



# Lecture Series in Social Anthropology

Spring  
Semester  
2024

Tuesday 23 April 2024 | 4.15 p.m. | Room AND 4.06

## Resisting Hierarchies: Exploring Anti-Caste Assertions in the Formation of Hindu-Matua Identity in India and Bangladesh

**Prof. Rajat Roy (Presidency University Kolkata)**

This presentation explores the politics of social memory of the Matua community, originating in the early nineteenth century among the untouchable Chandal (now Namasudra caste) in colonial Bengal. The Matua movement, founded by Harichand Thakur (1812-1878) in the late 1830s, vehemently contested the prevailing caste hierarchy in Hinduism. Critiquing both orthodox Hinduism and Vaishnavism in *Sahajia* (liberal) and *Gaudiya* (orthodox) forms, the Matua religious ideology evolved into a *sampradāya* (community), challenging societal norms and traditional Vaishnava practices.

This presentation, centered on the foundational Matua hagiographies and their later-day revised editions, employs textual analysis to unravel the social and religious complexities among the untouchables, primarily within the post-colonial politics of eastern regions in India and Bangladesh. It illuminates the contemporary historical significance of early Matua hagiographies, which have transformed into epistemic sources and political manifestos for the Dalits. Additionally, it elucidates the intricate relationship between the Matua community and caste, Hinduism, and Vaishnavism in Bengal.

Through the introduction of critical caste perspectives hitherto unexplored in the region, this presentation underscores the dignity discourse within Matua hagiographies. This accentuates the distinctive position of the Matua community in the religious and social landscape of colonial Bengal and post-colonial West Bengal in India and Bangladesh.

### Organization:

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Entrance free of charge.

Subject to change. For details see: <https://t.uzh.ch/1s7>

