Article: Negotiating the Question of Caste, Islam and Indian Muslims: Caste Elements among Meos of Mewat

Author(s): Altaf Hussain

Source: Explorations, ISS e-journal, Vol. 6 (1), April 2022, pp. 91-117

Published by: Indian Sociological Society
Negotiating the Question of Caste, Islam and Indian Muslims: Caste Elements among Meos of Mewat

--- Altaf Hussain

Abstract

Caste system is a basic social structure of the Indian society. In the past, there was a common view among scholars that the caste system is unique to Hindu society and an integral part of it. Therefore, very rich literature has been produced on the Hindu caste system and its various aspects. But, in recent times many social scientists have also recognized the existence of caste-like features among the non-Hindu religious communities particularly the Muslims of India. The main objective of this paper is to revisit the issue of caste among Indian Muslims in general and the Meos of Mewat in particular. The paper will analyze the existence of castes like attributes among Meos of Mewat from a sociological and historical perspective which is widely overlooked in the prior works on the theme and Meo community. In the end, this paper will also going to deal with the emergence of Tablighi Jama’at revival movements among Meos of Mewat and its intrusion into the social and cultural life of the Meo Community and how Meos respond to Tablighi interventions, particularly in their socio-cultural life.

Key words: Caste, Islam, Indian Muslims, Meos, Mewat, Tablighi Jama’at.

A Brief Analysis of Caste, Islam and Social Stratification of Indian Muslims

The caste system is a basic social structure of Hindu society and an essential part of it. Scholars have studied caste in its various parameters in a variety of ways at a national, regional and village level. Ghaus Ansari (1960, p. 1) rightly said that there already exists a great mass of literature on the Indian caste system and there is hardly any aspect of this phenomenon that remains untouched. But, unfortunately, such studies were confined to the Hindu caste system. But in recent times several social scientists and anthropologists' works on non-Hindu religious communities in a different parts of India recognized the fact that other religious communities of India like Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs are also stratified in the lines of the caste system. More importantly, various sociologist and anthropologists studied various
Muslim communities in a different part of India and they also recognized the fact that caste-like features also exists among Indian Muslims. This paper is going to deal with the issue of caste among Indian Muslims in general and Meos of Mewat in particular.

Firstly, it is important to know the stand of theoretical Islam on the issue of caste distinctions. Islam religion emerges as a revolutionary ideology, mainly, based on the twin premises; the unity of God, and the brotherhood of mankind. Islamic faith theoretically stands for co-existence, brotherhood, and egalitarian society. It is also proclaimed in the Holy Quran in Surah Al-Hujrat (Versa, 49:14) that: - O mankind! We have created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes where you might get to know one another. The noblest of you, in Allah sight, is the most righteous of you. Allah is wise and all-knowing. Even in his last sermon, the Prophet Mohammad categorically declared Beware! All mankind is from Adam and Eve. The Arabs have no superiority over a non-Arab nor is the non-Arab superior to an Arab. A dark-skinned man has no superiority over white-skinned man, nor is a white-skinned man have superiority over a dark-skinned man except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constituted to the brotherhood (Rahman, 1996, p. 4). This is evident from the Prophet’s examples and those of his companions as well. For instance, Prophet Mohammad belonged to the highly respected tribe of Quraish, a few months before his death married Qutaiba, the daughter of Qais, who was a weaver by occupation. The first Caliph Abu Bakr, who had a distinguished lineage and family background, married off his sister Umm Farwah to a man who was a weaver by occupation (Habib-al-Rahman, 1985, p.14). Reuben Levy (1957, pp. 53-66) also indicates a picture of the society during the early period of Islam as being a great ideal of equality. For instance, with reference to Kitab-al-Aghani, he quotes a number of facts to show that a princess of the noble Quraish tribe had no superior position than a Beduin. Prophet's marriage to a lowly slave, and that Ka’ba - the most important place of worship was accessible to all Muslims. Thus, it would seem that while the early Arab society was structured on the principle of the tribal aristocracy based on birth, Islam still did not constitute an elaborate system of social stratification. In fact, it was its broad humanistic perspective, tolerance, and its vision of egalitarianism that fascinated millions of people to its fold. (Momin, 1975, p. 580).

Ghaus Ansari (1960, p. 28) noted that during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammad, most of the battles fought in the name of Islam and were confined to the boundaries of Arabia and after his death; numerous attacks were launched
outside the Arabian soil. The idea of equality among Muslims was practicable only in the then prevailing conditions of Arabia. In the course of the expansion of Islam and its contact with other complex cultures and democratic forms of political organization, social equality within the community gradually disappeared. The very structure of Islam itself in this process became the victim of social discrimination. Some social scientists also highlight that Indian Muslims practised an elaborate system of social stratification since the establishment of Muslim rule in India. Yoginder Sikand (2004) mentioned that,

The *Ashraf* - *Ajlafr* division is not the invention of modern social scientists, for it is repeatedly mentioned in medieval works of *Ashraf* scholars themselves. To these writers, the Muslims of Arab, Central Asia, Iranian and Afghan extractions were superior in social status to the local converts. This owed not just to racial difference, as local converts generally being dark-skinned and *Ashraf*, lighter complexioned, but also to the fact that *Ashraf* belonged to the dominant political elite, while the bulk of *Ajlafr* remained associated with the ancestral profession as artisans and peasants, which are looked down upon as inferior and demeaning.

Imtiaz Ahmad (1966, p. 270) further noted that,

Birth as a principle of status and honour was considered as very essential in the early Muslim society in India. In the administrative system, the position of status and authority was assigned to the members of the families of foreign origins, who had descended either from the accompanied invading armies or from the original immigrants. Barni informs us that the early Turkish Sultans contemptuously treated the Muslims of local origin. Ilutmish dismissed thirty-three persons from government services because of their birth in the lower caste. When he appointed Jamal Marzuq as the *Mutassarif of Qannauj* on the recommendation of Nizam-ul Mulk Junaidi, Aziz Bahruz objected to this appointment on the ground of his low status of birth. Ilutmish not only cancelled his appointment but instituted an inquiry into the genealogy of Nizam-UL Mulk himself. When it was found that the *Wazir* belonged to a weaver family, Sultan had lost confidence in him. Thus, a lower caste-born person neither could be recommended for an *Iqta* nor appointed to the post of *Khwaji* or *Mudabbin*. Following the same
practice, Sultan Balban dismissed lower caste-born persons from all-important offices. Sayyid Ashraf Jahangari writes in one of his letters that, Balban had made thorough inquiries about the families of all his office and government servants. Expert genealogists had gathered in Delhi from all provinces of the country to help him in ascertaining the family status of all these persons. Muhammad Tughlaq consciously initiated the policy of giving preference to foreign-born Muslims in administration and government, and systematically ignored the claim of Muslims born in India.

