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# Demographic and Socioeconomic Status of *Matua* Community in Barishal, Bangladesh: Historical Perspective

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**Abstract.** This study is an analysis of the socioeconomic and cultural patterns of the *Matua* community revealing a gender imbalance with the presence of only 3% female respondents, indicating the typical practice of traditional norms and rituals. The dominant working-age population of the *Matua* family is raising concerns about workforce sustainability and elder care. Similarly, the high percentage of married respondents and reformed Hinduism emphasizes social justice and equality, highlighting the community's unique challenges. The study reveals a social patriarchal structure with mostly fathers leading households and large extended families, though modernization has directed those families to shift towards nuclear families. Their housing is still largely evident in raw mud houses. Whether the education levels are high, agriculture remains yet dominant. Income inequality is another significant issue, with nearly half of the population in the lowest income bracket. The study emphasizes the importance of gender inclusion, economic diversification, improved living conditions, and enhanced educational and employment opportunities for equitable community development.

**Keywords:** *Matua*, demographic, socioeconomic, historical, Bangladesh

## Introduction

The *Matua* community in Barishal, Bangladesh, is a distinctive and historically noteworthy part of the socioeconomic and demographic environment of the area. With a rich cultural and theological legacy, the group sprang from the larger *Matua* movement of the 19th century, which was started by Sri Sri Harichand Thakur of Gopalganj in contemporary East Bengal. While caste acts as an important factor in marriage practices, public sector employment, social network formation, and political monetization (Ghatak, 2024). the *Matua* community is an avarna or outcast community of Bengal Hindus. Originally, the *Matua* movement was a socio-religious reform movement that promoted economic independence, education, and social equality to improve the Namasudra community, which was disadvantaged. It was established to shield themselves from the disregard for priestly doctrine and to safeguard the lower-class Hindu merchants and landowners who despised and ignored them (Pal, 2018). The *Matua* community in Barishal has been instrumental in forming the socioeconomic landscape of the area. They have historically encountered several difficulties, including economic hardships and societal prejudice. The community has shown remarkably resilient and adaptable to adjust with these challenges. Through business, education, and active involvement in local politics, the *Matua* community in Barishal has improved its socioeconomic situation throughout the years. In Van Schendel's narratives, borderlands mostly represent themselves as threatening and subversive "others" (Van Schendel, 2005) and their inhabitants are commonly accused of being less civilized, and less appropriate than members of the dominant culture (Scott, 2010). However, Barishal City itself is one of the oldest and most multicultural borderland municipalities in Bangladesh. The social dynamics and economic growth of the town are impacted by this population trend. *Matua* community in

Barishal has a varied age range in its demographic profile, with a large proportion of its populace being young and actively engaged in the workforce. Although coercive legal measures such as vested property laws are absent, Hindus have relatively little access to capital assets. Similarly, the untouchable lower castes like Dalits (or *Matua*s) possession of wealth and properties also reflects the same (Chowdhury, 2009). However, the socioeconomic standard has been gradually improving to greater access to healthcare and education. Gaining insight into the demographic and socioeconomic background of the *Matua* community in Barishal from a historical viewpoint is essential to understanding their current situation and the continuous attempts to overcome the obstacles they confront. This historical background sheds important light on the community's path to social and economic empowerment and emphasizes the need for ongoing assistance and inclusive policies to guarantee their long-term growth.

**Rationale**

In recent days, Global poverty, increasing social exclusion, and growing inequality have become an alarming issue to the concerned people. For a better world excluded people need to be included and inserted into the connection of solidarity (Henderson, 2022). In Bangladesh, most Hindus as a religious minority suffer from convulsing factors such as a lack of socioeconomic opportunities, low-intensity hostility at all socioeconomic levels including the state, and that's why they find greater opportunities across the border (Mahmud & Islam, 2022). However, The *Matua* community is a well-known socio-religious group whose distinctive historical and cultural heritage has had a major impact on its socioeconomic and demographic makeup. The purpose of this study is to examine the historical development of the *Matua* community in Barishal, Bangladesh; with a particular emphasis on their socioeconomic circumstances and demographic patterns. Comprehending these facets is vital to formulate policies and initiatives that can improve their standard of living and guarantee their assimilation into the nation's wider socioeconomic structure. The *Matua* community was established in the Bengal area in the 19th century by Harichand Thakur. After the death of Harichand his son Guruchhand Thakur took the leadership of this community. He was the foremost persona to guide the community along with a set of claims and customs (Sinharay, 2012). A notable change in the population was brought about by the community's migration from East to West Bengal, especially in the wake of India's 1947 split. Moreover, Outside West Bengal there is a large proportion of refugees resettled in Orissa, Bihar, Dandakaranya, Andaman Islands, and elsewhere, they migrated for many challenges (Sinharay, 2012). In Bangladesh, *Matua*s also migrated to many districts for various reasons. For instance, Barishal is one of those migrated places. According to Mukherjee, A community of tribal like Dongria Kondh is characterized by very specific economic, kinship, religious, and material-cultural systems (Mukherjee, 2019). Similarly, *Matua*s' socioeconomic standards, cultural customs, and patterns of residence have all been impacted significantly by this movement and their customs and culture. Examining migratory patterns, age distribution, gender ratio, and population growth are all important aspects in analyzing the demographic and socioeconomic trends of the *Matua* community in Barishal. On the basis of historical records, it can be said that, "class" politics is always subordinated by "caste" politics; and politics has historically been dominated by urban-educated upper-caste gentry (Sinharay, 2012). So, the community's population has grown at different rates due to its sociopolitical variables including migration and job possibilities. To address the needs of the community, both now and in the future, it requires an in-depth understanding of these patterns. Education, employment, income levels, and accessibility to essential services are some of the pattern elements that influence the socioeconomic standing of the *Matua* population in Barishal. This study will offer a thorough examination of their present socioeconomic circumstances and point out areas in need of focused improvements. A historical perspective is needed to recognize the long-term socioeconomic possibilities and

problems that the *Matua* community. This research can identify the underlying factors that have contributed to the community's present socioeconomic position by looking at past occurrences and policies that have affected it. This strategy will also draw attention to the community's adaptability and resilience throughout time.

