

MEWAT: A region that is turning almost exclusively Muslim at the core

Mewat—comprising the newly created Mewat district of Haryana, the adjoining Hathin tahsil of Palwal and several contiguous tahsils of Alwar and Bharatpur districts of Rajasthan—is the homeland of Meo Muslims. They form nearly 50 percent of the population of this region; their presence is above 70 percent in several tahsils and reaches 85 percent in a couple of them. Their growth in all of these tahsils has been very high during the last four decades for which we have compiled the data. Thus, in the five tahsils of the region that fall in Haryana, and which together accommodate more than a million Muslims in 2011, their share in the population has risen from 62 percent in 1971 to 75 percent now. In Pahari tahsil of Bharatpur, their proportion has grown even faster, rising from 63 percent in 1991 to 73 percent in 2011. Every tahsil in the region has experienced a similarly high growth in the presence of Muslims in this period.

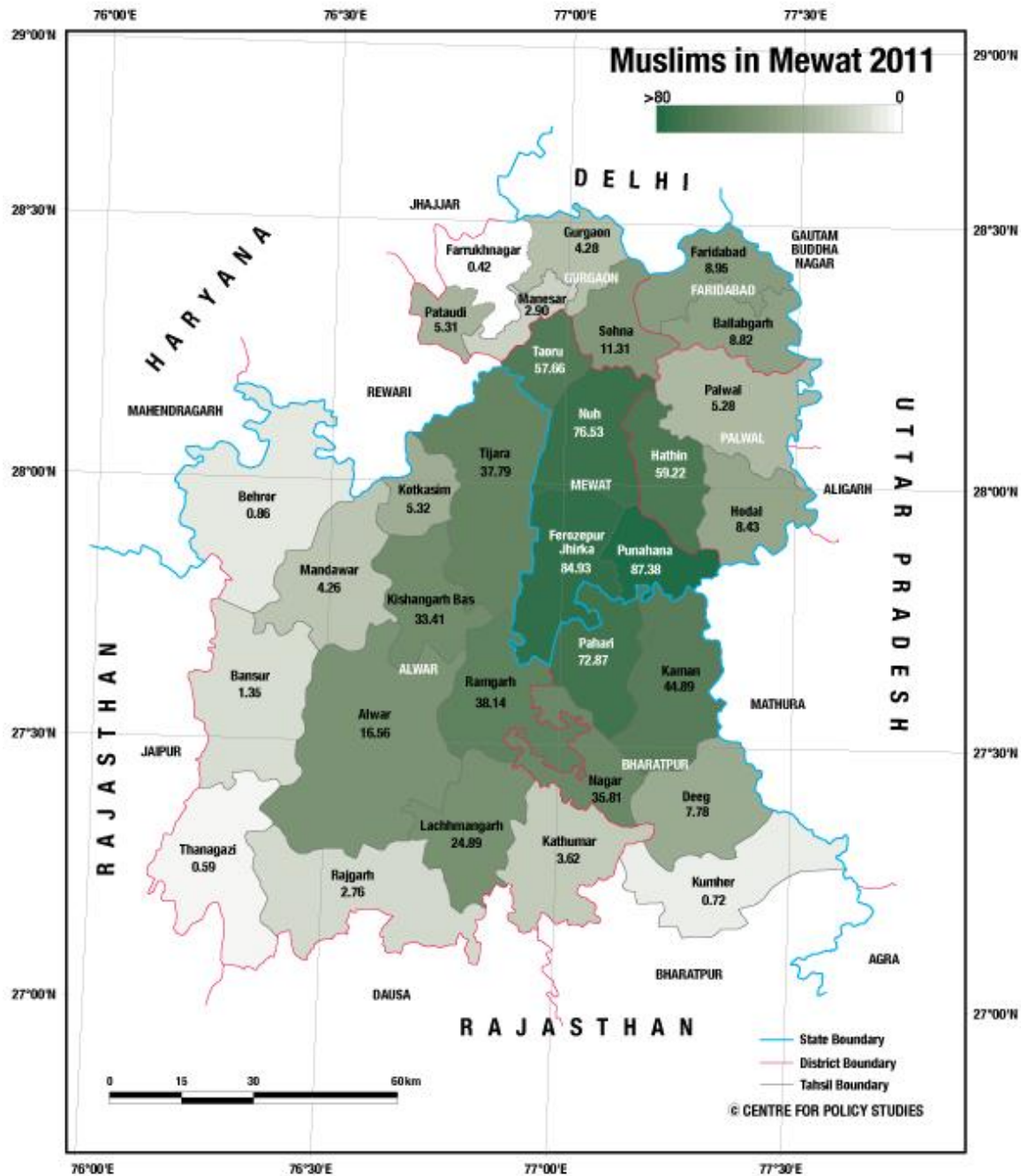
Unlike the Muslims of Malerkotla in Punjab, who had the protection of the Sikhs around them, the Meos of Mewat had been in active conflict with the Hindus in the decades leading to the Partition, largely because of the spread of the fundamentalist Tablighi movement among them since the last decades of the nineteenth century. There was much disturbance in the region during the Partition and many were displaced from their homes. However, most of them returned after the unrest subsided. They thus retained their dominance in the region. But, in the period before Independence and Partition, they perhaps never had the kind of numerical dominance that they have achieved now, with core part of the region becoming almost exclusively Muslim.