Denzil Ibbetson (1911, p.14) also observed in British India that in Punjab, conversion to Islam had no effect on the caste of the converts, his social customs are unaltered; his rules of marriage and inheritance are unchanged. During the British colonial rule, all the census reports of British India (from 1881 to 1931) and several glossaries of caste and tribe from various parts of India claimed the existence of caste-based distinction among the Indian Muslims. The census of India, 1901, mentioned about 133 social groups prevalent among the Indian Muslims. It also indicated that the Muslim community was largely divided into Ashraf and Ajlaf social groups which were almost analogous to the Hindu caste system. In later years, sociologists such as J. H. Hutton, E. H. A. Blunt, G.S Ghurye, S.C Dube and M.N. Srinivas reinstated the existence of caste elements among the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent through their ethnographic works. British ethnographers examine the issue of caste among Indian Muslims on a Varna basis and differentiated them based on origin and occupation. However, all the existing information we have in British India on this theme is firmly vague, fragmentary, and fragile.

In post-colonial India, several social scientists have presented either historical or sociological studies about Indian Muslims and reported the existence of caste-like features in their particular works and communities. Ghaus Ansari (1960) was a prominent figure, who specifies that the Muslims in the Uttar Pradesh comprised of two major ethnic sections; (i) those who claim themselves to be the descendants of early Muslim immigrants, such as Saiyad, Sheikh, Mughal or Pathan, and (ii) those indigenous origins whose ancestors were proselytized to Islam. The former section is collectively called the Ashrafs or Shurafa and the latter is called the Ajlafs. He categorized the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh into four major blocks, namely, priests, warriors, commoners, and serfs. In this way, he attempted to compare these four groups with the four Varna’s of the Hindus society. S.C. Misra
(1964) also examines caste and social hierarchy among Muslims of Gujarat. His work mainly deals with a socio-historical investigation of the communal organization of the Muslim community in Gujarat. He argued that the social stratification among the Muslim communities residing in Gujarat is patterned by the Hindu caste system with some significant differences. Zarina Ahmad (1962, pp. 325-336) also observed that the structure of Muslim society in India does not reveal the Islamic ideals of social equality. She pointed out that even the Ashraf Muslims (Muslims who claim to be of foreign descent) resemble the Hindu caste cultures in many aspects. She noted that Ashraf society includes an endogamous group system, restricted mobility among castes, prohibition on eating and drinking, and is organized on a hierarchical scale. She further observed that social groups among the non-Ashrafs (Muslims of Indian origin), approximate even more intimately to the Hindu castes. It is evident that early works tried to understand the issue of caste among Indian Muslims on a general and Varna level.

During the 1980s, Imtiaz Ahmad brought a volume, which deeply enriched the available literature on the structure and the functioning of the caste-based stratification among the Muslims spread across the different parts of India. The book comprises ten empirical studies carried out by sociologists and social-anthropologists in multiple cultural and geographical settings of India during the late sixties and early seventies. Ranjeet K. Bhattacharya (1973, pp. 107-32) studied the concept and ideology of Caste among the Muslims of Rural West Bengal and observes that despite claims to adhere to the egalitarian ideology of Islam, there is a rigid system of stratification present among west Bengal Muslims. M.K.A. Siddiqui (1973, pp. 133-156) in his work on Caste among the Muslims of Calcutta argues that the concept of caste is opposed to Islamic beliefs, but the caste-like system is functionally present among the Muslims of Calcutta. Leela Dube (1973, pp.195-230) in her case study among the Laccadive Muslims observes that the caste among the Muslim groups on the Island can be compared with the Hindu caste system, though it is not similar in many matters. Victor S. De'Souza (1973, pp. 45-60) study on the Moplahs on the South-west Coast of India also observed that the Muslim status group of Mysore and Kerala are hierarchical stratified and observed endogamy. Zarina Bhatty (1973, pp. 89-106) work on status and power in a Muslim dominated village of Uttar Pradesh observes that the system of social stratification among Muslims can be best understood within a caste framework. She argues that the Muslims in Kasauli had a caste system similar to that of the Hindus, and that the Muslim caste structure had its roots in a political-economic system, which was part of the existing Hindu feudal system in India. In his overview, Imtiaz Ahmad
(1973) mentioned that some features of casteism are certainly prevalent among Indian Muslims. He also observed that, unlike the Hindu caste system, the pattern of stratification among Muslims does not enjoy any ideological justification. Ahmad concluded by saying that, the caste system exists among the Muslims but it differs from the Hindu model in certain important respects. Ahmad also notices that caste among the Indian Muslims is due to the influence of the caste system among the Hindus.

In the last couple of decades, many other social scientists like Masood Alam Falahi, Hasan Ali, T N, Madan, and Parvez. A. Abbasi has also reported the presence of caste-based distinctive features such as endogamy, hierarchy, occupational specialization, and hereditary membership in their respective studies. Recently Anwar Ali (2005) credibly demonstrated the reality of caste among Muslims in northern India, particularly Bihar. He has researched the lives of the low and backward amongst Muslims and noted how these Muslims have been forced to live on the margins in sub-human conditions, how they have been systematically discriminated against by society, the forward, by the religious leadership, by the political parties. He further writes that how upper caste/class Muslims continue to maintain their hold over various waqf boards, important madarsas, mosques, darghas, tombs, and minority educational institutions. The majority of IAS and IPS and other reputed services among Muslims still belong to upper caste Muslims. He writes that the journey of Muslims Dalit and Hindu Dalits started more or less with the same social, educational, and economic status. However, in independent India, the constitution provided the Hindu lower caste and tribes, the status of scheduled caste and scheduled tribes and gave them a means of improving their situation. However, the Muslim Dalits were left to the mercy of Allah.