## Objective

Broadly this study wants to know the demographic and socioeconomic status of the *Matua* community in Barishal district, Bangladesh from a historical perspective.

## Methods

The study was carried out in Bangladesh's Barishal district in the Agailjhara, Gournadi, Muladi, and Wazirpur Upazilas. Understanding the demographic and socioeconomic situation of the *Matua* population is made easier by the historical significance and different socioeconomic conditions of this location. The study's target demographic is the *Matua* people who live in the designated Upazilas. This group is the main focus of the inquiry since they are an essential part of the cultural and social fabric of the area.

### Quantitative Methods

The quantitative component of the study used a survey approach to collect detailed information on a range of topics, such as social concerns, opportunities for the *Matua* community, challenges faced, and demographic information. A semi-structured survey questionnaire was used to ease data gathering. By enabling both organized and somewhat open-ended comments, this tool offered a well-rounded method of gathering data. To guarantee a representative subset of the *Matua* population, random sampling was employed. This approach reduces selection bias and improves the findings' generalizability. For the study, a total of 120 *Matua* homes were chosen at random. It was determined that this sample size was adequate to get a trustworthy picture of the socioeconomic and demographic makeup of the neighborhood. Those who lived in homes with at least one adult (18 years of age) were eligible to participate. This age requirement guarantees that the people giving information are probably aware of the situation in the family. By using homes as the main unit of inquiry, the *Matua* community's family and economic systems could be thoroughly examined.

### Qualitative Methods

Qualitative techniques, such as secondary document reviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews (KIIs), were used to supplement the quantitative data. These methods provide a more in-depth understanding of the problems found in the survey. Both KIIs and FGDs were conducted using a checklist as a tool. This made sure that every pertinent subject was covered methodically when gathering qualitative data. To choose participants for the gathering of qualitative data, purposeful sampling was used. This strategy focused on people whose expertise and experience may yield insightful comments. To ensure consistency and relevance in the data acquired, participants for the qualitative approaches were chosen from those questioned during the quantitative phase. To get expert insights into the socioeconomic realities and historical backdrop of the *Matua* community, two Key Informant interviews were carried out with community leaders. There were two focus group discussions with chosen attendees. Every FGD lasted 45 to 60 minutes and had seven participants. These conversations made it easier to examine community potential and challenges in depth. Both manually and with the use of Microsoft Excel, data were evaluated. This strategy made it possible to handle both qualitative and quantitative data using theme analysis and statistical tools. Tables and graphs were used to display the results, giving the data easy-to-understand visual

representations. This style facilitates the comprehension of complicated data sets and helps with the efficient transmission of findings.

## Findings and Analysis

### Sex Ratio of Respondents

Since in many cases, women are more self-conscious about answering any survey questions, it is necessary to maintain the accepted social and cultural atmosphere during the questioning (Newby et al. 1998). In this research, male respondents make up a huge majority (97%) of the sample. This suggests that male *Matua* community members account for the majority of survey replies and data collection. The fact that women make up only 3% of the respondents indicates that they are underrepresented in this specific poll.

Women are less likely to participate in public life in many traditional countries, which might account for their lower survey representation. Their participation in community dialogues, religious matters, or data-gathering procedures may be restricted by social conventions. The data collection process may have unintentionally favored males over women due to factors such as accessibility, participant willingness, or interviewer bias. Males may have different duties or obligations in the *Matua* community than women do, and males may be more involved in the issues the poll was trying to address. The lopsided sex ratio raises the possibility that the survey's data and results include gender bias since they may not accurately reflect the opinions or experiences of women in the *Matua* community (Figure 1).

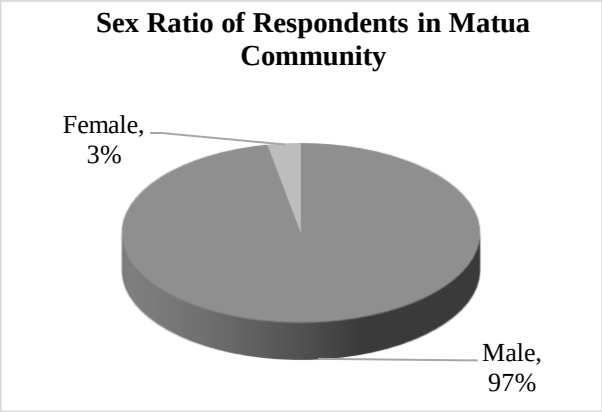


**Figure 1: Sex Ratio of Respondents in *Matua* Community**

### Age Structure of the Respondents

Age and gender are the primary basis for population classification and important demographic variables of mortality, fertility, and marriage in vital statistics, censuses, and surveys (Saha, 2001). Here, 19% of the population is between the ages of 18 to 30. This age group reflects the younger, maybe more movable demographic. The reduced proportion might be a sign of migration in search of better jobs or educational possibilities outside the neighborhood. Ages 31 to 45 (46%) is the largest age group and most likely corresponds to those in the working age range. This demographic frequently engages in the most economic activity, making a substantial contribution to the workforce and financial stability of the town. People in this age range of 46–70 years (27%) are probably more established in their families and occupations. They may also begin to move into retirement, which would add stability and continuity to the community. The smallest age category, reflecting the senior population, is 70 years of age or older (8%). This lower proportion could result from fewer people reaching this age range or from greater mortality rates. The age distribution points to a community with a sizable working-age population, which is essential for both social stability and economic

growth. The comparatively lower numbers of younger and older people may point to future workforce sustainability and elder care issues. Planning for healthcare, economic growth, and community services can be aided by having a thorough understanding of these demographics.