The Region

The geographical boundaries of Mewat are not well defined. It is simply the region where Meo Muslims dominate the population. By that criterion, it would include the tahsils or sub-districts listed in the Table here on the right and also shown in the Map below.

The Core region of near exclusive Muslim presence
Ferozpur Jhirka, Punahana and Nuh tahsils of the newly created Mewat district of Haryana along with Pahari sub-district of Bharatpur in Rajasthan seem to form the core of Mewat region. According to the count of 2011, Muslims form 87 percent of the population of Punahana and 85 percent of Ferozpur Jhirka tahsils of this district. They have a share of more than 76 percent in the population of Nuh that adjoins Punahana and Ferozpur Jhirka on the north, and of around 73 percent in Pahari that adjoins these two on the south.

MEWAT, 2011		
Sub-district	Muslims	%Share
Mewat District of Haryana		
Taoru	96,164	57.66
Nuh	2,19,716	76.53
Ferozpur Jhirka	2,91,645	84.93
Punahana	2,55,122	87.38
Palwal District of Haryana		
Hathin	1,59,298	59.22
Alwar District of Rajasthan		
Tijara	1,49,846	37.79
Kishangarh Bas	67,255	33.41
Ramgarh	97,879	38.14
Lachhmangarh	71,857	24.89
Alwar	1,16,571	16.56
Bharatpur District of Rajasthan		
Pahari	1,44,945	72.87
Kaman	91,562	44.89
Nagar	86,598	35.81
TOTAL	18,48,458	48.01



There are about 91 lakh Muslims in these four tahsils that lie at the core of Mewat, and they form more than 81 percent of the population of this core. As we see below, the share of Muslims in these tahsils has been rising very rapidly. In the last decade alone, the Muslims in this core part of Mewat have grown by 45 percent compared to the rate of growth of just about 16 percent for the rest of the population. Number of Muslims here has increased from 6.3 lakhs in 2001 to 9.1 lakhs in

Muslims in the core region, 2001-11			
	2001	2011	RG%
Muslims	6,29,625	9,11,428	44.76
Others	1,81,130	2,09,954	15.91
%M	77.66	81.28	-

2011, while the rest of the population has increased from 1.8 to 2.1 lakhs. This core part of Mewat seems on the way to becoming an exclusive Muslim pocket in the near future.

The outer core where Muslims form a majority

Around the core region of four tahsils mentioned above, there are another three tahsils, where Muslims form a majority or near majority. These include Taoru of Mewat and Hathin of Palwal district, both in Haryana, and Kaman tahsil of Bharatpur in Rajasthan. There are 3.5 lakh Muslims in this part and they form more than 54 percent of the population here. The growth of Muslims in this part has been even faster than in the core region. During 2001-11, their share in the population has increased from 48.4 to 54.2 percent. The rise has been the highest in Taoru, where the Muslim share has increased from 49.1 percent in 2001 to 57.7 percent in 2011.