On the other hand, several scholars insisted that the system of social hierarchy among the Muslim groups is disparate and incomparable to the Hindu caste system on any grounds. They studied and considered the Muslim's social stratification along the lines of social classes of high, middle, and low, which developed through political power and landed aristocracy among the Muslims of India (Faridi and Siddiqui, 1992). A.R. Momin (1992, pp. 8-17) emphasizes the Islamic literature where he has effectively established the fact that the 'caste system' has no conformity with Islam. He argues that Indian Muslims have developed features of caste in their social structure, but that the caste system is considerably weakened and not similar to the Hindu caste system in several ways. For instance Jamil Farooqui (1992, pp. 18-30) stated that the caste characteristics are not found among
Muslim's 'pseudo-caste’. In addition, he concluded that the Muslim social structure could not be explained in terms of caste groups because they do not form the basis of social stratification in Muslim society. Ziauddin Ahmad (1992, pp. 30:50) also argues caste among Muslims is not similar to the Hindu caste system in various ways. He further observes that the caste system cannot stand on its own without the support and sanctions of religion, and conceptions of purity and pollution. Therefore, among the Muslims of India, it cannot strike roots. He says actually, among the Indian Muslims there are classes of high, middle, and low, which developed through political power and landed aristocracy. Many other social and religious scholars strongly believe that there is not any real conformity to the caste system among Muslims. They also view that social stratification among the Indian Muslims is not comparable in any respect to the Hindu society. But, in reality, the Muslim community remains as diversified, fragmented, and caste-ridden as any other community of India. The real fact is that caste is much of an objective reality within the Muslims, affecting their interpersonal, social, and economic relationship, like it, is in any other community of the Indian society (Alam, 2003).

The existing literature, on this theme, indicates that there are mainly two broad methods to study the social structure of the Indian Muslims. The first method is the one opted by Ghaus Ansari, Zarina Ahmad, and Satish Mishra, in which they carried out a study on the growth and evolution of the Muslim society across centuries and they strived to comprehend this idea on the macro-level in their respective studies. The second approach follows a sociological method, chosen by most of the sociologists who conduct fieldwork by selecting a particular community or coterie of a region and spending enough time having an explicit interaction with them. These findings are piled in a systematic disquisition of the communal and cultural aspects of the existing social structure. A close analysis of the Indian Muslim societies undoubtedly demonstrates that like the Hindu social system, the Indian Muslim social structure is also tangled in nature and varies across communities and regions. Therefore, it is very obvious that the above-mentioned approaches do not seem sufficient when used solitarily because a proper outline and information of their history are quite paramount for the conventional understanding of their existing social structure. Thus, it is required to assemble both historical and sociological perspectives in a local setting, which is often overlooked in the former works on this theme in general and the Meos community in particular. Hence, this study is intended to accumulate both of these methods to understand the existing social structure of the Meos of Mewat profoundly.

Some sociologists and anthropologists studied the social system, Kinship, and
customs of Mewat's Meos community. For instance, Shamsuddin Shams (1983) provides considerable insight into the belief system and social profile of Meos of Mewat. Pratap C Aggarwal's (1966, 1969, 1971) also wrote one book and various articles on the social structure and culture of Meos of Mewat. His work helps us to understand the social structure and culture of Meos of Mewat. His work's primary aim is to identify and interpret the social-cultural change caused by a modern institution and religious reformation in Mewat after 1947. Abha Chauhan (2003) conducted a field study in Mewat. This study tries to comprehend the operational ideologies of the Kinship organization of the Meos and current variations as well as its influence on the lives of the peoples. This study depends upon the field works across the villages of Nagina then Ferojpur block of Mewat district in Haryana. Recently Raymond Jamous (2003) works on the Kingship and Rituals of Meos of Mewat is important work to understand the Meos kingship and social institutions of Meos of Mewat. Very recently Yoginder Sikand (2002) also works on the origin, development, ideology, organization and consequence of Tabligh Jama’at movement among Meos of Mewat. Amir Ali (1970) also survey the social-economic profile of Meos of Mewat. He largely examines the social-economic and cultural outline of Meos of Mewat from the past to the present. In recent times. Shail Mayaram's (2003, 2017) writings have aroused considerable interest in the past as well as the customs of Meos.

**Area of Study: Mewat**

The area, Mewat, is a distinct, socio-cultural and historical region of Northern India. In medieval times, the Persian sources usually preferred Mewat as the land of Meos and Khanzadas. During the medieval times, the inhabitants of Mewat included the group of Meos, and other cultivating classes such as Khanzadas, Jats, Gujjars, Ahirs, Rajputs, Baqqals, Brahmans, Minas, Thathars, and Malis (Fazal, 1949, pp. 202-06) During the British Rule, Mewat laid in South Delhi and included the parts of the British Districts of Muttra (Mathura), Gurgaon, a considerable portion of Alwar (Ulwur) and some parts of Bharatpur (Hunter, 1886, p. 418) A Meo poet has rightly described the area of Mewat as;

इत दिल्ली उत आगरो, अलवर और बैराठ
काली पहाड़ सुहावणो, जाके बीच बसे मेवात।
नू तो सारी जात ही, बसाए एक ही साथ
Even in the present context, it is difficult to ascertain the Mewat boundaries because Meos are scattered over the districts of four states, namely, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. Mewat has situated approximately 64 km to the southwest of Delhi, roughly corresponding to Modern Alwar and Bharatpur districts of Rajasthan and Nuh district of Haryana. It comprises the nine modern-day Tehsils of Tijara, Kishangarh, Alwar, Lachmangarh (Alwar District), Deeg, Nagar, Kama (Bharatpur district), Nuh, and Firozpur Jhirka (Nuh district) respectively (Bhardwaj, 2012, p. 220) Therefore, Mewat, the land where the ‘Meos’ live, is a cultural area rather than an administrative unit or a natural region. It is a composition of various Hindu and Muslim social groups but is mainly known for the Meo community.

**Meos of Mewat: Origin, Islamisation, and Cultural Practices**

Since, about five centuries, the Meos, are a dominant landowning sub-caste of Mewat in Rajasthan and Haryana and enjoy the privileges available to both Hindus and Muslims (Aggarwal, 1966, p. 59). The Meos claim that they belonged to the *Kshatriya* clan and their origin can be traced to Suryabansis, Chandravansis, and Agnikuls of the Rajput nobility glittering with such appellations as the Tomars, Yadav, Chauhans, and Rathors. Based on the marriage legend between Dariya Meo and Sisbadni Mina, the British ethnographers have proved that, in the past, the Meos and the Mina were connected in a marriage relationship with each other, and hence, they belong to the same race (Cunningham, 1885, Powlett, 1878, Crook, 1975, Ibbeston, 1911). Yoginder Sikand (2002, p. 110) stated that ‘while it is almost certain that many Meos are indeed of Rajput stock, it seems very likely that among them there are many who are the descendants of ‘lower’ caste converts who either before, or after, their acceptance of Islam, laid claim to Rajput ancestry to enhance their social standing.’

