

Meo Muslim, Mev, Mewati Muslim

By Reena Kukreja, Queen's University

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The Meo, also called Mev or Mewati Muslim, self-identify as a distinct socio-cultural ethnic community, and, despite their Muslim religion, trace their lineage to the Hindu Rajputs in North India. It is also contended that the Meo converted to Islam after leaving other Hindu caste groups and a tribe, Meena, with whom they shared several similarities or that they were a nomadic Islamic tribe called the Mids, or Meds, who migrated from Western India into the region now known as Mewat, between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Today, perceived as converts from Hinduism, the Meo, numbering around 20 lakh, are considered low caste, or Neech zat, by the Indian Muslims. The Meo men and women are disfavoured for marriage by the Indian Muslims because of their suspect religious identity and their low caste status within the Muslim hierarchy. Till recently, they have considered themselves both as a caste group and a distinct religious faith within Islam because of this dual identity. During the colonial period, they were considered a distinct caste by both Hindus and Muslims. Their customs, traditions, life cycle ceremonies and modes of prayer, till the 1990s, closely replicated the Hindus with nominal adherence to Islamic practices like circumcision, nikah or marriage ceremony, and the burial. Though lauded for their syncretic culture and religious practises that adopted and adapted traditions from both religions without succumbing to the hard-core religiosity of either, they historically faced rejection from both the faiths because of their identification as neither a 'true' Muslim nor Hindu. Historically, the Meo inhabited a geographically contiguous space called Mewat or the 'land of the Meo', understood more as a cultural space than an administrative unit. In present-day India, it is administratively divided up between the districts of Nuh (formerly Mewat), Palwal, and Faridabad in southern Haryana and Alwar and Bharatpur and Dholpur districts in Rajasthan. A small portion of historical Mewat also lies in western Uttar Pradesh; however, it is in Nuh, Haryana that they comprise an overwhelming majority.



Date Range: 1100 CE - 2020 CE

Region: Haryana, Rajasthan, and Eastern Uttar Pradesh, North India

Region tags: Asia, South Asia, India, North India

Meo Muslim dominant regions

Status of Participants:

✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Mayaram, Shail. 1997. *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of Muslim Identity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Source 2: Jamous, Raymond. 2003. *Kinship and Rituals among the Meo of Northern India: Locating Sibling Relationship*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Source 3: Aggarwal, Partap Chand. 1971. *Caste, Religion and Power: An Indian Case Study*. New Delhi: Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources.

Notes: Chauhan, Abha. 2003. "Kinship Principles and the Pattern of Marriage Alliance: The Meos of

Mewat." Sociological Bulletin 52(1) (March): 71-90. Shamsh, Shamsuddin. 1983. Meos of India: Their Customs and Laws. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publishing. Sikand, Yoginder. 2007. "The Reformist Sufism of the Tablighi Jama'at: The Case of the Meo of Mewat, India." In Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam, edited by Martin Van Bruinessen, Julia Day Howell, 129-148, London: I.B. Taurus.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: http://twocircles.net/2010apr13/tablighi_jamaat_mewat_part_1.html
- Source 1 Description: An academic work on the growth of Tablighi Jamaat's influence on Meo Muslims in the 20th century.
- Source 1 URL: https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/10/web-exclusives/how-meos-shape-their-identity.html?0=ip_login_no_cache%3Db91d86769bb9e237385d8c32ea02ea06
- Source 1 Description: This article details the oral tradition of singing that is very specific to the Meo Muslims and is used for remembering history, and identity formation.

Relevant online primary textual corpora (original languages and/or translations):

- Source 1 URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QbM1UzbgS0>
- Source 1 URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyI20mevVoE>
- Source 1 Description: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2019/may/24/the-hour-of-lynching-vigilante-violence-against-muslims-in-india-video>

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

↳ Is the cultural contact competitive:

– Yes

Notes: Both yes and no. The Hindus, specifically the dominant-peasant caste groups of the Hindu caste groups of Jats and Gujjars, in the same region, have had historical cultural contact with the Meo Muslims. They share many of the life-cycle ceremonies with the Meo. However, in recent years, with the spread of chauvinistic Hindu religious fundamentalism in the region, these groups have begun asserting Hindutva based violence against the Meo Muslims. As well, prior to the Partition of India in 1947, the Raja of Alwar, through policies of othering the Meo peasantry, as well as the Arya Samaj, through its Shuddi programs, created rifts between the Hindus and the Meo - the aftermath of which was felt during the riots in the region when the Meo were targetted by Hindu mobs.

