

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEO COMMUNITY: A SOCIO-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Satya Pal Singh

Assistant Professor

Department of Law, M.D University, Rohtak

Email: satyapal.law@gmail.com

and

Mohd. Imtiyaj Khan

Assistant Professor

Department of Law, M.D University, Rohtak

Email: imtiyajkhanadvocate9@gmail.com

Abstract: This study looks closely at the Meo community's complex socio-historical development. The research closely follows the beginnings of the community, providing insight into its formation and subsequent evolution across time. It explores the deep religious metamorphosis that the Meo people underwent, explaining how the conversion of the Sufi saints to Islam was essential to their identity and way of life. Additionally, the study carefully examines the many cultural customs that have been essential to the Meo community's existence. It explores how their practices have changed, impacted by both their Hindu history and Islamic present, and how conventions, traditions, and rituals have molded their communal fabric. The study also explores important historical turning points for the Meo group, emphasizing their role in the noteworthy 1857 Indian Rebellion events. It explores their roles, driving forces, and the ramifications of their participation at this turning point in Indian history. The complex interactions between the Hindu and Islamic cultural components within the Meo community are one of the main topics this article explores. In order to create a distinctive synthesis that characterizes the Meo identity, the research critically examines how these two cultural influences have not only coexisted but also converged and interacted. This study article, in summary, provides a thorough and nuanced knowledge of the socio-historical path of the Meo group, going beyond a superficial glance.

Keywords: Meo Community, social economy, Islam, cultural.

1.0 Introduction:

When one delves into the history of Mewat, they discover a region molded by the long-lasting influence of the Meos, an ancient tribe whose narrative has been told against a backdrop of constantly changing frontiers. This land's boundaries have been continually altered, a reflection of the dynamic interaction between the Meo community's development and the persistent incursions of different invaders. Mewat's alkaline soil has left its impact on the people who live there.

In the middle of Mewat's parched terrain, the emptiness of the area appears to have acted as a furnace for the creation of an unbreakable connection between its people and the place they call home. The Arawali hills are particularly significant as a priceless gift from nature to the Meos. Not only have these hills given the community wood for their hearths, but they have also improved the area's sanitation and beauty. They are a haven in the middle of the dry desert.

The region and the Mewat people are described by Wolseley Haig in his book Cambridge History of India as follows:[1]

The Meos, who live in Mewat, a "ill-defined tract lying south of Delhi and including part of the British districts of Mathura and Gurgaon, most of the Alwar, and a little of the Bharatpur State," were the most volatile of these minor lords. The Meos' ravages continued northward into Delhi's streets and across the Jumna into the Doab. The reigning dynasty converted to Islam and took the name Khanzadas. One of the most influential rulers in the Delhi

region at the time of Timur's invasion at the end of the fourteenth century was Bahadur Nahar, whose mausoleum is still located in Alwar.

The Mewat area, located in northern India, is a heartbreaking example of the effects of past neglect and socioeconomic inequality. This area has a long history of systematic neglect, which has led to its recognition as one of the most undeveloped and backward areas of the nation. The region's general lack of development, high rate of poverty, and illiteracy are all clear results of this neglect.

Mewat's problems have its origins in centuries of shifting dynasties, invasions, and shifting socio-political environments. The ruling powers have consistently paid this region little attention throughout its history. The effects of this extended disregard have taken many forms, the most prominent of which are poverty and illiteracy.

While little progress has been achieved in the seven decades since India gained its freedom, the process of developing the country has been incredibly gradual. A sobering figure illustrates the magnitude of the educational deprivation: just one out of every 10 members of the Meo village is literate. This figure serves as a sobering reminder of the region's steep educational and human capital development challenges. The Meo community, formerly known as the "Meds," is said to have come from the ancient Greek and Persian communities. After becoming warriors, the Meos adopted an agricultural way of life and made agriculture their main source of income. This change was a turning point in their history since it created the groundwork for their later social and cultural development.

