

STRETCHING southwards from the borders of Delhi towards the Thar desert, over large parts of the Gurgaon and Faridabad districts of Harayana, and Alwar and Bharatpur in Rajasthan, is the culturally distinct region known as Mewat. This name is derived from the major community inhabiting the area - the Muslim Meos. The Meos are descendants largely of Rajput, Meena and Gujjar converts to Islam and have still retained many elements of their pre-Islamic past, including several customs, social institutions, rituals and beliefs. It is estimated that there are over a million Meos in Mewat alone and several hundred thousand scattered elsewhere.¹ Nearly all the Meos of Mewat reside in rural areas and most villages in the region have overwhelming Meo majorities.

The Meo community consists almost entirely of small and middle level peasants who, on the whole, are greatly impoverished. There is an almost complete absence of irrigation facilities in the region even though the minister of state for irrigation in the present Haryana ministry is himself a Meo. As a result, most Meos can raise just one crop a year, if the rains are sufficient. Rampant exploitation by Bania and Jain moneylenders is another major cause of Meo poverty. Most of the Banias of Mewat live off the interest they charge on loans given to the Meos. The general rate of interest per month is three per cent, which works out to an exorbitant 36 per cent yearly, enough to drive many Meo families deep into debt and penury for generations. Much Meo land has passed into Bania hands as a result of their inability to repay loans. Educationally the community is extremely behind as well; only an estimated 10 per cent of the Meos are said to be literate. To add to their many woes, the Meos also complain of

government neglect and discrimination by local officials on religious grounds.

Agriculture and Housework

If the general condition of the Meos is woeful, that of the Meonis, the Meo womenfolk, is even more distressing. In the domestic sphere, the burden is almost entirely on women. Forced by their acute poverty, right from childhood itself, to assist their mothers in household chores, young Meo girls cannot go to school. They tend to younger siblings, graze goats and sheep, and roam the bare, barren slopes of the Aravallis in search of firewood.

Unlike many other peasant communities, agricultural work, too, is largely part of women's domain

among the Meos. In many cases the only agricultural operation done by men is ploughing. It is a common sight in Mewat to see groups of women toiling together in the fields, carrying large loads on their heads, while their menfolk sit chatting away, smoking from communal *hukkas* (water-pipes). Offering an explanation for this phenomenon, Usman Khan, former *sarpanch* of the Meo village of Jharpudi in Harayana's Gurgaon district, says: "*Bahut bahadur qaum hai*" (This is because our women are a very brave race). So strong are they that even when they deliver children, they are back to work the next day and cook food for their families." Husain Khan (not his real name) of Nuh, Gurgaon district, however, attributes the overwhelming dependence of Mewati agriculture on Meoni

The Meonis of Mewat

Yoginder Sikand



Meo men smoking from a *hukka*

physical labour to the general economic and cultural backwardness of the community and to Meo insensitivity towards their women. "Meonis are doubly exploited," he says. "First they, along with Meo men, suffer at the hands of the Banias and the officials. Then, they are exploited by their men themselves. Some are even treated as dumb cattle, though our religion strictly prohibits this."

Islamic Rights

The Meos are one of the few Muslim communities in India who, in matters of inheritance, are governed by their own customary law and not by Muslim personal law. While the latter provides for a share for daughters in the property of their deceased fathers, the former does not. Granting daughters inheritance rights in land, Meos contend, would further contribute to the rapidly increasing fragmentation of their already unviable, small landholdings - a problem that has become extremely acute with the rapidly growing population.