Muslims in the outer core, 2001-11			
	2001	2011	RG%
Muslims	2,35,932	3,47,024	47.09
Others	2,51,870	2,92,718	16.22
%M	48.37	54.24	-

The peripheral region

Tijara, Kishangarh Bas and Ramgarh tahsils of Alwar and Nagar of Bharatpur district seem to be on the periphery of the core Mewat region; Muslims have a share of more than one-third in the population of these four tahsils. There are a total of 4 lakh Muslims in this part, and they form 36.6 percent of the total population. Here the gap between the growth rates of Muslims and others has been relatively smaller, with the former growing by 44.6 percent and the latter by 23.6 percent during the last decade. The rise in the share of Muslims in the population, therefore, has been relatively modest, from 33.1 percent in 2001 to 36.6 percent in 2011, though it is quite large in absolute terms.

Muslims in the periphery, 2001-11			
	2001	2011	RG%
Muslims	2,77,711	4,01,578	44.60
Others	5,62,118	6,94,739	23.59
%M	33.07	36.63	-

The outer periphery

Alwar and Lachhmangarh tahsils of Alwar district seem to form the outer periphery of Mewat region. Muslims have a share of 16.6 and 24.9 percent, respectively, in these two tahsils. There are a total of 1.88 lakh Muslims in this region and they form 16.75 percent of the total population. The gap between the growth of Muslims and others is relatively less pronounced in this part also; in 2001-11, Muslims here have grown by 38.8 percent, while the others have grown by 19.2 percent. The share of Muslims in the decade has increased by only 2 percentage points, from 16.75 to 18.89 percent.

Muslims in the outer periphery, 2001-11			
	2001	2011	RG%
Muslims	1,35,729	1,88,428	38.83
Others	6,74,509	8,04,099	19.21
%M	16.75	18.89	-

There is significant presence of Muslims in some of the sub-districts beyond the region that we have defined, particularly in Sohna and Pataudi of Gurgaon, Faridabad and Ballabgarh of Faridabad, Palwal and Hodal of Palwal, Deeg of Bharatpur, and Kotkasim of Alwar district. Historically, the region is said to extend even up to Dhaulpur district of Rajasthan. The proportion of Muslims in Dhaulpur district and in several of its tahsils is indeed above 5 percent. But for all purposes, the 13 sub-districts that we have considered above can be taken to form the region of the Meo Muslims today.

Long-term trends of growth of Muslims in Mewat

The districts and sub-districts in most parts of India have been repeatedly reorganized during the last few decades. Therefore it is not easy to get long-term demographic data for a particular district or sub-district. Below, we give such data for those parts and the period for which we have been able to compile such data.

Mewat district of Haryana

Mewat district has been carved out of Gurgaon after 2001, and the tahsils within this district have also been carved out of larger tahsils at different points of time. But the territory included in the four current tahsils of Taoru, Nuh, Ferozpur Jhirka and Punahana has remained more or less unchanged since 1981. Therefore, it is possible to compile time-series data for this district for the period 1981 to 2001. As seen in the Table here, the share of Muslims in the population of the district has increased from 66.3 percent in 1981 to 79.2 percent in 2011. The increase of 13 percentage points in their share in just three decades is very high indeed. In these three decades, the number of Muslims in the district has increased from 2.53 to 8.63 lakhs, multiplying 3.41 times, while the rest of the population of the district has increased from 1.29 to 2.27 lakhs, multiplying by only 1.76.

Muslims in Mewat district, 1981-2011

	T	M	%M
1981	3,81,741	2,53,198	66.33
1991	5,43,006	3,81,621	70.28
2001	7,89,750	5,90,967	74.83
2011	10,89,263	8,62,647	79.20

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

Hathin sub-district of Palwal

Hathin was carved out largely from Palwal tahsil after 1981. We have compiled the data for 1991 to 2011. The share of Muslims in this sub-district has increased by nearly 10 percentage points in these two decades alone. Growth in the share of Muslims here is somewhat larger than even Mewat district. As far as the presence and growth of Meo Muslims goes, the tahsil could be a part of that district. When the district was first created in 2005, Hathin was indeed included in it. Later, with the formation of Palwal district in 2008 from Faridabad, this tahsil was shifted from Mewat to the new Palwal district. But it remains an important part of Mewat region.