Despite various views existent regarding the origin of the Meos, they were regarded as Upper-caste Rajput by the caste living within their territory including the Brahmans, Jats and Ahirs. There are again several views regarding the Islamisation of the Meos, particularly of when and how the Meos embraced Islam. According to A. Cunningham (Cunnigham, 1885, pp. 24-25) the conversion did not take place

---

1 It Delhi and Agro, Alwar and Bairath Mewat is situated in the middle of Kalo mountain. No, all the castes are there, just sit together (Upper) Meo Ghani Tadat Me, Nu Baje Mewat II
until the reign of Feroz Shah Tughlaq. According to W.W. Hunter (Hunter, p. 419), it is feasible that the original Meos, together with a few other castes, proselytized to Islam at the time of Ghazni in the eleventh century. British colonial ethnographers also emphasized that the Meos embraced Islam due to the cruelties inflicted by Sultan Balban and the other Muslim emperors on the Meos. (Cunningham, 1885, pp. 24-25). On contrary, the Meos believe that they were converted to Islam during the earlier phase of its spread in India. They traced their first proximity with the Muslims back to Mohammad Bin Kasim’s attack on Sindh in the 8th century. The Arab invaders toiled intensely to unfurl Islam in Sindh. The Meos believed that their habitation was spread out to Sindh at that time and must have come under the influence of Islam. The Meos further believe that the second phase of the outspread of Islam among the Meos began at the time of Mahmud Ghaznavi in the 11th century, when Sayyaid Salar Sahu, Mahmud Gaznavi's brother-in-law, was in the command of the royal force. He established himself in Ajmer and started conquering the areas around Ajmer, where his son Sayyad Salar Masud Gazi defeated Tejpal, a Meo chieftain, at Dhandgarh near Rewari. Tejpal is believed to have embraced Islam and thus became the first known Meo Muslim. (Sakoor, 1974, p. 317) British ethnographers persist in the forceful conversion of Meos but the medieval sources do not provide any reliable information which proves that Delhi Sultanate and Mughal rulers forcibly converted Meos to Islam. Interestingly, the process of Islamisation of the Meos in terms of their adoption of certain Islamic practices such as nikah, burial, Eid celebration and christening Islamic names began during the late 17th and early 18th century with the help of Dak Meroras (Meos who were working as post-carriers in Mughal administration) (Bhardwaj, 2012, pp. 246-247). Their Islamization is still in the process even after the Meos embraced the Islamic faith long back.

Meos of Mewat: Peasantisation and Social Transformation

The Meos or Mewatis are mentioned firstly in the Persian sources. Minhaj Siraj and Ziauddin Barni mentioned that the Meos or Mewatis were involved in cattle-lifting, theft, robbery, and highwaymen activities during the 13th century. He also added that the early Meos settlement was either located on the hilltops or closely surrounded by the Aravalli hills (Kala Pahad). Now, it is conspicuous that the geographical setting played a considerable role in their early activities in this region. It is interesting to note that Meos who were the cattle-lifters, highwaymen, and robbers of the 13th century, since the Mughal period, particularly under the reign of Emperor Akbar, have undergone a vital transformation in the economic and social status of their society; they began to own zamindari rights in many
Parganas of Alwar, Tijara, and Sahar Sarkar of Agra Suba. The fact that the Meos uphold the zamindari rights alongside the other upper caste coterie of these Parganas indicates their increased premier social and economic status during the 16th century. Interestingly, this transformation among the Meos in the 16th century was not just restricted to their migration to plain areas, conversion to agriculture and landed caste, but was also apparent in other aspects. Abul Fazal in the *Ain-i-Akbari* mentioned other Meos of Dak-Meoras and Khidmatiyyas, who worked as postal carriers and royal guards. Abul Fazal has referred to Meos as *Mewrah*, and he tells us that they were the natives of Mewat, and were famous as runners, and one thousands of them were employed by Akbar as post-carriers and were called *Dak-Mewrahs*. (Cunningham, 1885, p. 22). Even during the late 19th century, in Gurgaon, the Meos held 387 out of the 1264 villages, or say one-sixth of the land covering the entire south (Channing, 1882, p. 8). In Alwar, the Meos were numerically the first race in the state and the agricultural portion of land possessed by them was considerably double that of any other class of cultivators in the state. They occupied about half of the Alwar territory (Powlett, 1878, p. 3). They also occupied substantial land in Bharatpur state during the colonial period. As it was mentioned earlier, the Meos were Sudra for the Qanungo and Patwaris, a criminal tribe for British ethnographers of the 18th century. Despite this, they were regarded as the upper caste Rajput by the other caste people living within their territory including the Brahman and other Muslim and non-Muslim social groups of Mewat.

**Meos of Mewat and their social organization**

The entire social and political structure of the Meo community is based on their *pal-gotra* system. Most gazetteers, ethnographies, and census data compiled in the second half of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century have mentioned that Meos are subdivided into five *bans*, twelve *pals* (*Pal means ‘to nourish’ or ‘to look after*) (lineage or bigger unit consisting of several *gotra*) and thirteenth *pallakra* (has the same meaning as Pal, except that it signifies smallness inferior status) of the *Pahat* and fifty-two *gotra* (small clan organization). They also mentioned that these divisions were identical to those that were found among Jat, Gujar, Mina, Ahir and Rajput of Mewat region. The *pal* is the basic unit of Meos kinship and segmentary polity. There is no record as to when and why Mewat was divided into Pal system. Now, all the 13 territorial sites of the Meo pals stand deserted and ruined. Each *pals* are further sub-divided into *thambas* (sub-territorial lineage) each of which is believed to have descended from a single ancestor. Thus *thamba* division is associated with the son of the founder of the *pals* to which they belong. People belonging to the same *thamba* feel closely related. *Patti* is another
term used for particular *Muhallas* of the villages associated with one of the sons of the founder of the villages. *Thok* is also the term of their division, and a prominent Meos of each *thok* is called *numbardars*.