Dowry is seen by the Meos as taking the place of women's inheritance rights though it is not actually an Islamic custom allowed by the *shariat* (Islamic law). Further, the two are also not really equivalent in the sense that unlike the property which Muslim women themselves inherit from their fathers, and over which they, and not their husbands or husbands' families are entitled to exercise control, dowry is paid to the groom's family and the bride has no right over it. Generally speaking, neither does the groom since child marriages are almost the norm among Meos. Interviews with several Meos reveal that the dowry problem is becoming increasingly acute. Among the better off sections of Meo society, men compete with one another to pay higher dowries for their daughters to enhance



their own social prestige- a handsome dowry is considered to be a sign of wealth, success and power. It is said to be a *nak ki bat* (a matter of honour), of one's personal standing in society. Despite several caste *panchayats* having been held by Meo *chaudhries* (leaders) in which it was unanimously decided to do away with dowry, the practice actually shows no sign of abating. In fact, says Rahmat Khan (not his real name), a student of Tijara (Alwar district), many of the *chaudhries* who had vociferously condemned dowry at these *panchayats* themselves paid grand dowries when it came to the marriages of their own daughters.

Burden of Large Families

Meo families are generally large and women begin producing children soon after marriage. Meos generally believe that family planning, especially limiting the number of children, is strictly prohibited by Islam. Says Mushtaq Khan (not his real name) of Nuh, "*Ham thokar marte hi rahte hai aur is par koi pabandi nahin hai*" (We keep penetrating [our women] and there is no restriction on this at all.) When I told him about a book written

by Professor Tahir Mahmood of Delhi University's Law Department on family planning and Islam, in which the author has conclusively proved that Islam does permit limiting the number of children, he seemed greatly surprised. He said he had never heard of this before. He confirmed it with a local *maulvi* and the next day revealed that he had actually been using contraceptives but feeling terribly guilty about it, thinking it to be un-Islamic. Now since the *maulvi* had told him that contraception, under certain conditions, was allowed by Islam, he had used a contraceptive the previous night and for the first time ever, he said, he had not felt guilty because of it.

Unfortunately, says Mushtaq, most *maulvis* do not deal in their sermons with such concrete social problems as rising poverty, illiteracy, women's rights, family planning, et cetera. Instead, they generally confine themselves to lecturing only about the importance of faith (*iman*), prayers (*namaz*) and fasting (*rosa*). If, he says, they were to lecture to their congregations about the role religion could play in solving the growing social problems of the Meos, it would be

socially more relevant than at present. Mushtaq suggests that books on Islam and social problems should be abridged and translated into simple, readily understandable Hindi and Urdu and made available in the *gasbas* of Mewat at affordable prices so that Meos, too can benefit from them.

Educational Barriers

If the literacy rate can at all be said to be a measure of development, Meonis seem to have registered virtually no development at all. According to reliable estimates, not more than one per cent of all Meonis are functionally literate. In the entire community of over a million souls, there are said to be not more than 20-25 Meoni graduates. In most schools of rural Mewat, there are hardly any girls at all.

To imagine that Meoni illiteracy stems simply from patriarchal prejudices that frown on women's education is misleading since over 90 per cent of Meo men themselves are unable to read and write. Given the extreme poverty and educational backwardness of the community as a whole, the low priority given by Meos to female education is hardly surprising. Interestingly, however, many Meos today seem less disinclined to educating their girls than they used to be. While in the past, girls' education was completely ruled out, the opposition has mellowed somewhat. Even those who lack enthusiasm for girls' education have changed their arguments and their positions are now perceptibly less rigid. Increasingly, the Meos, including their *maulvis*, are beginning to accept that Islam does actively encourage all believers, including women, to acquire an education. The general refrain seems to be that they do not send their girls to school for various other reasons—not because it is something inconceivable,

but because it is something that their religion proscribes.

One argument is that they have retained many of the patriarchal customs and values of their putative Rajput past which discourages female education. Another reason is that secular education is of no use for their girls because they are not going to get government jobs anyway (school is seen here largely as a means of acquiring employment in a government department- as a police constable, bus conductor or forest guard). “Even Meo men do not get jobs due to discrimination, so how can we even think of our women getting employment? So what is the use of educating our girls in school?” asks Hanif Khan (not his real name), a Meo peasant of Ferozepur Jhirka (Gurgaon).

Many Meos defend the practice of not sending their girls to school on the ground that there is no seclusion of women within the four walls (*char-divari*) and veil (*pardah*) there and the girls would be seen and taught by strange (*ghayr*) men. It is also said that girls who study in schools are generally taunted by boys and it is better for them to remain at home.