Muslims in Hathin, 1991-2011

	T	M	%M
1991	1,50,561	74,722	49.63
2001	2,03,867	1,10,788	54.34
2011	2,69,015	1,59,298	59.22

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

Pahari and Kaman sub-districts of Bharatpur

Pahari was carved out from Kaman tahsil after 1981. We have compiled data for the undivided Kaman tahsil from 1971 to 2011, and for the component Pahari and Kaman tahsils from 1991 to 2011. In undivided Kaman, the share of Muslims has increased from 42.4 in 1971 to 58.7 percent in 2011. There has thus been an accretion of more than 16 percentage points in these four decades. This is very high rate of increase in the share of a particular community; and, as is clear from the Table here, the quantum of accretion has been only growing from decade to decade.

Muslims in Kaman, 1971-2011

	T	M	%M
1971	1,48,161	62,772	42.37
1981	1,77,397	80,203	45.21
1991	2,26,319	1,10,932	49.02
2001	3,04,940	1,63,802	53.72
2011	4,02,846	2,36,507	58.71

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

In both the individual component tahsils of Pahari and Kaman, the share of Muslims has risen by 9 percentage points in the two decades for which we have the data. In Pahari, the

share of Muslims has increased from 63.3 percent in 1991 to 72.9 percent in 2011; and, in Kaman, the rise has been from 36.0 to 44.9 percent.

Nagar sub-district of Bharatpur

For Nagar tahsil, we have been able to compile data from 1971 onwards. In the four decades between 1971 and 2011, the share of Muslims in this tahsil has increased by more than 13 percentage points, from 22.6 percent in 1971 to 35.8 percent in 2011. The increase is somewhat smaller than the increase of 16 percentage points that has taken place in Kaman tahsil; but even this marks a drastic change in the religious demography of the sub-district.

Muslims in Nagar, 1971-2011

	T	M	%M
1971	97,442	22,046	22.62
1981	1,17,843	30,043	25.49
1991	1,50,065	42,579	28.37
2001	1,95,671	61,765	31.57
2011	2,41,858	86,598	35.81

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

Tijara sub-district of Alwar

In Tijara, the rise in the share of Muslims has been far less pronounced than in the other tahsils that we have considered above. Here, Muslims formed 30.3 percent of the population in 1971; their share in 2011 is 37.8 percent. This amounts to an accretion of 7.5 percentage points in 4 decades. Mewat district and sub-districts like Kaman, Hathin and even Nagar have recorded much higher growth in the share of Muslims. Tijara is a major centre of pilgrimage for the Jains, but only 1,364 Jains have been counted in the tahsil in 2011.

Muslims in Tijara, 1971-2011

	T	M	%M
1971	1,02,510	31,046	30.29
1981	1,29,538	41,105	31.73
1991	1,81,877	63,185	34.74
2001	2,80,772	99,183	35.33
2011	3,96,575	1,49,846	37.79

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

Ramgarh sub-district of Alwar

Ramgarh was carved out from mainly Alwar tahsil after 1971. The share of Muslims in this tahsil has risen by 11 percentage points in the three decades between 1981 and 2011. This is unlike Tijara and more in consonance with the large increase in the Muslim share observed in several other parts of Mewat.