**Table 1: Respondents by Age**

| Age Structure of *Matua* Community's People | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 18-30 | 23 | 19% |
| 31-45 | 55 | 46% |
| 46-70 | 32 | 27% |
| 70+ | 10 | 8% |
| Total | 120 | 100% |

**Marital Status of *Matua***

When a person is physically, mentally, and morally independent enough, then Marriage is socially and religiously a vital ritual to establish a family (Saleheen et al. 2021). A survey conducted in Assam revealed that, their most people are monogamous, and arranged marriage is the norm. They get married into the clan. Eloped within the same community after being married is granted. Child levirate is also permitted (Bordoloi & Das, 1987). Compared to West Bengal, In Barishal 106 out of 120 respondents (88%) are married, showing that married people make up a significant portion of the studied population. People typically get married young in many traditional civilizations where marriage is seen as an important social institution. Within the *Matua* community (assuming this table applies to the same group), marriage may have substantial cultural significance. The high number of married people may be attributed to the respondents' age grouping, which leans toward adults who are typically of marrying age. There is a lower proportion of single people than married, with 14 out of 120 respondents (12%) are not married. This group may be made up mostly of younger people who haven't yet reached the age or stage in life where marriage is customary, or it may also include those who have decided to stay single. There could be societal pressure to marry in some cultures, which would reduce the number of single adults. Those who haven't gotten married yet or opt to stay single make up a portion of the unmarried respondents. There was not a single divorce in the sample; 0 out of 120 respondents reported having been divorced. Divorce is either extremely stigmatized or uncommon in many traditional civilizations. The lack of divorced people in the sample may reflect cultural norms that prohibit or disfavor seeking a divorce. People may find divorce as a sign of relationship failure, so they choose to put up with marital issues instead of filing for divorce. Divorce rates are low or nonexistent in some places due to legal and religious constraints that make the process difficult.

While the extremely small percentage of single people (12%) shows that most adults are probably anticipated to marry, the high percentage of married people (88%) reveals that marriage is a prominent social practice in the community. The lack of divorce may be the result of legal, cultural, or religious restrictions that discourage or make the process more difficult, reflecting a more traditional view of marriage and family life (Table 2).

**Table 2: Respondents by Marital Status**

| Marital Status | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Married | 106 | 88% |
| Unmarried | 14 | 12% |
| Divorced | 00 | 00% |
| Total | 120 | 100x |

**Religious Beliefs and Practices**

All (100%) people of *Matua* community belong to Hinduism. As specified by Fox, Lack of religious legitimacy in political discourse, cultural restrictions imposed by the majority, confrontational behavior against minorities, and defining minorities as the 'other' can be linked to high levels of discrimination and poverty among minorities (Fox, 2000). These were the reasons why in the 19th century, Harichand Thakur established the *Matua* community in Bengal (present-day Bangladesh and India) to reform the whole social structure. It was a socio-religious reform movement. The reform movement of the *Matua* reformers constructed a pluralistic identity combining folk literature and culture, which is humane, liberal, and progressive (Biswas, 2018). It was founded mainly with the intention of uplifting lower caste groups who were socially and politically oppressed, especially the Namasudras, a Dalit community in Hindu society. The teachings of Harichand Thakur, and subsequently his son Guruchand Thakur, were centered on equality, rejection of traditional Hindu traditions that maintained the caste system, and opposition to casteism. The *Matua*s place a strong emphasis on straightforward worship of God (Hari), free from formalities and the mediation of Brahmanical priests. *Matua* adherents view Harichand Thakur as a manifestation of Vishnu, also known as Hari, which situates their religious system under the larger Hinduism. Like the larger Bhakti groups throughout India, they practice devotion to Bhakti, a Hindu path that emphasizes individual devotion to God. Although *Matua*s are Hindus by identity, they openly oppose many of the Hindu religion's traditional Brahmanical rites, particularly those that uphold caste hierarchy. For instance, they don't perform complex Vedic rites or sacrifices, which usually demand the participation of Brahmin priests. The *Matua*s, a community in West Bengal, India, reject caste distinctions and emphasize equality, aligning with their reformist roots. Despite their religious practices, they identify as Hindus due to their Vishnu worship, Bhakti tradition, and social categorization. They aim to reform Hinduism, particularly for lower castes and have grown to significant political influence, often courting political parties during elections. *Matua*, a Hindu community, is known for its pluralistic and inclusive practices, focusing on human dignity, social inclusion, and rejecting discriminatory practices (Mukherjee, 2018). However, there is tension within Hindu society over how *Matua*'s anti-caste stance fits within orthodox Hinduism, with some traditionalists viewing it as non-conforming, while the *Matua* community sees itself as aligned with Hindu spiritual ideals. So, The *Matua* community, a part of the Hindu community, practices a unique form of Hinduism that emphasizes equality, inclusion, and devotion without intermediaries like priests. This socio-religious reformist approach separates them from mainstream Hinduism, making their relationship with the religion distinct.

**Household Head of *Matua***

Table 3 outlines the distribution of household heads (the primary decision-maker or authority figure) in a sample of 120 households.