Meos generally contend that they

would be enthusiastic about educating their daughters if there were all-girls' (*zenana*) schools with only female teachers. Given the cultural milieu, the case for separate girls' schools appears, on the whole, to be sound. The absence of such schools at present means that Meo girls cannot actually gain access to education for the time being. Interestingly enough, while the absence of *zenana* schools is seen by Meos as the reason why they should not send their girls to school, they do not hesitate to make their women work in the fields, in the open view of '*ghayr mard*' (strange men). Further, the *burqa* is almost entirely unknown in Mewat² and so is strict seclusion, for Meonis must work outside their homes, and with strict *purdah* and *char-divari* this would be impossible. There is thus an obvious contradiction between the denial of education to Meo girls on the ground of the absence of *zenana* schools and the use of Meoni labour in agriculture. Argues Mohammadi Begum, the Meoni librarian of the Mewat Model School, Ferozepur Jhirka (Gurgaon district): “If our working in the fields the whole day without *burqas* is acceptable to our menfolk, how can studying at school,



learning proper manners and etiquette, dressed in *hijab* (modest dress), be said to go against religion?"

Echoing the same sentiment, Fajruddin Khan, *sarpanch* of Doha (Gurgaon district) and founder of the Bibi Fatima Girls school, the first and only all-girl Meo-run school, says, "Islam enjoins upon all believers, men and women, to acquire knowledge. Unfortunately, most Meos are in the dark about this. One of the main reasons why we Meos are getting poorer is that we do not have educated mothers. Mothers are actually the very *madrasas* (schools) of our children. Education will make our girls aware of what is *halal* (right) and *haram* (wrong), which is also what Islam wants them to learn. So how can it at all be said that schools will spoil them?"

Salma Begum,³ a postgraduate Meoni from Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia, is now teaching geography at the Mewat Model School, Ferozpur Jhirka. She claims that Meos would not have been as hostile to girls' education as they now are, had it not been for a few cases of educated Meonis getting married on their own accord outside the Meo community, albeit to other Muslims.⁴ Because of this, she says, many Meos think that education will spoil their girls, make them "extra frank" and threaten the long-established traditions of the community. Hence, she maintains, it is necessary for the few educated Meonis to be careful about how they behave. Violation of established customs on their part can seriously jeopardize girls' education among Meos forever. On the other hand, if they are able to conduct themselves in a culturally acceptable manner, Meos might be inspired to start sending their girls to school. Patriarchal norms and customs which are actually against the spirit of Islam, says

Salma, can only be gradually countered.

It would be naive to see school education, as it presently is, as the panacea for Meoni backwardness. Barely 40 per cent of the teachers' posts in Mewat are actually filled up. The teachers here, mostly Banias and Punjabis with very few Meos, are notorious for taking little interest in the development of their students. Moreover, the curriculum, besides providing basic literacy and numeric skills, seems hardly related to the existen-

to school is to some extent understandable.

Islamic Education

Increasingly, Meos are sending their girls to Islamic *maktabs* (primary schools) attached to most village mosques. There they learn to read Urdu and are taught to memorise parts of the Holy Quran. Few *maktabs* actually teach their students how to write. Though the pedagogical techniques employed and much of the content of the education imparted at



tial concerns and conditions of rural Mewati students. The highly Sanskritised Hindi of the textbooks is beyond the comprehension of most students. The books tend to reinforce traditional communal and gender stereotypes. A fairly general complaint is that the textbooks tend to glorify Brahminical Hinduism and the upper castes, and paint Muslim rulers in a bad light. The great contributions of Islam and Muslims are generally ignored. The Meos find this particularly unjust. In the absence of a thorough revision of the curriculum, the Meo's perceptible lack of enthusiasm to send their children (of either sex)

the *maktabs* leave much to be desired, for the Meonis they are the only affordable and culturally acceptable means of acquiring reading skills. Most *maktabs* are coeducational. No fixed fees are charged. Parents give grain and money to the *maulvis* to teach their children, though for poor families this is not compulsory. Girls are withdrawn from the *maktabs* as soon as they reach puberty (*baligh hone ki umar*) and are then married off, for from that age onwards they become vulnerable to strange (*ghayr*) men, including their male teachers. Thereafter, they cannot continue their studies.