↳ Is the cultural contact accommodating/pluralistic:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo Muslims have co-habited with the Hindu castes in the same region. The ceremonies of the Meo, related to birth, and marriage, have been closely related to the ones practised by the Hindus. However, due to rise in religious fundamentalism among the Hindus and the spread of orthodox Muslim tradition preached by the Tablighi Jamaat among the Meo, much of these pluralistic and syncretic traditions are being shed by the Meo as ones practised by the Jahiliaat or the ignorant.

↳ Is the cultural contact neutral:

– I don't know

↳ Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– Yes

Notes: Since the early 1990s, when the Babri Mosque was demolished, there is increased tension between the Meo Muslims and the Hindus in the same region - this is based on a resurgent Hindu nationalism that demonises the Meo as the "other." Public beatings and lynchings of Meo Muslims on suspicions of "cow smuggling" by the so-called Hindu gau rakshaks is made on the basis of their religion. Earlier too, during the partition of India in 1947, the Ahirs, Jats and Gujars, the dominant Hindu caste groups inhabiting this region, colluded with the princely state of Alwar to embark on state sponsored genocide of this community. The so called 'cleansing' or 'safaya' as it is etched in the memory of the Meo, also led to their displacement from their lands and their dominant land-owning status in the region. This paved the way for their wooing by the Tablighi Jama'at, who ascribed the killings and rapes to the unorthodox practices followed by the Meo and encouraged them to return to the fold of a purer Islam.

↳ Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– No

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– No

Notes: No, the Meo identity is ascribed by birth. Very much like the Hindu caste structure, this birth-based identification accords each Meo membership to one of the 13 clans or "Pals" as these are known by the Meo. These territorial based clans all bear Hindu Rajput names. Additionally, there are 52 more clans that do not have 'Pal' territory and are known as Nepaliya. Each Meo traces their lineage to one of the Pals or Nepaliyas.

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– No

Notes: The Meo, under the influence of the Tablighi Jamaat, do go on religious tours / congregations that are known as Jamaats to Muslim-majority regions within India and preach about 'pure' Islam to Muslims there. Those who undertake such jamaats are those that are receiving the Islamic taleem.

Does the religion have official political support

– No

Notes: While the Meo do not have any outright official political support from any of the leading political parties, regionally or at the national level, the Indian Congress Party is one national level party that they been drawn to from pre-Independence period, a trend that continues on to a large extent, till date.

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Estimated population, numeric: 4000000

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Estimated population, percentage of sample region: 80

Notes: The biggest number of Meo is found in the Nuh district of Haryana - nearly 80 percent of its population. The second biggest number is in the Alwar district of Rajasthan with approximately 14 percent of its population comprising the Meo.

Nature of religious group [please select one]:

– Small religious group (seen as being part of a related larger religious group)

Notes: In contemporary India, the Meo are a distinct part of the Indian Muslims. The Tablighi Jamaat, drawing its roots from the Deobandi Sunni school of thought, has played a key role in making the Meo shed most of their syncretic customs, traditions, and religious practises, and instead adopt a more orthodox Muslim practise.

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– No

Notes: Imams are considered the religious leaders of the Meo. The Meo, as a cultural community, also have caste councils or panchayats. These non-elected caste councils that have no legal sanction within Indian judicial system are powerful bodies that regulate and govern the lives of the jati members. Comprising solely of men drawn from village elders, these caste councils arbitrate over disputes within the jati, be it related to property or marriage. In the case of the latter, infractions to caste endogamy or other taboos related to marriage can invite social sanction against the erring person or the family. These range from refusal to share hukka pani, ostracism against communal sharing of the water pipe that translates in the shunning of the family by other caste or jati members.

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– Yes

↳ Are they written:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo, like other Indian Muslims, consider Koran to be their holy book. The other texts that they consider revered are the "Sunna," and the "Hadith."

↳ Are they oral:

– No

Notes: While saying no, it should be added that the Meo bards play a big role in the transmission of oral history and customs. However, these pluralistic traditions are being abandoned by the Meo as they increasingly become "Islamicised" both by the proselytising of the Tablighi Jamaat and the spread of Hindutva that threatens their identity.

↳ Is there a story (or a set of stories) associated with the origin of scripture:

– No

↳ Are the scriptures alterable:

– No

↳ Are there formal institutions (i.e. institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders) for interpreting the scriptures:

– Yes

Notes: Muslim priests and those teaching at the madrassas teach and interpret the Quran and texts such as the Sunna (practices of Islam) and Hadith (sayings and traditions of Mohammad).

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– Yes

Notes: Sheikh Musa Mosque also known as the Dargah of Sheikh Musa, near Taoru. Presently, it has a madrassah running in it.