Silva indicated that due to economic assistance and authoritarian attitudes in South Asia male-headed households are a popular phenomenon (De Silva, 2005). *Matua* leaders proposed an unorthodox religion emphasizing the need for literacy, education, social progress, and most importantly equality (Lorea, 2020). However, structurally the father is the home head in 95 out of 120 cases (79%) of households. The prevalence of patriarchal family arrangements, in which the father is often the head of the household and the key decision-maker, is reflected in this high proportion. In many cultures, the father is expected to take care of social, economic, and familial obligations, especially in South Asia (assuming this data applies to the *Matua* group, as previously noted). This is consistent with widespread cultural norms about male authority in domestic affairs. This arrangement perpetuates the idea that males should be the family's providers and decision-makers and that women should handle more household duties. The

mother is the head of the family in 5 out of 120 households (5%). When the mother is the head of the family, it's often because the father isn't there, either because of his relocation, death, or separation. For example, when their spouses die, widows frequently take on the role of head of the family. Despite being minor, the proportion could also point to some changes in conventional gender roles, with women increasingly taking on leadership responsibilities in families, especially those headed by single parents or matriarchs. This may sometimes be a sign of women's economic engagement when mothers assume the position of decision-makers in the home as a result of their jobs or other active participation in earning a living. As stated by Joshi, 'In general, data indicate that there are two main categories of female-headed households: widows and married women; whose husbands are residing elsewhere' (Joshi, 2004). A sibling is the head of household in 18 out of 120 households (15%). The oldest male sibling, or brother, assumes the role of head of the home when the father is absent, carrying out the duties that the father would have previously performed. Because patrilineal traditions continue to view men as the natural successors in household leadership, it is usual for males to continue to retain leadership positions in the household even in the absence of their fathers. When a parent is sick, unable to care for himself, or employed elsewhere, a sibling may take on this responsibility and oversee day-to-day operations. A sister is the head of household in 2 out of 120 households (1%). Even though sisters only run 1% of families, this is noteworthy because it shows that women have little role as household heads when there are no male role models. This might happen in homes with only one parent, where the elder male siblings or the female assumes leadership because both parents are not there. Although uncommon, this demonstrates a little shift in gender roles where women, in certain extraordinary situations, assume leadership positions in the family structure that have historically been held by men. The majority of households are headed by fathers, reflecting a patriarchal structure where men are the primary authority figures. Even when fathers are absent, male relatives take on leadership roles, making the overall percentage of male-headed households is 94% (79%+15%). This reinforces the cultural preference for male authority. In that sense as well, only 6% of households are headed by women, highlighting the gender disparity in household leadership. Traditional gender roles still dominate, with women taking leadership only in exceptional cases like widowhood or the absence of male relatives. This data suggests that traditional family structures hold significant sway, particularly in conservative or rural communities where responsibilities are largely based on gender.

Table 3 reveals a patriarchal pattern in the surveyed community, with fathers dominating 79%, women representing 5%, and brothers taking 15% of household leadership. This suggests that traditional gender roles persist, and a strong cultural preference for male authority figures within family structures persists even when the father is absent.

**Table 3: Respondents by Household Head**

| Household head | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Father | 95 | 79% |
| Mother | 5 | 5% |
| Brother | 18 | 15% |
| Sister | 2 | 1% |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

**Household Size of *Matua***

De Silva found that many South Asian countries still have a large number of individual families. Yet, Bangladesh has indicated a marginal decline in the prevalence of large families (De Silva, 2005). However, Table 4 presents data on the household size distribution within the

*Matua* community, categorizing households into three sizes: small (2-3 members), medium (4-6 members), and large (7+ members).

Twelve households (10%) out of 120 are categorized as small, implying that two to three people live there. A nuclear family structure is usually represented by a small home size (parents and one child, or just a couple). The community's low ratio of tiny households (10%) implies that nuclear family arrangements are not as prevalent. This may also apply to households where the children have left home or those containing elderly people, maybe as a result of younger family members moving away for employment or other reasons. Some of these little households might be made up of recently created families who haven't yet grown. 44 (or 37%) of the 120 households have four to six people. The middle category probably represents conventional family configurations where parents have several children living under their roof. In many countries where having multiple children is the norm, this size is usual. Numerous children are typical in many traditional or rural societies, such as the *Matua*, for a variety of reasons, including as social standards that value larger families, cultural preferences, or financial necessities (children helping with work). Additionally, medium-sized homes may be transitional, with older children preparing to move out or with extended family members temporarily residing together. There are 64 large households (53%) out of 120, with seven or more persons. A big household size is indicative of an extended family, which consists of relatives such as uncles, aunts, cousins, or parents and grandparents living together under one roof. This shows that the *Matua* village has a joint family system in place. Due to the reliance on agriculture for household income, big families are typical in traditional rural areas, where multiple family members make up the labor force. In such contexts, having a large family may also be considered economically advantageous. Large, multigenerational families are common in various cultures, particularly in areas like the *Matua*, where there is a strong tradition of family closeness. This practice extends beyond marriage. In addition to sharing resources and assigning several family members to different obligations (such as child or elder care), large families can also offer a robust social support network. The extended or joint family system is common in the *Matua* society, as seen by the prevalence of large households (53%) and medium households (37%). This is consistent with cultural norms that maintain close-knit families and the cohabitation of several generations. Particularly in rural or traditional societies where numerous family members can contribute to the household's income or work force, large families are frequently viewed as a social and economic benefit. In rural or agricultural communities like *Matua*, larger families are advantageous as they lead to more people working in agriculture, family businesses, or manual labor. This can also reflect economic challenges, as extended family members often live together to share expenses and support each other financially. Small households (10%) may indicate migration for work, nuclear families, or the elderly with children moving out for work or marriage, or who choose to live independently. The *Matua* community is experiencing a gradual shift towards more nuclear family structures, with a significant portion of households remaining large. This shift may be influenced by urbanization, education, or modernization, as younger generations may prefer or be forced to live independently.

Table 4 shows that *Matua* households are predominantly large (7+ members), reflecting traditional joint family structures in rural communities. However, there is a gradual shift towards nuclear family setups or smaller households, possibly due to migration, modernization, or changing social norms. This distribution suggests a strong cultural preference for family cohesion and intergenerational living, reflecting evolving family dynamics in response to socioeconomic changes.