Muslims in Ramgarh, 1981-2011

	T	M	%M
1981	1,11,712	30,501	27.30
1991	1,49,796	45,249	30.21
2001	2,01,757	68,929	34.16
2011	2,56,605	97,879	38.14

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

Kishangarh Bas, Lachhmangarh and Alwar tahsils

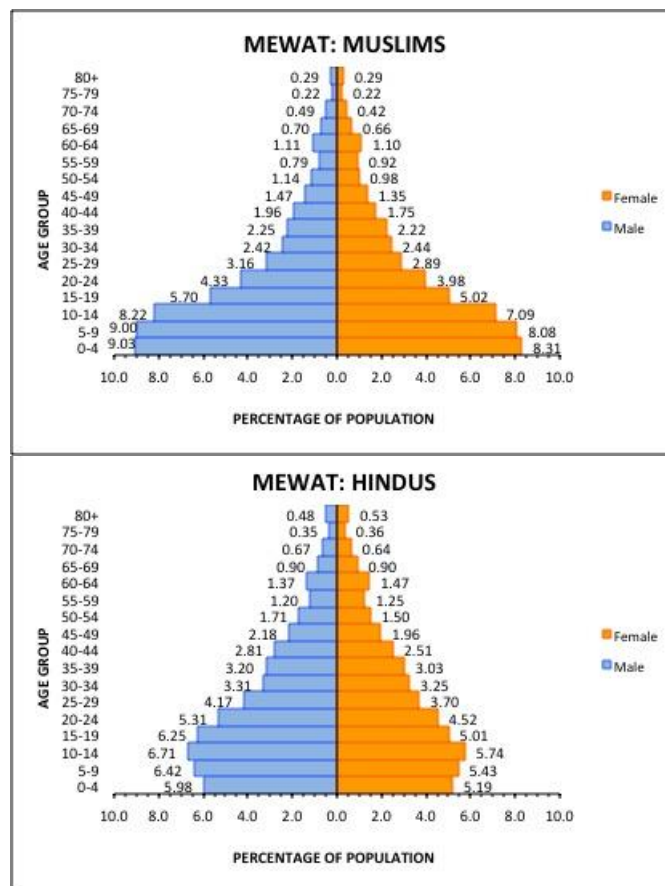
Kishangarh Bas was split after 1991 to carve out Kotkasim tahsil; the latter has rather low presence of Muslims. The share of Muslims in the remaining Kishangarh Bas tahsil was 29.6 percent in 2001 and it has increased by 4 percentage points to reach 33.4 percent in 2011. It is not possible to get earlier data for this component. Similarly, Lachhmangarh has been split after 1991 to carve out Kathumar tahsil; the share of Muslims in the latter is low. Their share in the remaining Lachhmangarh tahsil has risen by from 21.9 in 2001 to 24.9 percent in 2011. It is not possible to get earlier data for the current Lachhmangarh tahsil. Proportion of Muslims in Alwar tahsil is relatively low and the growth in their share has also been relatively small. Muslims formed 11.8 percent of the population of the tahsil in 1981; they form 16.7 percent in 2011.

The Muslim share has been growing very rapidly in almost every part of Mewat except in Tijara and Alwar sub-districts of Alwar district. The growth of Muslims even in these two sub-districts is low only in comparison with other parts of Mewat. In several core parts of the region, the share of Muslims has risen by as much as 16 percentage points in four decades. Some of the tahsils in Mewat region have become nearly exclusively Muslim.

In the analysis above, it is remarkable that in general the gap between the growth of Muslims and others is higher where the share of Muslims is high and relatively lower where their share is low. This seems true all over the country. Wherever Muslims have a dominant share in the population—as in certain districts of Western Uttar Pradesh, in the Purnia region of Bihar, in the adjoining Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand, in Dinajpur-Murshidabad region of West Bengal and in much of lower Assam—the gap between the growth of Muslims and others has been much wider, than in the regions where Muslim presence is not too high. It seems that wherever Muslims have an intense presence, it tends to get more and more intense.

Higher number of Children

We do not have the detailed age distribution and literacy data for the tahsils, but such data is available for the districts. In Mewat district of Haryana, the number of children percent of the population is as high as 24.6 for the Muslims compared to 15.9 for the Hindus. And female literacy among Muslims is as low as 29.3 percent compared to 61.8 percent for the Hindus. The difference in the demographic profiles of the two communities in Mewat district in 2011 is clearly visible in the age-pyramids below. The base of the Muslim pyramid is much wider and indicates a population that shall continue to grow faster than the Hindus for several decades.