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes

Notes: The dargahs of the Sufi saints have different architectural elements than the Mosques in this

region. The older mosques such as that of Sheikh Musa, bears a strong Rajput influence in its style. This is unlike the newer mosques that have emerged post 1992 in Mewat, that bear all visual signifiers such as minarets and domes.

↳ Tombs:

– Yes

Notes: Dargahs of Sufi saints belonging to the Chisti tradition such as Sheikh Moosa or Shah Chokha.

↳ Cemeteries:

– No

↳ Temples:

– I don't know

Notes: Earlier, the Meo, due to their 'syncretic' cultural belief, would visit Hindu temples and offer arti to Hindu Gods. But this does not occur anymore as the 'divide' created by histories of conflict, and marginalization, have made the Meo shed such traditions.

↳ Altars:

– No

Notes: Earlier, the Meo would pray at Hindu altars but this is not followed anymore.

↳ Devotional markers:

– I don't know

↳ Mass gathering point [plazas, courtyard, square. Places permanently demarcated using visible objects or structures]:

– Yes

Notes: Dargahs and Mosques are clearly demarcated areas for worship. Madrassas have also emerged as new sites where the Meo children learn Arabic and Quranic teachings.

↳ Other type of religious monumental architecture:

– I don't know

Is iconography present:

– No

Notes: While iconography of living things is prohibited under Islam, what is observed among the Meo is the extensive use of calendar art of the Kabaa - prints are hung as the pride of place in their homes.

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

– I don't know

Are pilgrimages present:

– Yes

Notes: The Haj is a major pilgrimage that the Meo now seek to go. In the past, travel to the Dargahs of various Sufi Pirs, within Mewat, to other significant Sufi shrines of saints such as Salim Chisti, would comprise a significant pilgrimage.

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer “no” only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– No

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo do believe that their spirits live on, either in hell or paradise, based on the sins they commit during their earthly existence.

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: The process of preparing bodies for burial and burial practice is the same as followed by Indian Muslims in general - one strictly adhered to.

↳ Cremation:

– No

↳ Mummification:

– No

↳ Interment:

– No

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

↳ Secondary burial:

– No

↳ Re-treatment of corpse:

– No

↳ Other intensive (in terms of time or resources expended) treatment of corpse :

– No

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Are grave goods present:

– No

Notes: The Meo are buried simply with just the shroud or the white Kafan wrapped around the dead body.

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: There are formal rituals associated with burial, including ceremonial washing of the body, shrouding in an unstitched white cotton cloth called kaffan, and burial before sunset (if possible), in a Muslim cemetery. There is also a brief visitation of the deceased. The male members of the community accompany the deceased's male family members to the Kabristan or the cemetery. Janazah prayers are offered.

↳ As cenotaphs:

– Yes

Notes: The cenotaphs are rare among the Meo, except for Sufi saints in the region. These get transformed as Sufi shrines or dargaah.

↳ In cemetery:

– Yes

↳ Family tomb-crypt:

– No

↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic activities):

– No

↳ Other formal burial type:

– No

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo do believe in Bhut or malevolent spirits than can cast their evil influence on whoever crosses the Bhut's path. Once again, this is a belief that reveals the Meo's Hindu origin, one that the contemporary orthodox adherents to Islam are exhorting the Meo to shun.

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo believe in Allah as the only omnipotent deity and supreme creator of all beings. Iconography of Allah is taboo. Belief in Allah has to be clearly distinguished from the Meo belief in Bhuts or bad spirits.

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic:

– No

Notes: Very much like the formal Islam that the Meo have now begun to follow, their earlier beliefs did not consider 'Allah' to possess a human form - but saw and still regard him as an omnipresent being with no shape or form.

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity:

– No

Notes: Allah is considered omnipresent and thus does not occupy a specific realm.

- ↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld):
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god):
 - No
- ↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites:
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites:
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good:
 - Yes
- ↳ Other feature(s) of supreme high god:
 - I don't know
- ↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world:
 - Yes
 - ↳ The supreme god's knowledge is restricted to particular domain of human affairs:
 - Yes
 - ↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:
 - I don't know
 - Notes: The Meo believe that Allah has knowledge of the entire world.
 - ↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region:
 - Yes

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god knows your basic character (personal essence):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god has other knowledge of this world:

– Yes [specify]: "And with Him (Allah) are the Keys of the Unseen. No one knows them (the Secrets of the Unseen) except for Him (Allah). And He (Allah) knows all that is on the land and all that is in the seas and there is not even a single leaf that falls except that He has full knowledge of it and there is also not a single dry thing that is hidden in the darkness of the Earth, nor anything that is wet or dry" (Surah al-An`am (6), Verse 59).

↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can reward:

– Yes

Notes: Based on the good deeds, God can reward the believers.

↳ The supreme high god can punish:

– Yes

Notes: Breaching of taboos and non-adherence to practices such as

circumcision can result in punishment.

↳ The supreme high god has indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god exhibits positive emotion:

– Yes

Notes: Following observances of prayers, fasts, charity (zakat), learning the Holy Quran, and going on the jama'at (religious congregations) is believed to result in the reward of jannat (heaven in the afterlife) as well as a better outcome in the physical life through nullification of powers of evil spirits.

↳ The supreme high god exhibits negative emotion:

– No

↳ The supreme high god possesses hunger:

– No

↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural beings other than the high god:

– No

Notes: While saying that it is not permissible to worship supernatural beings other than Allah, the Meo still continue to go to Sufi shrines or Dargahs and pray to the Sufi saints. Earlier, elements of hindu rituals such as kua puja involved worship of supernatural beings.

↳ The supreme high god possesses/exhibits some other feature:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient data is available to comment on this.

↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living:

– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– Yes

↳ In dreams:

– Yes

↳ In trance possession:

– Yes

Notes: The Sufi belief system strongly believes in the concept of mystical divine - where trance, through music, creates communication with the Supreme Being. The trance-like state can possess the singer or a member of the audience.

↳ Through divination practices:

– Yes

Notes: At the shrines of Sufi saints or pirs, Sufis provide divination. Some caretakers of the shrines also offer divination and healing through premonition (kashf) and talismans or amulets (tabeez).

↳ Only through religious specialists:

– No

Notes: The ulamas are not considered the sole mediators between Allah and the congregation. The Meo also believe that Sufi pirs or saints and caretakers of Sufi shrines, as spiritual guides, also enable the communication.

↳ Only through monarch

– No

↳ Other form of communication with living:

– Yes [specify]: Through Sufi Pirs or spiritual saints or guides, through trance, dreams, and through rewards and punishments in life.

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– Yes

Notes: Bhuts or evil-intentioned spirits are the ones that can be seen.

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– Yes

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

- ↳ Human spirits' knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:
 - No

- ↳ Human spirits' knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:
 - No
 - Notes: The spirits are believed to have knowledge of worldly affairs that exist outside of the geographic space of Mewat.

- ↳ Human spirits' knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:
 - Yes

- ↳ Human spirits' knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:
 - Yes

- ↳ Human spirits can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):
 - Yes

- ↳ Human spirits can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):
 - Yes

- ↳ Human spirit's can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):
 - Yes

- ↳ Human spirits know your basic character (personal essence):
 - Yes

- ↳ Human spirits know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):
 - No
 - Notes: I qualify this by mentioning that the Meo believe that the spirits cannot foresee future and that, we as human beings, can change our destiny and hence our future life on earth.

- ↳ Human spirits have other form(s) of knowledge regarding this world:
 - Yes [specify]: through conversations with Djinn or good spirits

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can reward:

– Yes

Notes: By blessing of good fortune in crops, life outcomes (prevention of accidents that can cause grievous bodily harm or fatality), protection of animals - particularly milch cattle.

↳ Human spirits can punish:

– Yes

Notes: Punishment can be meted out due to straying from the righteous path and /or causing harm to others, lying, or committing sins. Punishment can be direct or indirect, i.e., on other members of the family, failure in crops, or sickness of animals.

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits have memory of life:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

Notes: exhibited through maleficent acts and destruction.

↳ Human spirits possess hunger:

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits possess/exhibit some other feature:

– Yes [specify]: These can morph into different shapes and adopt voices of humans or animals.

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:

– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:
– I don't know

↳ In dreams:
– Yes

↳ In trance possession:
– Yes

↳ Through divination processes:
– Yes

Notes: This is particularly true for the Sufi and Hindu elements of Meo religion practise.

↳ Only through specialists:
– No

↳ Only through monarch:
– No

↳ Communicate with living through other means:
– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:
– I don't know

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:
– Yes

Notes: Yes, in the form of Sufi saints that the Meo venerate.

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:
– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model:
– No

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– Yes

Notes: The belief in supernatural beings involves the good spirits occupying the supreme position - those who are evoked for good fortune while the evil or shaitan spirits are ranked at the very bottom of the supernatural hierarchy - ones that have to be avoided at all costs.

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– No

↳ Other organization for pantheon:

– I don't know

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: With Allah being omnipresent and able to record the deeds of humans for their afterlife - jannat or jahannum (heaven or hell) - the Meo consider this monitoring of their behaviour to be certainly present. They also believe in djinn or jinn - spirits that are either good or evil in intentions. In the Meo folk spiritual beliefs, maleficent spirits can also inhabit human beings and cause harm, either to the person, or through them, to others.