**Table 4: Respondents by Household Size**

| Household Size of *Matua* Community | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Small (2-3) | 12 | 10% |
| Medium (4-6) | 44 | 37% |
| Large (7+) | 64 | 53% |
| Total | 120 | 100% |

**Family Types of *Matua***

Amin mentioned that increasing landlessness in Bangladeshi villages is leading to increasing fragmentation and nucleation of families and compels the women to be dependent more on their families (Amin, 1998). Table 5 shows the distribution of family types within a sample of 120 households, categorized into single/nuclear, joint, and extended families, with corresponding frequencies and percentages.

Around 33% of households are single/nuclear families, consisting of parents and their children. This trend is a result of urbanization, job migration, and economic factors. Younger generations are seeking financial independence and prefer to live separately from their extended family. As employment opportunities and urbanization increase, smaller, more independent family units become more practical. Social norms also change, with couples raising their children independently, contrasting traditional values of living with parents and siblings. This trend indicates a gradual decline of the joint family system, influenced by lifestyle changes, personal choices, and work-related migration. In many rural and semi-rural communities, joint families are prevalent, with 59% of households consisting of two or more generations. This traditional family structure is seen as central to social and emotional support, as family members rely on each other for caregiving, financial support, and shared responsibilities. Joint families pool resources together, reducing individual financial burdens and making it easier to manage economic hardships. In agrarian communities, where family labor is crucial for harvesting, joint families are often favored (Chowdhury, 2016). Larger households provide more hands for farm work, which is economically beneficial. The joint family system is deeply ingrained in cultural and religious practices, and in many South Asian communities, living together in a joint family is seen as fulfilling cultural expectations of elder care, maintaining family lineage, and upholding traditions. Around 8% of households are extended families, consisting of nuclear family units living together or close by with other relatives. These families often represent a transitional phase between joint and nuclear families, providing social support while allowing some degree of independence. They may grow into full joint families or evolve into separate nuclear households over time. The lower percentage of extended families may reflect the declining role of extended family structures in modern times, as people move to cities and establish nuclear households, reducing their reliance on extended families for economic or social reasons. Joint families are more common in rural or agricultural economies, where having more family members provides greater support for household work, childcare, and economic activities. Nuclear families are more prevalent in urban settings due to smaller living spaces, higher living costs, and job mobility. The maximum percentage (59%) of joint family might reveal that, this traditional *Matua* community has a cultural value that emphasizes on family unity. This is due to the collectivist nature of the society, where the family acts as the primary support system. Whether single/nuclear family percentage (33%), the minor section, revealing a gradual shifting towards modern family structures. It goes to particularly younger generations who prioritize privacy and independence. The *Matua* community is experiencing social transformation, with 33% of families being nuclear, reflecting a shift towards smaller, independent units. However, 59% of families are joint, demonstrating the importance of interdependence and family ties. The extended family structure (8%), may be a transitional form, reflecting families transitioning to nuclear setups or

maintaining close ties while living separately. This suggests that family units in the community are adapting to economic pressures, changing social norms, and modern lifestyles, indicating a state of flux.

Table 5 reveals that 59% of the *Matua* community maintains a joint family system, reflecting traditional values of family cohesion. However, 33% of nuclear families are undergoing modernization, especially in younger generations or urban settings. The extended family (8%) bridges the gap, balancing traditional values with modern economic realities and changing social norms. This distribution highlights the ongoing tension between preserving cultural traditions and adapting to societal changes.

**Table 5: Respondents by Family Types**

| Family Types of *Matua* Community | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Single/Nuclear | 40 | 33% |
| Joint | 70 | 59% |
| Extended | 10 | 8% |
| Total | 120 | 100% |

**Male-Female Ratio in *Matua***

Figure 2 outlines the distribution of different male-to-female ratios within households in a given community, highlighting the varying family structures in terms of gender composition. The study examines the gender composition in households in a community. It reveals that 2% of households have one male and two females, which may indicate a single-parent household or a nuclear family with an equal number of male and female children. 8% of households have an equal male-to-female ratio, suggesting a balance of genders but still relatively uncommon. 9% of households have three males and two females, possibly reflecting households with more sons than daughters, potentially due to cultural preferences or natural family size differences. 13% of households have an equal number of males and females, indicating a balanced gender composition. 15% have a male-dominant household with twice as many males as females, possibly due to cultural or societal preferences for male children or natural variations in birth rates. 11% have four males and three females, reflecting joint families with extended male relatives living together or larger family sizes. 13% have four males and six females, creating a female-majority composition, possibly indicating extended family living arrangements. 19% have an equal number of males and females (five males and five females), suggesting a large joint family structure where both genders are equally represented. This high frequency (19%) suggests that gender-balanced family structures are quite common in this community, suggesting that gender preferences do not play a significant role in household composition. 10% of households have six males and five females, a male-skewed household with a slight excess of males, suggesting natural birth patterns or male-dominant extended family living. The presence of both genders in almost equal numbers suggests that extended family setups are prevalent in this community, where multiple generations or extended relatives live together.

Figure 2 reveals that some households have more males than females, possibly due to natural birth variations or societal preference for male children. In agrarian societies, males are valued for their contribution to physical labor and economic support. However, many households show a balanced male-to-female ratio, indicating gender equality in family composition. This could be due to natural family dynamics or societal preferences. The M-4: F-6 category shows a female-majority household, suggesting that some families have more daughters or extended female relatives living together. This composition could also reflect households with a higher number of female children or where males have moved out for work, leaving a higher proportion of females. The variety of male-to-female ratios, especially in larger households, suggests extended family living arrangements in this community.

Households with higher numbers of both males and females reflect joint family systems, typically seen in traditional communities where family cohesion, shared responsibilities, and collective living are valued. Figure 2 also shows different male-to-female ratios within households, reflecting different family structures in the community. Some are male-dominated, while others are balanced or female-majority. Equal gender ratios indicate gender balance is common. Both male-dominant and gender-balanced households suggest a mix of traditional gender preferences and natural family compositions. Extended and joint family living arrangements are typical in this community, with higher numbers of both males and females.