Muslim growth in the historical context

Matsaya Desha

The territory of Mewat lies in the ancient Matsaya Desha associated with King Virata of Mahabharata; Matsaya is also one of the sixteen *mahajanapadas* mentioned in the Buddhist literature. Modern Bairat town, located about 66 kilometer west of Alwar is identified with the ancient Viratanagar, the capital of Matsaya; archaeological remains from very early times are found in Bairat. Matsaya in Sanskrit means fish; it is speculated that the region was at one time called *Meena Vati*, the land of fish, and Mewat is a corrupted form of *Meena Vati*. It is also said that the Meenas of this region came to be called Meos after conversion to Islam. The region is still inhabited by considerable numbers of Meenas, who are counted as a scheduled tribe in Rajasthan. Traditionally, Meenas and Meos are both cattle-rearing communities.

Early conversion to Islam

The conversion of the people of this region to Islam began rather early at the time of the Delhi Sultanate and continued at least up to the time of Aurangzeb. It is generally believed that the Meos were rather indifferent Muslims; British officers in the region have observed that they were not conversant with even the basic Islamic performance of Namaz. This was partly because of the forced nature of the conversion, and also because of the great depth and resilience of the community-based social structures of India. Meo Muslims have retained the social organisation of the Jats, Ahirs and Rajputs of this region until now, even though intermarriage between the Muslim Meos and the Hindu communities from which they were converted, including the Meenas, ceased long ago. Meos had also retained the rituals, customs and festivities of their original communities until recently; these have been now largely given up under the influence of Tablighi movement that began in this region towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Fight against the Mughals and other imperial powers at Delhi

Even after their conversion to Islam in the Sultanate period, they retained sufficient roots within the indigenous communities and polity to fight against the invading Mughals, along with first Sher Shah Suri and later with Raja Hemachandra, also known as Hemu, in the first battle of Panipat. During the Sulatanate, Mughal and later the British periods, they are known to have retained a rebellious spirit. The British often referred to the Meos as a 'criminal tribe', though they were never formally listed as such.

The beginning of Tabligh among the Meos

Tablighi Jamat, now a vigorous transnational movement of Islamic renewal, had its origins in Mewat. The Jamat was founded by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas in the mid-1920's. But the work of Islamic renewal among the Meos was started already in the late nineteenth century by his father, Maulana Mohammed Ismail, who is said to have initially paid the Meos their daily wages to induce them to join him to learn the Namaz and memorise verses from the Quran. Soon Meo children began to receive free Islamic education in his Madrassa in Basti Nizamuddin in Delhi, and these children went back to Mewat to preach Islam. The Madrassa was opened in 1880. After the death of Maulana

Ismail in 1898, his elder son Mohammad continued the Madrassa's work among the Meos until his death in 1917. Mohammed Ilyas took over from there.

It was while working among the Muslims of Mewat that Ilyas came to question whether education alone could renew Islam and eventually decided that “only through physical movement away from one's place could one leave behind one's esteem for life and its comforts for the cause of God.” It was this realization that led to the founding of the Tablighi Jamat. It is said that Ilyas evolved the Tablighi methodology of *gasht*—of going around in groups to the Muslim households and summoning them to the Namaz and the study of Quran—from what the Meos had spontaneously begun to practice.

Thus by a quirk of history, the Meos, who were known for their indifferent attitude towards Islamic practice and who were often seen as half Hindu, became the originators and propagators of a fundamentalist movement that insisted on rigorous study and observance of what is enjoined by the Quran, Hadith and the Sharia. By the 1930's, groups of Meos were being sent to far away places outside Mewat to preach the renewed and rigorous Islam that the Jamat advocated.

The Meo rebellions against the Hindu rulers

Around the same time, the Meos rose up in revolt against the Hindu rulers of Alwar and Bharatpur. The rebellion led to much violence and there were widespread attacks against Hindu temples and shops. From then onwards, the relation between Hindus and Muslims in the region became highly strained. The Meos not only began to adopt rigorous Islamic practices and join the wider pan-Indian and pan-Islamic Muslim agenda, but also began to change their dress and appearance to conform to the Islamic codes.