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously "moral" or "ethical" norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

Notes: Part of the practice of monitoring deeds and behaviour of the adherents also extends to being generous hosts and providing assistance in time of need.

↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:

– Yes

↳ Food:

– Yes

Notes: Consumption of pork and alcohol is prohibited - these are considered 'haram'. As well, 'halal' meat - one that is slaughtered by a Muslim with the recitation of the name of Allah - is considered lawful for consumption.

↳ Sacred space(s):

– Yes

Notes: Mosques and madrassas are considered sacred spaces as are sufi shrines. With a strong base in Hindu traditions, wells or kua were also considered a sacred space - one where prayers were performed on life-cycle events such as marriage or birth.

↳ Sacred object(s):

– Yes

Notes: The Quran, Kabaa, and the Sufi burial sites.

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions:

– Yes

Notes: With a strong base in Sufism and Hindu traditions, the Meo belief system draws a line against murder of members of other religions, one punishable by the Supreme God as much as by 'misfortune' that visits them during their earthly existence.

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex:

– Yes

↳ Adultery:

– Yes

↳ Incest:

– Yes

Notes: With the Meo social system, based on endogamous clans tracing roots to common ancestors, the taboo on incest also includes marriage with members of the same clan and same village - thus the Meo marriage system's adherence to exogamy in marriage.

↳ Other sexual practices:

–Yes [specify]: Sex with same sex or 'unnatural' sexual acts with animals. Masturbation, as self-pleasure, is also forbidden.

↳ Supernatural beings care about lying:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness:

– Yes

Notes: There is emphasis on each member (and gender) performing their duties as householders, members of the faith, and as members of the community. Emphasis is laid that laziness is not a 'desired' trait that God seeks in the adherents.

↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery:

– I don't know

↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient data available.

↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk:

– I don't know

↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about property crimes:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance:

– Yes

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↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo believe that Allah cares about the performance of rituals related to circumcision, burial practices, prayers, and fasting during the holy month of Ramzan (Ramadan). This is a significant departure from earlier period when the Meo had an unclear notion about rituals and taboos.

↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists:

– Yes

Notes: The conversion of 'kaffirs' or infidels /unbelievers to Islam is considered to grant heaven in afterlife to the person enabling the conversion. This notion of conversion is relatively new to the Meo.

↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene:

– Yes

Notes: There is great emphasis laid on personal hygiene of various body parts - this is a practice that is, once again, new to the Meo Muslims. In particular, ritual cleaning or wudu that includes washing of one's feet, hands, face, and head before offering prayers and ghusl or full body bath after intercourse and after menstruation are considered compulsory in the contemporary period.

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– I don't know

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo believe that the djinn (spirits) or pret (ghosts) mete out punishment to those who stray from the 'path' or those who get caught in the evil intentions of the evil djinns.

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god:

– Yes

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: In this case, it would be punishment given by the good djinns or pret.

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– Yes

↳ Done by other entities or through other means [specify]

– Yes

Notes: The agent of punishment can be an unwitting third party or actions of a third party, that are attributable to the punishment by the spirits.

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– Yes

↳ Done randomly:

– No

↳ Other [specify]

– I don't know

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:

– No

Notes: I qualify the 'no' by saying that the punishment meted out by the supreme god is in the afterlife while that by supernatural beings is in the immediate earthly life.

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural punishments in this life are highly emphasized by the religious

group:

– Yes

Notes: I qualify this 'yes' by stating that with the increased belief in the Tablighi Jamaat, the belief in punishments by spirits is being gradually replaced by the belief of punishment by God. However, informally, the earlier belief system continues to hold ground too.

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of political failure:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of defeat in battle:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of crop failure or bad weather:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of disaster on journeys.

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of mild sensory displeasure:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of extreme sensory displeasure:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of sickness or illness:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of impaired reproduction:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck visited on descendants:

– Yes

- ↳ Other [specify]
- I don't know

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

- ↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done only by high god:
 - No
 - Notes: Also by good spirits.

- ↳ Done by many supernatural beings:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:
 - Yes
 - Notes: Also to enforce moral guidelines.

