Namasudras and shuti communities, however proves that the larger sections may have considered seeking other jobs in other sectors and may have been compelled to migrate to other regions in small groups or even as nuclear families.

Globalization in modern era is a mantra to solve the Matua crisis. Everyone think that through globalization the whole world will unify into a family as a global family or a global village. But in real world different things happened. In developing and underdeveloped community the fruit of this process did not reached equally in all the segment of the society specially the marginal class the scheduled caste community. Above all globalization as well as the development programs can't transform the pattern and standard of life on a large scale in West Bengal. Because West Bengal is one of the states of India, a democratic country where the Namasudra community could not share the fruit of development programs equally like other-caste people. It also increases discrimination among the rural and urban people,

between have and have not family. Poor people become poorer. The tribal are exploited more. In the constitution there is some provision for education and for the development of their socio-economic conditions. In spite of this provision they are victimized by the industrialization and modernization process in rural areas. Their actual sources of income have been exploited for industrialization and urbanization processes for which they have to lose tenancy. Family structure has also changed. To improve and transform their living pattern govt. has to take some measures in

- i) land acquisition,
- ii) improvement in infrastructural and other facilities regarding education,
- iii) more opportunity in employment generation etc.

But I think, Namasudras were numerically big and organizationally as powerful as the other groups and they obtained more education, Govt. service and other cultural and social facility with the help of globalization and its impact.

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