### Table-1. Details about Meos *Bans, pals, and gotras*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Vamsh</th>
<th>Names of related Pals</th>
<th>Villages associated with Pals</th>
<th>gotras (clan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tomar (Rajput)</td>
<td>Balot</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mangria, Sirohia, Bialiayana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ladawat</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>Nanglot, Kataria, Sukeria Gonchia, Bodiyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ratawat</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jamnia, Bilawat, Majlawat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Derwal</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Kanger, Bigot, Marag, Mander, Tawar, Saugan, Kahout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jadu (Rajput)</td>
<td>Demrot</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>Gorwal, Mewal, Kad<em>Nai</em> Bad<em>Nai</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chirklot</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>Baghtia, Bhoslia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pundlot</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Singalia, Machhalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dulot</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>Kharakia, Bhabhla, Jounwar Lamkhera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nai</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>Besar, Batlawat, MahaJatlawat, Sailania Bahmanawat, Nahrawar Khanjadoo, Morejhangel Guma!, Kheldar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuhuan (Rajput)</td>
<td>Pahat(Pallakra)</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>Kanwalia, Chaunker, Chaursia, Chauhan, Bhan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badgujar</td>
<td>Singhal</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>Badgujar, Loka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rathor (Rajput)</td>
<td>Kalisa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bharkatia, Khokhat, Pawar Chalukia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gor, Kachwaha (Rajput)</td>
<td>Dehngal</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>Sagrawat, Gor, Khuswal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 6 | 13 | 52 |

**Question of Caste among Meos of Mewat: An Analysis**

It is fascinating to know that the Meos elucidated themselves and others in terms of *zati*, or *biradari* like the Hindu community rather than their religious community. The term *zat*, or *biradari*, is commonly used among both the local Mewati Muslims
and the Hindus, to designate a social status, stature and an endogamous ethnic unit. Thus, *zat* or *biradari* is the most important denominator of one’s status and identity among the Muslims of Mewat. For instance, when a Meo addresses member of another community he/she calls that person by his/her name and *jati* together like *Mamur Nai, Chotta Luhar, Dhanni Chamar, Jawahar Bania, Mulchand Khati, Pawan Bania, Sakir Mirasi, Mahbub Fakir, Sakina Nayan, Magri Luharan,* and so on. In the Mewat, the term ‘*jati or zaat*’ is equal to ‘*jati*’ as is the case with the Hindu caste system. It is the most important denominator of one’s status and identity. The relationship in the Mewat is categorized and hierarchied based on *jati or zat* with the common marker being the adherence of a person to the *unchi jati* (high caste) or the *neechi jati* (lower caste).

Further Muslims of Mewat are hierarchal arranged in the social order. The Meo who claim that they were converted from Rajput Hindu caste and are a major landowning community in Mewat region are at the top of social order. It is interesting that apart from upper caste converted Muslims other Muslims social standing depends upon their occupation, such as *Sakka* and *Nai* were higher in social standing than the *Luhar, Kasai* and *Teli* (oil pressure) and *Mirasi* were lower in social standing to the all Muslims due to the occupation, which they follow. It appears that apart from the higher caste converted Muslims; the lower castes Muslims follow the same occupation, which they followed before conversion to Islam. Partap C. Aggarwal (1971) in his case study of a Chavandi Kalan village in Mewat region of Rajasthan during 1980s, observed that, the peoples of Chavandi village hierarchical in the lines of *unchi jat* (high caste) and *nechi jat* (lower caste). He noted that the sixteen castes were residing in that village both Hindu and Muslims, they were divided into three ranked clusters the *unchi jat* (high castes), the *kamins* (service castes), and the *Harijans* (untouchable). He describes that Brahmans, Meos, Sikhs, Banias and Khatris were on the list of *unchi jat* (high caste) in that village. He further notes that *kamin* (services castes), out of nine castes in this group, three, *Khati, luhar* and *Nais* were clean Shudras. They practice their traditional caste occupation according to the *jajmani* rules. He further observed that *Fakirs, Sakkas,* and *Mirasis* were Muslims service castes, which serve the land owning Meos by the *jajmani* rules. Their social standing was lower than the *Nais,* and *Luhars* Muslim groups of that village. He further observed that *Harijans* (untouchable), there were two castes of untouchable in Chavandi Kalan; the *Chamars* and the *Bhangis.* They were at the bottom of the hierarchy of that village. So, it is clear from above that Muslims of Mewat are unequal but they are not ranked with each other unlike the Hindu Varna system. However, they are stratified
as lower and higher caste/jati like that of Hindu society. In every Mewat village, all the Muslim and Hindu caste or jati are ranked concerning each other. Further, the interaction between the Meos and the lower caste (both Hindu-Muslims) is structured by patron-client relationships which are known as the jajmani system in Northern India. The basic jajmani arrangement is still prevalent among the Muslims of Mewat but in recent times we have observed some considerable changes in this system.

Another important aspect of the Muslims of Mewat, mainly, among the Meos is that they are an endogamous group and do not marry outside their community. There is a very famous saying among the Meos of Mewat that 'vote or chori to qaum ko hi dene chaiye' (vote should be given to their leaders and the marriage of their girls must be held within their community only). A similar idiom is popular among the Jats of Haryana too, that, 'Jat ke beti Jat ko, jat ke vote jat ko'. But, in the past, there were some cases of them marrying other Muslims, but such cases were contested by the Meos of Mewat. I would like to share an episode from the 1960s, in which a Meo lawyer living in Alwar who had married outside his zati, admitted that he could not return to his natal village with his wife because his agnates would never tolerate such a state of affairs (Jamous, 2003, p. 19)

The Meos primarily stress caste/jati endogamy, but, matrimony between a Meo man and non-Meo Muslim women from within or outside Mewat are accepted, however, it is not preferred. Such marriages only take place in a situation when a man is more than 20 years old and is poor, handicapped, divorced, or widowed. It is important to note that in Mewat social fabric if a man marries outside his zati or region, his better half is unanimously called ‘Paro’, (meaning a woman who has been purchased or brought into the Mewat region from another social group or region). Here it would be significant to mention the experience of one of such women named Rubina. She belongs outside Mewat and is married to a Meo of Guhana village near Mewat district. She describes her situation as ‘we Paros, belong nowhere, we are treated like animals. If a man has to choose between leaving a local woman and an outsider, he will surely kick the outsiders out. She also describes that we don’t get as much love and respect as local women (Hindustan Times)’. I have also observed that if a woman who does not belong to the Meo society and Mewat region and gets married to someone from Mewat, then she is usually addressed as Paro. Even their children are addressed as Paro ki, and Paro ka (Paro’s daughter and Paro’s son respectively) by the local men and women. Their parents even face multiple difficulties while finding a suitable match for their children within the Meo groups. This apparently proves how Meos consider
themselves as a distinct social group and are always conscious of this dissimilarity even after intermingling with the people who do not belong to Mewat or are not Meos.