- ↳ Done to enforce group norms:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:
 - Yes

- ↳ Done randomly:
 - No

- ↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife:
 - Yes

- ↳ Supernatural rewards in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: Particularly of the Jannat or paradise and the availability of 'virgins' for male adherents (under Tablighi Jamaat)

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of mild sensory pleasure:

– I don't know

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory pleasure:

– Yes

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of eternal happiness:

– Yes

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as a superior life form:

– No

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in a superior realm:

– No

↳ Other [specify]

– Field doesn't know

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural rewards in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of good luck:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of political success or power:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of success in battle:

– Yes

- ↳ Reward in this life consists of peace or social stability:
 - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of healthy crops or good weather:
 - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of success on journeys:
 - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of mild sensory pleasure:
 - I don't know
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of extreme sensory pleasure:
 - I don't know
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced health:
 - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced reproductive success:
 - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of fortune visited on descendants:
 - Yes
- ↳ Other [specify]
 - I don't know

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Notes: Unlike the Ahmediya sect that originated in India and believes in a messiah who has guided them, the Meo do not believe in messiah. They believe in interlocutors or those who are invested with supernatural power to speak on behalf of the divine - eg, the pirs.

Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: Very much like the Hindus, the Meos follow the Gotra system (each clan, called a Gotra, can trace its lineage to a common male ancestor who was the founder of the particular clan in question). They too exercise gotra exogamy in marriage whilst maintaining caste endogamy. Marriage with a non-Meo woman or a woman of another caste or religion is prohibited amongst the Meos and till recently, did not carry social recognition. Despite the gradual "integration" into the mainstream Islam by the Tablighi Jamaat, the Meos still differ from other Indian Muslims on not marrying cosanguine first degree cousins.

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– Yes

↳ What is the nature of this distinction:

– Present (but not emphasized)

↳ Are specifically moral norms prescribed by the religious group:

– No

↳ Moral norms apply to:

– All individuals within society

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the religious group:

– No

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

– Yes

Notes: Sexual abstinence during ritual fasting periods as much as constraints on pre-marital and extra-marital sex (both considered taboo). Incest and unnatural sexual acts are forbidden or haraam.

↳ Monogamy (males):

– No

Notes: The Meo can have upto four wives. However, they have to seek permission from the first wife to remarry.

↳ Monogamy (females):

– Yes

↳ Other sexual constraints (males):

– Yes

Notes: With other men, extra-marital sex, or masturbation.

↳ Other sexual constraints (females):

– Yes

Notes: Extra-marital sex or masturbation.

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo keep fasts or 'roza' during the holy month of Ramzan - in line with the larger Muslim tradition.

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– No

Notes: During the run up to the actual nikah, there is taboo placed on consumption of meat, spices, and other food items. As well, during the Rozas or fasting during the month of Ramzan, Islaimc sun-up to sun-down fasting is also observed by the Meo. This is a practice that they started following only after the Tablighi Jamaat in the 1930s started its proselytising among them.

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– Yes

Notes: Regular prayers usually five times a day, either at the Mosque or at home, require apportioning time out of work especially for the men. Additionally, friday afternoon prayers, the Jummah, involve big gathering of the congregation.

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require accepting ethical precepts:

– Yes

Notes: With the increased influence of the Tablighi Jamaat that has sought to reform the Meo, it has encouraged them to follow a sharia based Islam, including piety or Ummah.

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– Yes

Notes: The Meo still follow some of the Hindu-influenced life-cycle rituals for births and marriages such as Bhat or Cucak. As well, offering to the Dargahs or shrines of Sufi saints, though a declining trend, occurs at the personal level. Kua-pujan or worship of the well, a ritual followed after marriage or

childbirth that the Meo shared with the Hindus, till recently, has been largely given up due to their Islamization. Some families might still adhere to it on a personal level.

↳ What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to small-scale rituals.

– I don't know

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale “ceremonies” and “festivals.”

– Yes

Notes: sacrifice of animals during 'Bakr-id' or Eid-ul Adha. With the Tablighi Jamaat's influence, the Jamaats or large scale gacongregations too have bcome the norm where formal elements of Islam are preached to male members. Young men are also encouraged to participate in Jamaats - travel in groups - to other regions where Islamic seminaries exist within India.

↳ On average, for large-scale rituals how many participants gather in one location:

– I don't know

Notes: The number of participants depends on the village or community size. For large prayers offered during Eid, the entire male congregation in a village gathers in a mosque to offer prayers. Jamaats are smaller in size - 8-10 young men travelling in groups.

↳ What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to large-scale rituals.

– I don't know

↳ Are there orthodoxy checks:

Orthodoxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are interpreted in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper interpretation, etc.

– Yes

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks:

Orthopraxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are performed in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper procedure, etc.

– Yes

↳ Does participation entail synchronic practices:

– Yes

↳ Is there use of intoxicants:

– No

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– Yes

Notes: Circumcision for men.