Partition of India

The Partition of India happened at a time when the Meos were in the process of adopting an assertive Muslim identity and the relation between them and the Hindus were highly strained. Unlike the Muslims of Malerkotla, who were protected by the Sikhs, the Meo Muslims could hardly count upon the goodwill of their Hindu neighbours. There was fierce rioting between the Hindus and Meos in Gurgaon, Alwar and Bharatpur. Some 30 thousand Meos are said to have died in Alwar and Bharatpur. Many Meos relocated to Pakistan, but most of the displaced, who were accommodated in camps in Gurgaon district, returned to their homes after the disturbances subsided.

After Partition and Independence

Complete transfer of populations, as it happened in the rest of Punjab, was averted by the intervention of the Indian government. Muslims continued to dominate the demography of Mewat after Independence and Partition. The experience of Partition seems to have made them take Tablighi Jamat and their Islamic identity even more seriously. Since Independence, there have been several instances of Hindu-Muslim rioting in Mewat and, as we have seen, the share of non-Muslims in the population has been rapidly declining.

Even trade has moved into Muslim hands

Some of the scholars who have studied the region have observed that in the decades following Independence, Muslims, who have traditionally been agriculturists, have tended to open shops in the towns of Mewat to counter the monopoly of Hindu trading castes in small businesses. The tendency seems to have become particularly strong in the towns of Mewat district in recent decades. In this one decade, their share has increased from 38 to 50 percent in the town of Nuh, from 36.4 to 55.4 percent in Punahana, and from 26.7 to 33.5 percent in Ferozepur Jhirka.

	%Share of Muslims in the towns		
	1991	2001	2011
Nuh	24.44	38.03	50.09
Ferozepur			
Jhirka	19.34	26.70	33.40
Punahana	28.70	36.41	55.40

Thus, the Muslims of Mewat have not only increased their numeric dominance in the decades since Independence, they are also in the process of excluding non-Muslims from the economic activity of the towns. With their dominant numbers, they of course dominate the polity of the region. It is indeed a measure of their political clout in the affairs of Haryana that a separate district has been carved out for them.

Summing Up

1. Mewat is a region in southern Haryana and neighbouring parts of Bharatpur and Alwar districts of Rajasthan, where the local agricultural and cattle-rearing communities began to convert to Islam from the early centuries of the previous millennium. The Muslims have numerically dominated this region for several centuries. Today, in 2011, the region accommodates nearly 2 million Muslims.
2. Unlike in other parts of Punjab, and of northwest India in general, Muslim dominance in this region remained intact after Independence and Partition. This was not because of any history of goodwill between the Muslims and others in this region, but because of the intervention of the central government at nearby Delhi. Mahatma Gandhi himself is known to have expressed his concern about the welfare of Meos in that period.
3. In the decades since Independence, the share of Muslims in the population of this region, and particularly in some of the tahsils that form the core part of this region, has grown very rapidly. In Mewat district, which has been recently carved out from Gurgaon in Haryana, their share in the population has 66.3 percent in 1981 to 79.2 percent in 2011. In Ferozepur Jhirka and Punahana tahsils of this district, their share in the population is as high as 85 and 87 percent, respectively.
4. The Muslim share in the population of the neighbouring tahsil of Pahari in Bharatpur is also very high at above 72 percent and has been growing rapidly.
5. The growth of Muslims in the towns of Mewat district has been especially rapidly in the last couple of decades. It is said that this is a consequence of the Meo Muslims opening small shops in these towns to counter the monopoly of Hindus in small trade of the region.

6. From the data, it is clear that the Muslims of Mewat have numerically flourished in the period following Independence. And, they seem to be in the process of establishing an exclusively Muslim pocket in the near future.

7. Among the social scientists of India, it has been fashionable to refer to the violence that took place in parts of Mewat at the time of Partition as systematic 'genocide' of the Meo Muslims. If that is true, then Mewat presents a rare case where a community that was a victim of genocide a few decades ago has risen to dominate the region numerically, economically and politically, and seems to be in the process of establishing an exclusive pocket of its own. Though the social scientists of India would not want to grant it, this even should be counted as an example of the extraordinary consideration that Independent India has endowed upon its minorities.