The Meo community is widely distributed in numerous northern Indian states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, and Haryana. It is interesting, therefore, that the Mewat region, which has historical significance, continues to be the center of their population. The Meo community in the state of Haryana has made their mark in a number of districts, most notably in Faridabad, Gurgaon, Mahendergarh, Ambala, and especially inside the boundaries of the recently drawn Mewat district.

2.0 Origin Of The Meos

Historians and scholars have been interested in the Meo community's origins for a long time. Although the Meos claim to be of Indian descent and to be related to the Kshatriya caste of the Aryan people, there are other viewpoints and hypotheses that offer different accounts of their ancestry and background. The Meos are proud of their ancestry to well-known Hindu mythological characters like Lord Rama and Lord Krishna. They trace their ancestry to two highly respected Hindu dynasties: the Chandravanshi and the Suryavanshi. The Meo community's identity and self-perception are significantly influenced by these assertions of a distinguished ancestry.

3.0 Social Economy

Mewat, an Indian area that includes portions of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Haryana, is known for its small-scale industry, skill development, and traditional agriculture combined with cattle grazing. The main economic activity in the region are agriculture, dairy farming, and handicrafts. The area is primarily rural. Mewat's social and economic growth is hampered by issues including poverty, a lack of infrastructure, and restricted access to healthcare and education. The goal of efforts to enhance livelihoods through education programs, skill development, and assistance for regional businesses is to build a more sustainable and inclusive social economy for the Mewat people.

4.0 Cultural Synergism

The Mewat region, which includes portions of northwest India and southeast Pakistan, is home to the unique ethnic and cultural group known as the Meos. Their identity and history are multifaceted, influenced by a variety of social, political, and religious elements.

4.1 Formation of Gotras and Pals: The Meo people used social organization and identification to divide themselves into 12 Gotras (clans) and 52 Pals (sub-clans). This framework is similar to the one used by several Indian martial groups, including the Rajputs and Kshatriyas. The organization of society into clans and sub-clans promotes a feeling of community, regulates marriage customs to prevent consanguinity, and upholds social order.

4.2 Suryavanshi and Chandravanshi Lineages: The Meos divided themselves into two lineages, Suryavanshi and Chandravanshi, just like the Rajputs and Kshatriyas. It is said that these lineages bind the community to mythological characters from Hindu mythology, such Lord Krishna (connected to the Chandravanshi lineage) and Lord Rama (related with the Suryavanshi lineage). The Meo community's feeling of antiquity and ancestry is

probably established by this claim of genealogy from revered Hindu figures, which also fits with larger Indian cultural traditions.

4.3 Synthesis of Hinduism and Islam: The distinctive fusion of Islam and Hinduism characterizes the religious and cultural customs of the Meos. Their historical connections with other religions and the intricate history of the region are reflected in this syncretism. Islamic conventions and Hindu customs, rituals, and beliefs are entwined. For example, although though idolatry is outlawed in Islam, some Muslims may continue to follow some Hindu-inspired rituals, such as visiting shrines and praying at saints' tombs.

Their faith, habits, and traditions have been very nicely recorded by Major Powlett in his Gazetteer of Ulwur. It is necessary to quote his description in its entirety:[2]

"The Meos have the same village deities as Hindu Zamindars, but they are now all called Musalmans in name. They also observe a number of Hindu holidays. As a result, Holi, which coincides with Meos's season of rough play, is celebrated alongside holidays like Muharram, Eid, and Shabeharat. They also commemorate Janamashtmi, Dashehra, and Diwali. Brahmin priests are frequently retained to write the Pili Chitthi, or marriage-fixing letter. They address themselves by their Hindu names, with the exception of "Ram" and "Singh," which are frequently appended but less so than "Khan." Meos, who are also known as Hindu Ahirs and Gujars, stop working on the Ramdhans, or monthly conjunction of the sun and moon. When they dig a well, the first thing they do is build a "Chabutra" to "Bairtiji" or "Hanuman." Nonetheless, they frequently showed little regard for Hindu shrines and temples when stealing was possible, and when the sacredness of a threatened location has been advocated, the response has been "Tum to Deo, Ham Meo!" I am a Meo, even if you are a Deo (God).