↳ Tattoos/scarification:

– No

↳ Circumcision:

– Yes

Notes: For men.

↳ Food taboos:

– Yes

Notes: Pork is prohibited.

↳ Hair:

– No

↳ Dress:

– No

Notes: I qualify this by stating that with increased 'Islamisation' of the Meo, they are being 'encouraged' to wear 'Islamic' dress consisting of white shalwar kameez for the men in lieu of tehmat or lungi. The women are similarly pressured to adopt shalwar kameez and dupatta in place of ghaghra choli worn in earlier times.

↳ Ornaments:

– No

↳ Archaic ritual language:

– No

↳ Other:

– I don't know

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– No

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– Other [specify in comments]

Notes: The Meo, also called Med, Mev, or Mewati, self-identify as a distinct socio-cultural ethnic community with social norms and practices that, till date, marked them separately from the larger Indian Muslim population. Inhabiting a contiguous geographical region within Haryana, Rajasthan, and a part of Eastern Uttar Pradesh too lends to cohesion of this group. Among the caste hierarchy of Indian Muslims, they are considered Neech Jat while the Indian State recognises them as OBC. The Meo occupy a unique position in Indian society and amongst Indian Muslims: they consider themselves as Muslim Rajputs, i.e., people who are Muslims but whose lineage can be traced to the Hindu warrior caste group of Rajputs in North India. Their oral history is preserved by caste singers known as Mirasis. The Meo Pandun ki Katha is a unique interpretation of the Mahabharata from the Meo perspective – it is often sung at gatherings and at weddings. The geneology of the Meo clans with details about their ancestors is preserved by Hindu Brahmin geneologists known as Jaggas. Despite attempts by Tablighi Jamaat, that started its proselytizing activities among the Meo in the early 1930s, to mainstream them and to make them shed off their syncretic cultural beliefs and practices, they still perceive themselves as having their lineage traced back to mythological Hindu Gods such as Ram and Krishna. Prior to the Tablighi Jamaat's increased presence here, they used to pray at dargahs of Sufi Pirs, that dot the Mewati countryside, such as the dargah of Shah Chokha, Sheikh Moosa, or the shrine of Baba Laldar, to name a few. As well, they prayed at Hindu shrines, did Kua puja (worship of the well) for significant life-cycle events, and celebrated Hindu festivals, much of which has been discarded after the riots following the Partition of India in 1947 and the increased Islamophobia in the country after the Babri Masjid demolition. Notwithstanding, the Meo still adhere to a caste structure similar to that of the Hindus, and have an elaborate kinship system that governs social rules regarding interaction and marriage. As livestock farmers, who trace their line back to Krishna, they still do Goverdhan puja and also celebrate a festival called "Khansotiya" during monsoons when the cow is washed and decorated. The marriage ceremonies also bear a strong Hindu influence such as the "bhat" or the ceremonial offering of rice by the maternal uncle, the sagai or the engagement ceremony, as well as "ghur savari" or the arrival of the groom on a mare (nowadays the use of ornately decorated chariots occurs). Additionally, the combination of Hindu practises is similarly evident during the circumcision ritual. The father's sister, along with the barber (nai), plays a principal ritual role in it and is rewarded with presents by her brother. This is not evident among other Muslims.

Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized famine relief:

– No

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the

religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Meo families that are "below the poverty line" - an economic benchmark established by the Indian state with varying parameters followed by each state - get access to subsidised food rations on a monthly basis.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized poverty relief:

– No

Notes: Poverty relief, in some measures, is made available to the destitute and widows through the channeling of funds collected under 'zakat' or religiously obligated Islamic alm-giving . However, due to the poverty of the Meo community, only a few Meo families can actually contribute to the zakat.

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, under the BPL or the "Below Poverty Line" scheme and various employment linked poverty relief schemes of federal and state governments.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

– No

Notes: While institutionalised care is not provided for the elderly, the prevalence of the joint family and/or collateral joint family system allows for their care, usually by the oldest male progeny's family, or in their absence, by other blood relations within the collateral joint family.

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– No

Notes: Post 1930s onwards when the Tablighi Jamaat started increasing its presence within the Meo community, one of its strategies to inculcate "Islamic" beliefs and values was to provide them Islamic taleem or education through the maktab. Almost every village has a maktab or madrassa where, early in the morning, Meo children go to study Arabic and the Quran. Some Meo children only attend the Madrassas, however, a majority of the children attend government-run or private schools. Government run schools are fewer in numbers in Meo inhabited areas, one which activists decrie due to systemic discrimination against the Muslims.

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: Formal education is provided through government institutions such as schools and a small number of colleges and technical training institutes. As well, there is a proliferation, like in other parts of India, of privately run educational institutions.