Along with the Meos, other social groups of Mewat such as Nai, Mirasi, Sakka, Kasai, and Luhar also marry within their group and observe endogamy rigidly. For instance, there is a village called Sudaka in the Mewat district of Haryana, where an 18-year old, Maimuna eloped with a Meo guy named Idris, who resided in her village. She was attacked with a knife neck to naval by their family members for this act. Later to protect her family's izzat (honor) Maimuna was forced by her family to marry her cousin Aijaz who lived in another village (Gandhi and Sharma, 2009, p. 2). It is very clear that with a few exceptions, among Hindu castes, rules prohibiting inter-caste marriage, were stringently enforced by all Mewati Muslims and Hindu caste of Mewat region.

Each zati in Mewat as a whole is endogamous. However, this does not mean that any male member of the zati can wed any women of their zati or biradari. As I already mentioned, Meos and other social groups are divided into several exogamous groups. During the late 19th and early 20th century, a Meo could not marry within his/her pal, gotra, and thamba. Marriage inside the same clan is severely prohibited and restricted because as per their belief, ‘goti so bhai baki ke asnai’. Besides this, the Meo code of marriage rigidly prohibits a man from marrying not only in the gotra to which his father belongs but also from marrying in the gotra of his mother or say, even from the gotra to which his maternal grandmother belonged (Weston, 1911, p. 51). Even at present, marriage between a boy and a girl belonging to the same gotra is considered amounting to incest. For example, in 2010, a twenty-two-year-old constable plus an 8-times National Wrestling Champion, Ekhlaas, of Dwarka village, Mewat (Haryana), got married to Anjum on 9th May. Even though, Anjum's ancestors had migrated from Haryana to Rajasthan about a century ago, when the khap panchayat of Dwarka village came to know about his marriage with her, it asked him to terminate his marriage to Anjum. But on his refusal to do so, the panchayat asked the village people to ex-communicate him and his family. One of the believers of the gotra tradition, Ramzan Chaudhary, the head of the gotra panchayat justified Ekhlaas and his family’s ex-communication. He says that no doubt we are Muslims, but at the same time we strongly love and follow our tradition and customs and hence we do not allow marriage in the same gotra (Milli Gazette, 2010). There is another episode in which Haji Kallu of the village Satputyaki (Nuh block, Mewat district) fixed his daughter’s marriage in the Ranika village (Nagina block, Mewat district). When the
zati panchayat of Satputyaki and neighbouring villages came to know that Haji Kallu fixed his daughter's marriage in the gotra ‘Derwal’, to which he also belonged, it asked him to terminate this marriage. But he refused to do so, and therefore, the biradari panchayat of that village not only boycotted Haji Kallu socially but even the people of that village and their neighboring villages destroyed his 20 acres of crops to punish him. There exist several such instances in Mewat, where a person marrying in the same gotra, along with his/her family, is subjected to harsh punishments, by the gotra or pal panchayat.

In Haryana Jat community always practice strict village and khap exogamy. Like these communities, in the past Meos not only avoided marrying in their village but also prohibited marrying in any of the villages in their thamba or even pal. Because Meos believes that each village, thamba and pal belonged to one ancestor, therefore, each boy and girl in the village, thamba and pal is brother and sister. The village men address the females of the village as ‘sister’ or ‘daughter’ depending on their relative age, irrespective of pal, gotra, and castes. Along with his/her village, as Wilson points out, a Meo man could not marry a woman from his mother’s village and his father’s mother village in the late 19th and early 20th century. (Samul, 1911, p. 51). Abha Chauhan (2003, p. 81) in her fieldwork based on the Nagina and Jhirka villages in Nagina block and Ghata village in Ferozpur Jhirka blocks of Mewat district in Haryana, observed that ninety-two percent of the respondents in the sample said that they were following the rule of the village exogamy strictly. None of the Meo households in the three villages recorded any case of intra-village marriage. In recent years, there has been a distinct change in these rules, such as father and son marrying in the same village and matrilateral cross-cousin marriages being arranged.

Though, Islamic and Tablighi Jama’at ideology permits and insist on both cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriage but these rules are strictly forbidden by the Muslims of Mewat. A Meo cannot marry any woman whose relationship with him is close enough to be traceable and a woman whose relationship is traced through consanguineal kin. Interestingly, in the post-partition period, when Tablighi Jama’at was well rooted in Mewat, it tried to question the practice of avoidance of cross-cousin and parallel cousin marriage, but, the Meo community never paid any heed to their instructions. For instance, in 1963, there were some religious ulemas (religious teachers) who tried to organize patrilateral parallel-cousin marriages, i.e, marriage between the children of two brothers. Maulvis of Uttawar, Ruparka, and Ghasera villages had sponsored three cases of marriage between the children of two brothers. The Meos of Mewat not only boycotted these marriages but also attacked
the Maulvis. One was brutally butchered and ploughed over (Sharma, 1969, p. 183). There was another case when in 1998, a boy and a girl of two brothers were put to death in a village in Firozpur Jhirka block because of cross-cousin marriage (Chauhan, 2003, p. 78). Another episode occurred in Kisangarh (Rajasthan) where a boy wedded his uncle’s daughter. This was an arranged marriage and the explanation given by the guardians of the bride regarding the marriage was that Islam did not prohibit such marriages. The Public's opinion was annoying as this marriage was regarded as nothing more than an incestuous union and the couple was eventually expelled from the village (Shams, 1983, p. 74). In another episode, a Meo of Gurgaon district arranged the marriage of his son with his brother’s daughter, asserting that Islam allowed such marriage. The Meos of the village were infuriated at this attempted ‘incest’ and they beat the culprit and banished him out of the village (Aggarwal, 1976, p. 278) Now more fascinatingly, the Tablighi Jama’at has abstained themselves from telling Meos about the chacha-taya ka nikha (cross-cousin marriage). These incidents, it results that on the grounds of social custom and marriage alliances, especially, in the marriage arrangements, Meos have been contradictory to the precepts of Islam and Tablighi Jamaat. This proves that despite the widespread penetration of the revivelist movement of the Tablighi Jamaat in Mewat, there still exist many practices which the Meos follow in opposition to the teachings of Islam and Tablighi Jamaat.