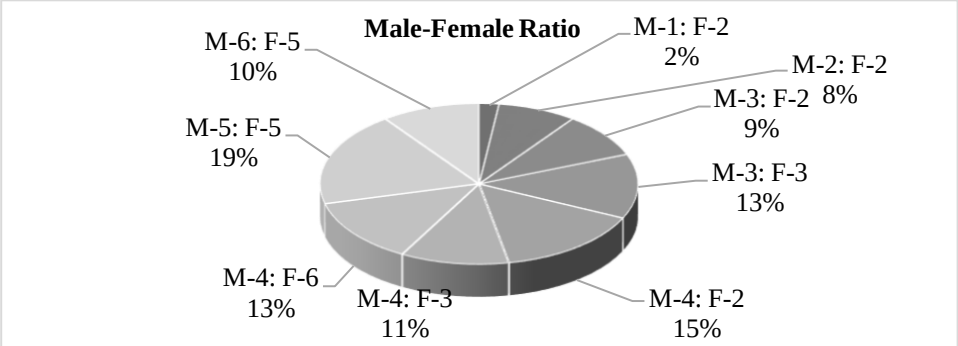


**Figure 2: Male-Female Ratio**

**Types of House Structure**

Housing has multi-layered economic and social characteristics and social benefits. Housing can accelerate community development by improving inequality and efficiency in society (Hasan et al. 2000). Ullah and others observed some Harijan families staying four or five generations of family in a single 10 by 12-foot room of house (Ullah et al. 2016). However, in this study, the dataset consists of four housing categories: Jhupri (11%), Katcha (53%), Semi-pucca (27%), and Pucca (9%). Jhupri houses are basic or temporary, with a low percentage suggesting fewer common dwellings. Katcha houses are made of temporary or less durable materials, suggesting lower economic status or limited access to resources. Semi-pucca houses are partially constructed with durable materials but still have temporary elements, suggesting moderate living conditions. Pucca houses are built with high-quality, durable materials and are considered more permanent and stable, with a small fraction falling into this category, possibly reflecting higher economic status or better access to resources among a smaller group.

The majority of the population (53%) lives in Katcha houses, indicating economic constraints or lack of infrastructure. Semi-pucca houses (27%) show progress, while Pucca houses (9%) indicate a rarity of high-quality, durable housing. The 11% of Jhupri houses reveals diversity in housing conditions. This distribution can help understand population living conditions, assess infrastructure needs, and plan resource allocation (Figure 3).

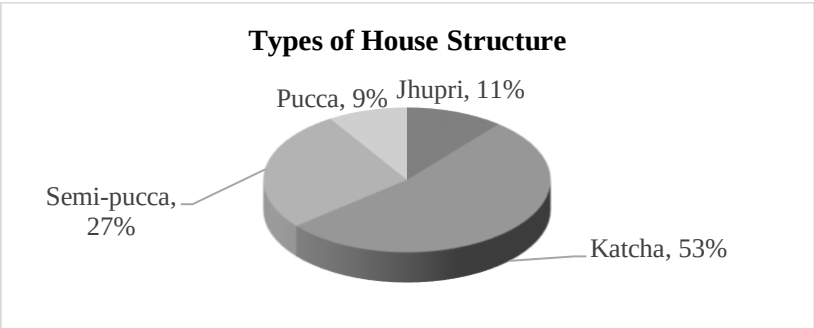


**Figure 3: Types of House Structure**

**Level of Education of *Matua***

Biswas's findings show that, in West Bengal, it also reveals that till 2001 the Namasudra community's growth rate in education has always been above the state-level Schedule Caste literacy growth (Biswas, 2017). On the other hand, In Barishal, Bangladesh the literacy percentage is- Illiterate (2%), Class-V (7%), Class-VIII (17%), SSC (35%), HSC (23%), Degree/Honors (12%), and Masters (4%). The illiterate group has at least some level of formal education, indicating a widespread level of literacy. Class-V represents those who have completed up to Grade 5, while Class-VIII represents those who have completed up to Grade 8. The largest percentage (35%) has achieved SSC, indicating a significant portion of the population has completed secondary education. HSC, equivalent to pre-university education, indicates a substantial number of individuals have pursued education beyond secondary school, preparing them for higher education or specialized training. Degree/Honors, typically obtained from universities, signifies a relatively high level of educational achievement. Lastly, only 4% of the population holds a master's degree, indicating that advanced educational attainment is less common, despite the significant time and financial investment required.

Figure 4 shows a diverse range of educational attainment levels, from illiteracy to advanced degrees. A high percentage of individuals have SSC (35%) and HSC (23%), indicating a significant portion of the population has advanced education. However, lower percentages in Degree/Honors (12%) and Masters (4%) indicate less common but still present advanced education. This information aids in assessing educational needs, planning higher education initiatives, and understanding workforce capabilities.