Is extra-religious education open to both males and females:

– Yes

Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo, because of their minority Muslim and OBC status, have to formally interact with various arms of the state bureaucracy to avail benefits.

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– I don't know

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– I don't know

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

– No

Notes: The larger region of "Mewat" is mostly dry and arid - with very few state-provided irrigation facilities. Some communities have been involved in the revival of village ponds, or talabs - this has primarily occurred due to initiatives taken by NGOs working on water management.

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The Irrigation department provides water management, through the establishment of irrigation canals. However, these have been scanty in Meo dominant regions - due to development neglect by the Indian state. MNREGA too provides funds for employment-based desilting and revival of village ponds, and the construction of gully plugs to prevent rain drainoff from the Aravalli hills.

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

– No

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The various states and agencies related to roads such as the PWD, or the Public Works Departments, are mainly responsible for the building and maintenance of roads and other transport related infrastructure.

Taxation

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– No

Notes: While the Meo community does not formally levy taxes, they, as Muslims, are encouraged to contribute part of their earnings as "Zakat" (alm-giving). However, due to high poverty rates among the Meo, this is often not adhered to.

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, the Meo, as Indian citizens, are liable to be taxed by the Indian state such as income tax, or sale of non-agricultural land, or capital gains tax, to name a few.

Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: With the Indian police at the local level.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Notes: The Meo community is regulated by its caste (Pal) councils or panchayats. In this feature, Meo councils bear strong resemblance to the Khap Panchayats of the Jats in Haryana. These non-elected caste councils that have no legal sanction within Indian judicial system, yet these are powerful bodies that regulate and govern the lives of the gotra members. Comprising solely of men drawn from village elders, these caste councils arbitrate over disputes, be it related to property or marriage. Their informal

ruling is usually accepted by clan/gotra members.

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The Indian judicial system.

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– No

Notes: While institutionalised punishment does not exist among the Meo, socially-imposed punishment is meted out by its caste councils. In the past, infractions to marriage rules of exogamy and caste endogamy invited sanctions against the erring members who were either outcasted or shunned by the community. Some of the informal panchayat rulings also extend to arbitration over property disputes.

Are the group's adherents subject to institutionalized punishment enforced by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Like all Indian citizens, the Meo too are subject to the Indian Penal Code that is enforced by the state judiciary.



Do the institutionalized punishments include execution:

– No



Do the institutionalized punishments include exile:

– No



Do the institutionalized punishments include corporal punishments:

– I don't know



Do the institutionalized punishments include ostracism:

– No



Do the institutionalized punishments include seizure of property:

– Yes

Notes: Court rulings can ask for the attachment of property of a Meo - this is case dependant.

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– No

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The Indian legal code, also known as the Indian Penal Code.

Warfare

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

– No

Do the group's adherents participate in an institutionalized military provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Getting recruited in the Indian army is now emerging as a significant employment opportunity for young Meo men.

Are the group's adherents protected by or subject to an institutionalized military provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The Indian army, and the police.

Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Notes: While the Meo do not possess their own distinct written language, they do speak a distinct "Mewati bhasha." Both the Devnagri script (Hindi) and Urdu are used in writing - the former more than the latter due to it being taught in schools.

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Hindi and English are two languages taught to all Meo children enrolled in formal educational institutions, either government run or private.

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Hindi and English are two main languages taught in schools in Meo-dominant regions.

Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– Yes

Notes: The Meo have access to a Muslim calendar, lunar-based Hijri calendar, that they use for festivals, and fasting.

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– I don't know

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Pastoralism

– Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards

Notes: The Meo have two major occupations, both linked to food production. A majority of the Meo are small and marginal landholders who grow wheat, mustard, and bajra. Irrigation is largely rainfed in the Meo populated areas. Dairy and cattle rearing is another livelihood strategy. The dominance of dairy farming in their lives is also attributed to the Meo tracing their lineage back to Krishna, the legendary cow-herd Hindu God. In recent years, however, due to increased targeted violence by the 'gau rakhaks', so called cow protection vigilante groups of the Hindu Right, many are deserting this occupation.

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Meo who are identified as "poverty-stricken" or "Below the Poverty Line" get access to subsidized food rations from the state.



Please characterize the forms/levels of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards

– Other [specify in comments]

Notes: Over 95 percent of Mewat's population lives in villages and is dependent on agriculture, primarily rain-fed, for production of staples such as wheat, mustard, and jowar. In addition, the Meo are also renowned for dairy farming with most of the milk or milk byproducts consumed by the family itself. A small portion is sold either in the market or to dairy cooperatives.

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