There is a belief among sociologists and anthropologists that social mobility is much easier among Muslims compared to Hindu society. Such as the common proverb quoted during the late 19th and early 20th century in the ethnographic and census reports on the Sheikhs says: “Last year I was a butcher, this year I am a Shaikh; next year if prices rise, I shall become a Saiyad (Crook, p. 302). Imtiaz Ahmad (1973, pp. 157-167) noted that Siddiqi Sheikh of Allahbad claims to be the descendants of Abu Bakr Siddique, the first caliph of Islam. In reality, they were converted from the Kayastha caste to Islam collectively. He further noted that they had succeeded in forming a new status, identity by the abandonment of traditional customs and rituals and adoption of Islamic custom and tradition and establishment of marital links with the families of supposedly Sheikh origin and descent. But, this paper suggests that social mobility among Mewati Muslims is not an easy work as far as Muslims of Mewat are concerned. There is a popular story in Mewat about a Patwari enquiring about the caste of a Mirasi, who happened to be sitting beside a Meo. The Mirasi answered, I am a Saiyad, hearing this the Meos was outraged and spoke with every bit of anger, if he, a Mirasi, can be a Saiyad, then I, who am a Meo, claim to be God himself. In Mewat even the Kasai, (butcher) groups also
claim that they are Sheikh and they are from Quraish clan, to which Prophet Mohammad belonged. They also claim that their social status is higher compared to other service castes of Mewat. However, Meos has never recognised their claim and they are considered as *nichi jati* (lower caste) in Mewat even at present.

The exact idea of ritual pollution and purity that existed in Hindu society is not found in the Muslims of Mewat, though, there is some semblance. For instance, during the late 19th century the lowest of the menial castes—sweepers, *chamars* and *dhananks*, either lived in separate quarters at a little distance from the main village or on the outskirts of the village. All other tribes lived in the center of the village. Where there were both Hindus and Muslims, inhabit different blocks of the village site (Gurgaon District, 1910, pp. 32-33). Raymond Jamous (2003, p. 20) also observed recently in his study that Meo represented nearly 40 percent of the village population, occupied over half of the residential space, and lived in three quarters. The quarters of two untouchable castes, the *Chamar* and *Bhangi* lay in the east. The Brahmins and the *baniya* each had their quarters, west of the main street, which divided the village down the middle along a north-south axis. West of that street lay the well-circumscribed quarters of the *kumhars* (potters), the *kasai* (butchers), the sonar (goldsmith) and the luharss (blacksmith). Those quarters were separated from the backward castes by a street to avoid any spatial contact with them. The different Muslim service castes comprised a few families, all of whom shared the same quarter and cemetery. Jamous further found that the Meo buried their dead in their cemetery (*kabristan*) and other Muslims castes shared a separate cemetery. I did not found any recent example of a separate cemetery for lower caste Muslims of Mewat. In the daily life the Meos, like most other castes; accept the principal food prepared by the upper caste. But the latter, like the *baniyas*, were vegetarian and refused to eat anything cooked by the Meos, even though they acknowledge their high-caste status. The Meo used the barbers as cooks, who prepared the *pakka* food on ceremonial occasions. They refused to accept any food prepared by lower and backward castes at home. In particular, they refused to enter *Fakir*’s house because, as a funerals priest, he was to contact with the impurity connected with death and burial grounds.

The caste *panchayats* are used to socially control deviant caste members so that the cohesiveness of the caste group is maintained. These types of traditional *panchayats* are found throughout the Indian subcontinent. They are called by different names in different places like *Khap* in Haryana, *Pal* among Meos of Haryana and Rajasthan, *Hatu panchayat* and *Parga panchayat* among the Munda tribe of Jharkhand. Similar *Khap panchayat* in Haryana upholds the concept of
bhaichara on a gotra, caste or territorial basis. On the similar lines of khap, Meos of Mewat have pal system, which upholds the concepts of bhaichara on gotra, caste and territorial basis and individual relations. This system maintains gotra, village exogamy, but caste endogamy in the similar way to Khap. Further, this system prohibited cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages. Meos have panchayat at thamba, gotra and pal level. The Meos jati panchayats play an important role in enforcing rules of exogamy, defining condition of divorce, punishing for breach of promise in marriage and checking cases of sale of girl. These panchayats issue diktats for excommunication and expulsion of people who marry within the gotra. Traditionally, each pal-gotra and each thama had a chief, a chaudhari, (leader) who was chosen from specific families within the dominant clan. In the principles, the chaudhri would occupy his position until his death and his eldest son ought to succeed him. Each pal, gotra and thamba chaudhari, yields great influence on the members of his unit and he is economically well off and socially respected. Similar to the Meo society all other Muslim service castes such as Nai, Mirasi, Fakir, luhar, and Sakkas, have their gotra panchayats. Each gotras headed by chaudhris, those play an important role in maintaining the caste endogamy and exogamy at gotra and village level. Therefore, it looks like the Muslims of Mewat have the same caste or jati panchayat similar to the Jats and other Hindu communities of North India.