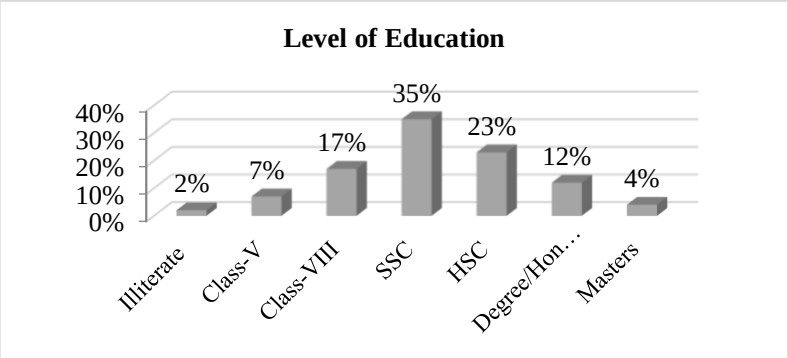


**Figure 4: Level of Education**

**Occupation of *Matua***

The great spirit of the *Matua* religion is the integration of work (Karma) and religion (Dharma). "Work with the hands and chant (Haribol) with the mouth" is the focal message of the *Matua* religion (Mandal, 2021). The majority of the population, 69%, is engaged in Agriculture, indicating its importance in providing livelihoods and influencing the local economy and food security. Education with 13% of the population working in Teaching, is relatively significant but not dominant, indicating the presence of educational institutions and a commitment to academic development. Private services, with 10% of the population employed in private industries, contribute to local economic diversity. Rickshaw pulling, often associated with informal transportation services, accounts for 5% of the population, suggesting it is not as prevalent compared to agriculture or teaching. Government service, with 5% of the workforce engaged in public administration and services, is not the predominant sector but is still relevant. Petty business, comprising small-scale retail and informal enterprises, represents 23% of the population, indicating a degree of economic self-employment and small-scale trade within the community. Only 3% of the population is involved in Big business, which typically refers to larger, more established enterprises. This low percentage suggests limited

opportunities or a less developed big business sector in the area. Research shows that, In India refugee lower caste *Matua* women often take part in agriculture and devote their labor to produce crops for their own families. Very few women went to urban areas in search of work and most of them worked as domestic workers or in factories (Halder 2019). In Bangladesh, the scenario is quite similar. So, overall, the employment landscape in the area is diverse and manifold, with a strong emphasis on agriculture, teaching, and small business activities.

Figure 5 reveals a multiple occupational distribution, with agriculture being the dominant occupation at 69%. Education and local entrepreneurship are prominent, with teaching and petty business contributing significantly. Private service and government roles contribute moderately, while rickshaw pulling and big business make up smaller portions. This distribution reveals the population's economic structure and labor market dynamics, offering insights for economic development and support.

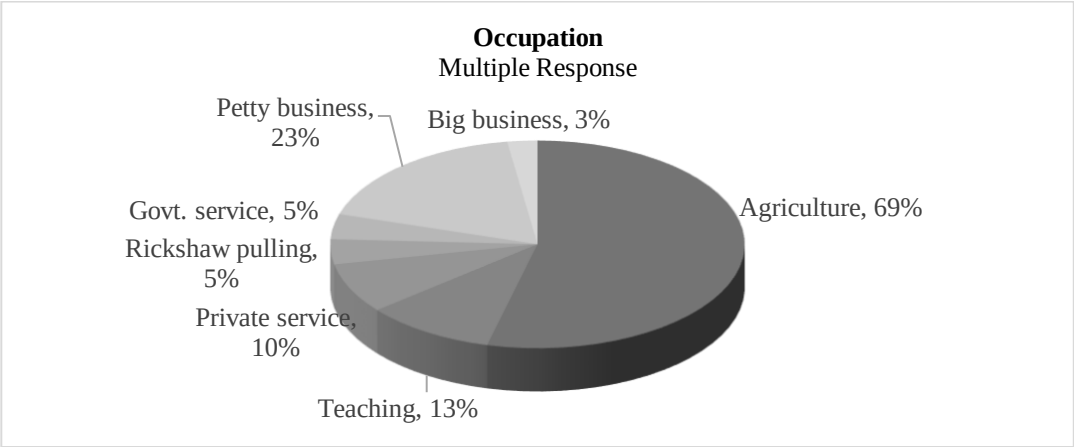


**Figure 5: Occupation**

**Number of Dependent Family Members**

In Bangladesh, since patriarchal/patrilineal kinship is the norm and most women have few income-earning opportunities, therefore they are dependent on primary male relatives for support (Menken, 2004). The number of earners, the type of housing, and the people living in a house are interconnected factors that determine household or family size (Begum, 2004). However, not only women, infants, differently able and elderly people are also generally the dependent members of the family. In this study, more than one third of the population has four dependent members, these dependents could be children, elderly family members, or some others who require financial or caregiving support. Figure 6 shows that a moderate percentage of earning members work for two dependents, indicating a functional level of caregiving and financial responsibility. 13% of earning members work to contribute for three dependents, which add-ons complexity to family's financial conditions. 33% of earning members run four dependents, indicating extensive caregiving and financial responsibility. This category may involve more than one child or a combination of children and other dependents, impacting household resources and planning. 19% of earners manage to take five dependents, which is a significant responsibility involving considerable financial and caregiving demands. 8% of families earn to manage for six dependents and face extensive caregiving and financial responsibilities, likely requiring additional support or services. Finally, 10% of breadwinners' care seven or more dependents, that indicates the highest level of dependency within the dataset. These families face significant challenges in managing their resources and providing for their dependents and may require targeted support or assistance. Overall, the data highlights the significant challenges faced by families in managing their dependents and financial responsibilities.

The data reveals a miscellaneous distribution of earners and caregiving responsibilities across families, with 33% having four dependents. As the number of dependents increases, the remaining segments decrease, with the highest level of 7+ family members affecting 10% of families. This highlights the diverse needs and challenges faced by families with different levels of dependent members, potentially influencing policies or support programs.