In addition, the Mewat region's women's position was negatively compared to that of other Indian groups. Because it was considered wicked to have a daughter, daughters were always seen as less than their brothers. Meo women, or Meonis as they were called, were in a very sorry status in Meo culture. up the other hand, Meo women strangely took up prominent positions in some homes after marriage. Elders clarified that the women's hard work was the reason for this appreciation. It was pointed out that Meo men were known for smoking the Huqqa and for sitting around doing nothing but plowing and excavating dirt when it was required. Other than planting, weeding, harvesting, thrashing, winnowing, and stacking, the women were in charge of all other agricultural duties. It's interesting that these ladies had additional obligations outside of their home tasks throughout their fieldwork.

5.0 Conversion to Islam

The story of their conversion to Islam is complex, with several hypotheses offering an explanation for this change. A commonly held belief ascribes their conversion to Islam to the impact of Sufi saints. The Meos combined Islamic beliefs with their Hindu rituals, even naming their children in the Hindu tradition, instead of completely giving up on their Hindu customs.

Some people have the misconception that Indians were forced to convert to Islam by Muslim conquerors out of fear, however this is untrue and motivated by animosity. A distinct reality is shown by historical occurrences like the conquering of the Sindh province by Muhammad bin Qasim. While the Hindu populace was treated well and had much freedom during his rule, those who opposed him faced penalties. The freedom to practice Buddhism and Hinduism was extended to the Medes, Jats, and even Brahmans. As Mohammad bin Qasim's wazir, Sisakar, the minister of Dahir, was privy to all of his secrets. Sisakar was also the one who the prophet frequently sought guidance from and consultation on all matters pertaining to the government's civil affairs.

In fact, Meos' conversion to Islam began at the time of the Ghaznavid invasion. But the Meos' conversion was mostly influenced by the Sufi saint Syed Salar Masud Ghazi, who was Mahmud Ghaznavi's nephew.

The Meos continued to convert to Islam beyond Syed Salar Masud Ghazi's reign and into the Mughal era. During this time, a number of well-known Sufi saints, including Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, Miran Sayyed Husain Khang Sawar, Miyan Raj Shah, Qutbuddin, Akbar Ali, Khwaja Mehrauli, Shaikh Moosa, Shah Chokha, and others, encouraged the Meos to convert to Islam. But when religious lecturers became scarce in the latter stages of Mughal and British colonial rule, the Meos progressively adopted a variety of innovative religious practices. As a result, their customs and culture were combined with those of the local Hindu population.

Maulana Mohammad Ilyas Kandhalvi became the leader of the Tabligh Movement in Mewat in 1926. There is no official membership in Tabligh Jamaat and it is not formally registered. Both talented and unskilled people from

different backgrounds are included. They exhort Muslims to follow the Islamic faith, pray, and fast (Roza). They also urge visitors to stay with them for three days or longer in order to understand more about these customs.

6.0 Mewat Rebellion In 1857

The Meo community's entry into the historical record was marked by the Indian Rebellion of 1857, a pivotal event against British rule. The Meos united with their fellow countrymen and raised a flag of defiance against colonial authority in support of Bahadur Shah Zafar.

7.0 Native States And Division

The Mewat territory fell into the hands of several governing families, including the Naruka, Jat, and Nawab, when the Mughal Empire declined. Mewat's history has the imprint of these dynasties, which were led by individuals like Raja Bakhtawar Singh of Alwar, Raja Surajmal of Bharatpur, and Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan of Firozpur Jhirka.

8.0 Meos Community And Partition of India

The partition that sadly occurred in 1947 when India attained independence presented serious difficulties for the Meo community and a few other tribes in the Mewat area. Maharaja Tej Singh of Alwar had disapproving opinions of the Meos, as did his adviser Dr. Khare, who belonged to a Hindu group. They planned the murder of a large number of Meos who had taken sanctuary in the Aravalli highlands in July and August of 1947. During this time, there were many violent crimes committed, such as murder, robbery, and pillage. There were even forced conversions of Muslims to other religions. About seventeen thousand Muslims were said to have converted to Hinduism in Alwar alone, and three thousand Muslims were said to have done the same in Bharatpur.