Social and Cultural Impact of Tablighi Jama’at Movement among Meos of Mewat

Some scholars firmly believe that Islamisation may be offered as an effective antidote to the ideology of caste. In this perspective, Tabligh Jamaat movement started in 1926 with the slogan “Aye Musalmano Musalman bano” in the Mewat area by Maulana Mohammad Ilyas (1885-1944). Tabligh Jamaat was started by Mohdammad Ilyas but it was his father Maulana Mohammad Ismail in the late 19th century who firstly takes initiative to reform Meo workers in the Banglewali Mosque at Hazrat Nizamuddin, New Delhi. In the initial years, Maulana Ilyas established a large number of mosque-based religious schools or maktabs and madrassas in Mewat to appropriate Islamic belief and practices. But, Maulana Ilyas soon was disappointed with the progress of the spread of Islam through the regular madrassas and maktabs. Further, Ilyas around 1926, came-up with Tablighi Jama’at idea that is unique in its simplicity and its effectiveness. Tabligh means “to communicate” or “to preach” and the term Tabligh Jama’at literary means preaching party. He first motivated Muslims to go in-group of ten people often to Meo village. This group would go to a village, invites local Muslims to assemble in the mosque and present their message.
Tabligh Jama’at peoples in largely 1930s stressed on following 15 points—(1) The Kalima (2) Namaz (3) attainment and diffusion of (religious) knowledge) (4) embracing of Islamic appearance and dress (shakl o surat) (5) seclusion of women (6) performance of nikah (the Islamic form of marriage) (7) devotion to Muslim dress by the Meonis (Meo women) (8) non-deviation from Islamic beliefs and non-acceptance of any other religion (9) protection and preservation of mutual rights (10) participation of respectable persons in every public meeting (11) pledge not to impart secular education to children before they have received basic religious education (12) pledge to strive for the preaching of religion (Islam) (13) adoption of Islamic ceremonies and rejection of non-Islamic ones (14) observance of cleanliness (15) pledge to protect the dignity and respect of one another (Nadavi, 1983, p. 11). Further, Maulana Ilyas adopted the six-article (chhe number) course of teaching which formed the essence of this movement. Tablighi Jama’at now spread through the world and become one of the largest Islamic movements in the world.

Most the scholars who work on the origin and spread of Tablighi Jama’at movement among Meos of Mewat have emphasized that the Tablighi Jama’at movement has considerably affected the social structure, customs, and traditions of Meo society. For instance, Partap C Aggarwal (1966) states, ‘One can confidently predict that in few years the way of life of the Meos will become completely Islamized. He further argues that after partition the Hindus no longer regard them as Kshtriyas, and they are becoming ‘full Muslims’’. Inder S. Marwah (1979, pp. 96-97) argues that because of the Tabligh movement the Islamic influence on the Meos increased considerably and it has resulted in the rapid Islamization of Meo community. Abha Chauhan (2003, p.78) also stated that the pressure on Meos to leave the customary practices and adopt the religious ones, especially with the increasing role of Tablighi Jama’at, whose influence in the mid-1930s but became sufficient after 1947, is felt largely by the Meos. Wahiduddin Khan (1988, pp. 17-18) argues that due to the Tabligh Jama’at movement “the whole of Mewat was transformed great spiritual excitement and enthusiasm could be seen among the people at large. They changed their way of dressing and grew beards, shaking off one by one almost all the pre-Islamic customs that they had retained after their conversion. Lending or borrowing on interest as well as robbing, looting and dacoits decreased considerably. Liquor consumption comes to end. Hence, most of the scholars except Shail Mayaram have emphasized in their studies that the influence of the Tabligh Jama’at, in the social and cultural life in Mewat undergoes Islamisation rapidly, particularly after the partition of India had a great impact on Meos life.
There is no doubt that Tabligh Jama’at movement had affected Meo community considerable in many socio-cultural practices but, simultaneously this movement and its ideology had experienced a strong résistance from the social structure and cultural practices of Meos of Mewat. For example, despite the long penetration of Tabligh Jama’at among Meos of Mewat, which stressed the Islamic appearance and conduct, the performance of marriage in an Islamic style, social change in the Islamic direction, do not observe the gotra system, great stress gives on equality and brotherhood, the influence of caste or zati remains strong. The Meos still feel proud of calling themselves the Suryavanshi and Chandravanshi Rajupt. They still described themselves and others in terms of zati, or biradari as like in Hindu community rather than a religious community. Even today, Muslims of Mewat are stratified along the lines of unchi zaat, (high caste) and niche zaat (lower caste) similar to the Hindu community of North India. The basic jajmani arrangement still exists in Mewat but it has been considerably weakened and it is rapidly disappearing as in Hindu society. Even, the traditional gotra, pal, and village exogamy rules, which the Tablighi Jama’at dubs as ‘un-Islamic’, are existent in the Mewat and are observed not only by the Meos but also by the other social groups living in the Mewat region. This is apparent from the efforts of Tablighi Jama’at which expresses its utter dismay by stating that ‘gotra vali gari to chal hi rahi hi. Rokhte ha in to bavandar hota hai’ (the gotra system has been going on smoothly, whenever, we try to check it, it invites a lot of clamors). The Muslims of Mewat practice endogamy rigidly. Marriage between the Meos and the non-Meo Muslims is not preferred. Even today, cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages are strictly prohibited among the Muslims of Mewat. The recent attempts of Tabligh Jama’at to “purge the Meo Muslims of these non-Islamic practices” have been vociferously contested by the Muslims of Mewat. More interestingly now, the Tablighi Jama’at has abstained from telling Meos about the chacha-taya ka nikha (cross-cousin marriage). This also evident that Tablighi Jama’at movement faces a strong resistance from as far as Meos social institutions are concerned. The Meos of Mewat generally use proverbs like ‘Meo to Meo hi rahnge Mullah nahi banange’. This proves that the Muslims of Mewat, particularly the Meos, resisted Tablighi Jama’at ideology whenever they intervene in their social and cultural practices.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that there is a remarkable difference between theoretical Islam and the existing social reality of Indian Muslims. Theoretically, Islam stands for
social equality but in reality, Indian Muslims are socially stratified and divided into the caste lines. This is also evident that the Indian Muslim social structure is also very multifaceted and differs from one area to another and one community to another. This fact is manifest in the social structure of Mewati Muslims. Each zati in Mewat region is endogamous and practices hypergamy. Meos of Mewat still severely prohibit marriage within *pal, gotra*, and village exogamy. Cross-cousin and parallel cousins’ marriage is still forbidden among the Muslims of Mewat. Hereditary membership and hierarchy among the Mewati Muslims are still prevalent. More importantly, such social and cultural practice is still prevalent among the Muslims of Mewat despite the great efforts and hard work of Tablighi Jama’at, who stressed equality and brotherhood since the 1920’s. A deep sociological and historical investigation of the Muslims of Mewat also indicates that the social and cultural practices of Indian Muslims govern by their prevailing social-cultural context, not by theoretical Islam. In the end, this work suggests that for a better understanding of the social structure of Indian Muslims we need to put together sociological and historical approaches within a given region, culture and community.

REFERENCES:


Ahmad, I. (1966). The Ashraf-Ajlaf dichotomy in Muslim social structure. *Indian Economic and Social History Review*.


WEB SOURCES:


Altaf Hussain is an Assistant Professor at the Department of History, Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi.
Email id: altafmeo91@gmail.com