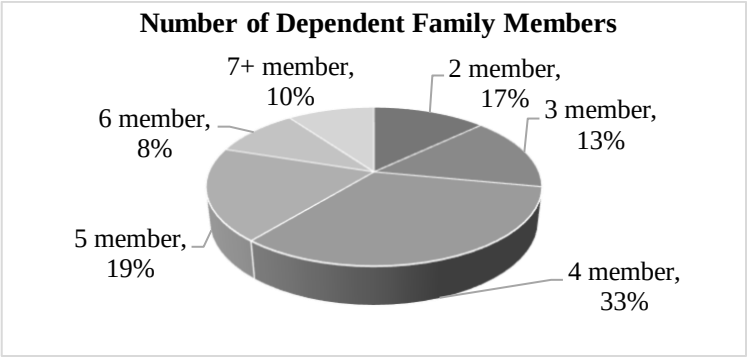


**Figure 6: Number of Dependent Family Members**

**The Monthly Income of *Matua* Family**

According to Shakhari, Economic status generally refers to the degree to which a household or organization maintains its economic status with assets or resources. The economic status of the family cannot be maintained without studying the economic status of all the members of the family (Shakhari, 2016). The income distribution in the Tk. 10,000-15,000 category is the highest, with 47% of the population falling within this range. This indicates that nearly half of the population earns between Tk. 10,000 and Tk. 15,000 monthly. The second bar represents 23% of the population, with almost a quarter earning between Tk. 16,000 to Tk. 20,000 monthly. The third bar represents 21% of the population, earning between Tk 21,000-25,000 monthly with a slightly lower percentage, suggesting a gradual decrease in higher incomes. The smallest group, with only 9%, falls within the Tk. 26,000-30,000 range, highlighting the disparity in income distribution (Figure 7).

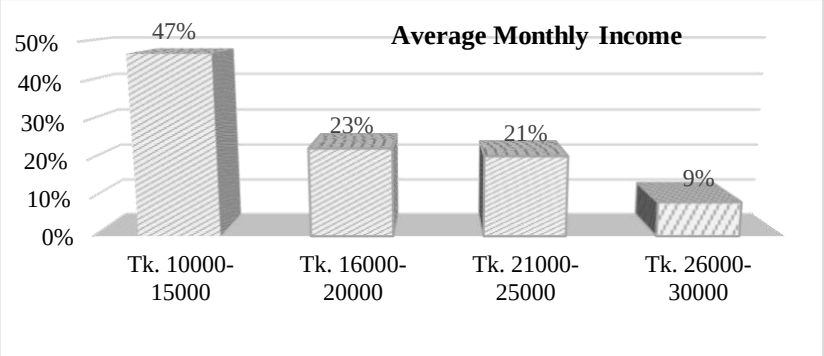


**Figure 7: Average Monthly Income**

**Monthly Savings of *Matua* Family**

A study reveals that education level and household income positively and household size negatively affect monthly savings and the rural people of Bangladesh are less interested in monthly savings (Sadekin et al., 2015). The savings distribution in the Tk. 5,000-10,000 category is the highest, with 47% of the population falling within this range. This indicates that nearly half of the population does not feel or does not have the option to save money more than 10,000 Tk. The second bar represents 26% of the population, a quarter percentage saves money within 11,000 to 15,000 per month. The third bar represents 16% of the population, with a

slightly lower percentage, potraying a gradual decrease of higher savings. The smallest group, with only 11% can manage to save more than 20,000 Tk. per month, highlighting the economical imbalance in the community (Figure 8).

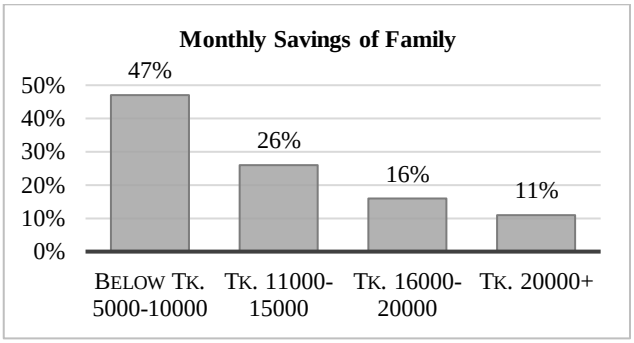


**Figure 8: Monthly Savings of Family**

## Conclusion

The *Matua* community study reveals a significant socioeconomic and cultural pattern, revealing a gender imbalance with 97% male respondents and only 3% female. This disparity may lead to incomplete insights into women's perspectives and issues, highlighting the need for more inclusive data collection. The majority of respondents (46%) are aged 31-45, suggesting a strong working-age population. However, the smaller proportions of younger and older individuals indicate concerns for future workforce sustainability and elder care. The aging population could pose challenges to economic stability and necessitate planning for support systems for the elderly. The *Matua* community, a Hindu community, has a strong emphasis on equality and social justice, with 88% of respondents being married. This suggests that marriage is a culturally significant aspect of the *Matua* community, and social pressures may influence marital decisions. The community is predominantly Hindu, practicing a reformed version of Hinduism founded by Harichand Thakur. The study also reveals that 79% of households are headed by fathers, indicating a traditional patriarchal structure. Mothers are 5% of households, and brothers 15%, often in the absence of the father. The limited number of households headed by sisters reflects the predominance of male authority in family leadership. The majority of households in the country are large, with 53% having 7 or more members, indicating extended family structures. Medium-sized households make up 37%, and small households account for 10%. Traditional family practices are predominant, with a shift towards smaller, nuclear units likely influenced by modernization. 59% live in joint families, reflecting multi-generational living values. Nuclear families and extended families represent more modern family structures, influenced by urbanization and changing social norms. Most households live in Katcha houses, indicating economic constraints, with some improvement in semi-pucca houses and few Pucca houses. The majority of respondents have completed secondary education or higher, indicating a reasonably educated population with opportunities for further education. The community relies heavily on agriculture (69%), with notable involvement in education (13%), and petty business (23%). There is a smaller presence in private services (10%), government roles (5%), rickshaw pulling (5%), and big business (3%). The majority of households manage four dependents (33%), indicating moderately manageable levels of caregiving responsibility. However, 10% of households with seven or more dependents face significant challenges, suggesting a need for targeted support. Nearly half of the population earns within the lowest income bracket, highlighting the need for policies and programs to address income inequality and provide financial assistance. The study offers a comprehensive analysis of the *Matua* community, revealing socio-cultural dynamics, economic challenges, and potential areas for

development. It emphasizes the importance of addressing gender imbalances, supporting diverse family structures, improving housing, and enhancing educational opportunities.

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