Nonetheless, certain initiatives were successful in reintegrating some of these converted people into the Muslim society. Maulana Ibrahim, Vinoba Bhave, Satyam Bhai, and Maulana Hifzur Rahman were among the key figures who facilitated these people's reintegration into the Muslim community.

The State of Jaipur soon saw the similar circumstance. Because to the state's discriminating policies, Mewatis had to endure hardship. An approximate estimate of the number of Meos slain in riots in the states of Bharatpur, Alwar, and Jaipur is 3,00,000, including women and children. Roughly four thousand mosques were destroyed, but only in the districts of Alwar and Bharatpur. For the Muslims, the entire land served as a cemetery.[3]

Pakistan was created on August 15, 1947, after India was split apart. Following India's partition, there were widespread sectarian riots that resulted in the deaths of many Hindus and Muslims. The community hysteria also caused significant suffering for the Mewatis. They started to move in huge numbers to Pakistan. The Mewatis set up a transit camp at Sohna so they could travel to Pakistan. Eight lakh Mewatis made the decision to migrate to Pakistan. Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan, a Meo chieftain, made every effort to discourage the Mewatis from migrating to Pakistan.[4] Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Pandit Sunder Lal, and other Gandhian leaders visited the Meo camps at the borders of Sohna and Delhi at Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan's request. On December 19, 1947, they also arrived in Ghasera, Mewat, with the goal of ensuring the Mewatis' rehabilitation and preventing their forced departure. Gandhiji was accompanied by East Punjab Premier Gopichand Bhargava.[5]

Surprisingly, a significant number of individuals who had previously crossed the border into India and fled their country made the decision to return to the Mewat area in the months that followed. This accomplishment was a major victory in halting the migration. The returning Meos had a major rehabilitation task, nevertheless, even when they returned. During the partition, many of their properties and residences were occupied by refugees who had fled Pakistan. Given that people who had fled from the other side of the border now populated the area, the Meos faced a challenging scenario in trying to recapture their houses and establish themselves.

9.0 Conclusion

This study explores the intricate socio-historical development of the Meo community, tracing its beginnings, changes, and key historical interactions. With origins that go back thousands of years, the Meo community has withstood invasions and boundary changes. Mewat's rugged, alkaline environment has shaped the people who live there, giving them a robust and resourceful nature.

The Meos's way of life and spirit have been strengthened by their unwavering ties to their homeland, the Arawali highlands. The main sources of prosperity for the Meo community have been small-scale industry, agriculture, and

livestock raising. However, the area has historically been neglected, which has led to enduring problems including poverty and a lack of development.

The Meos claim descent from revered characters such as Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, and their heritage is deeply entwined with Hindu mythology. But the Sufi saints, who were the main source of their conversion to Islam, have produced a distinctive fusion of Islamic and Hindu cultural aspects. Their customs, holidays, and rituals all show this merging, which is a reflection of their past contacts with both religions.

The Meos's historical involvement in the Indian Rebellion of 1857 demonstrates their steadfast will to oppose colonial authority. Despite the fact that the aftermath resulted in lives lost and authority taken away, it just strengthened their resolve.

For the Meo people, the 1947 Indian partition presented serious difficulties. The Gandhian leaders, Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan in particular, worked to stop widespread migration. Even though a large number of them returned, the homes and properties that the refugees had inhabited presented restoration issues.

This study article, in its whole, provides a thorough knowledge of the Meo community's path, including its beginnings, theological transformation, cultural subtleties, historical interactions, and current problems. The Meos' narrative is one of tenacity, flexibility, and a distinct cultural synthesis that has shaped their identity and continues to do so within the intricate socio-historical framework of India.

10.0 References:

1. Haig, Wolseley (1828). *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, London, p.515.
2. Powlett, *op.cit.* p.38.
3. *Mewat Ka Safar*, *op.cit.* p.15.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *The Tribune*, 20 December 1947; see also *National Herald*, 21 December, 1947, and *Meos of Mewat*, *op.cit.* p.31.