The *maktabs* of Mewat and their teachers are still completely untouched by modern, progressive Islamic theological developments. The *dars-i-nizami*, prepared way back during the reign of Aurangzeb, is still the curriculum (*nisab*) for almost all the institutes for Islamic learning (*madrassas*) in Mewat, as, indeed, for the rest of India. Almost no *maktab* or *madrassa* receives newspapers or journals and very few of them get even Islamic periodicals. Thus, even the teachers (*ustads*), let alone the girl students, are quite in the dark about the fast-changing world around them. The overwhelming stress at Islamic schools is on the inculcation of moral qualities. Girls are also taught how to grow up to be 'good' wives and mothers.

Meonis who learn to read at the *maktabs* hardly get a chance to practise their reading skills after they complete school and get married. They simply do not get spare time to read and their husbands cannot generally afford to buy books for them. Thus, many simply forget how to read after a few years. Those who do get to read once in a while lack access to enough suitable reading material. Enquiries reveal that there are almost no subscribers even to Islamic women's magazines in the whole of Mewat. In the small townships (*qasbas*), there are hardly any bookshops. The few that exist deal in textbooks. In the larger *qasbas* such as Tijara, Nuh and Ferozpur Jhirka, there are only a couple of mobile food-stalls which deal in Islamic books and tracts. These are the only source of reading material for most Meos and Meonis, though the shop-owners reveal that actually most of their customers are *maulvis*, and not ordinary peasants. There are just a few books available at these stalls that deal specifically with Muslim women. The most popu-

lar of these are the *Bahishti Zavar* of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi and *Musalman Bivi* by Maulana Mohammed Idrees Ansari. These texts merely reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Likewise, almost all the other religious tracts sold at these stalls are of the traditional sort. No progressive literature, whether Islamic or otherwise, is available anywhere in Mewat.

Recent Developments

Today there are growing signs that Meos are waking up to the pressing urgency of educating their girls. A few girls' *maktabs* and schools have been set up in Mewat, the prominent ones are the Fatimat-ul-zohra Maktab at Sakras (Gurgaon district), the Kuliyat-ut-Tahirat Maktab at Jeel Khedla (Bharatpur district), and the Bibi Fatima Girls' School at Duha (Gurgaon district).

(i) The Fatimat-ut-Zohra school in the village of Sakras, in Gurgaon's Ferozpur Jhirka *tehsil*, is one of Mewat's very few all-girl *maktabs*. Fajruddin Bashir, the village's young postgraduate *sarpanch*, and a local activist, Nazir Ahmad, were the inspiration behind it. Established in

June 1993, it already has nearly 70 students on its rolls. The two young lady teachers are daughters of Ahmad, and have just completed a five-year *alim* course at the Jamiat-ut-Salihah, an Islamic girls' seminary at Malegaon, Maharashtra.

The school's course consists of Urdu grammar (*qaida*) and two texts dealing with religious matters- *Deeni Talim Ka Risal* (The Book of Religious Instruction) and *Salat-ul-Rasul* (The Prayer of the Prophet). The textbooks are given free to the students, though notebooks and their uniform - white *shalwar-kameez* and *dupatta* - have to be purchased by the students themselves. Tuition fees are Rs 20 a month. They are waived for those who cannot afford to pay.

The school has provided the local girls with possibly their only opportunity to gain access to the written word. Hence they seem particularly enthusiastic about their studies. They exhibit their notebooks with great pride. Their neat and very intricate Urdu handwriting suggests that within a short span of time they have been able to learn a good deal. This is particularly remarkable considering that in many other *maktabs*, children,



including boys, are taught only to read but not to write. At the Fatimiat-ul-Zohra Maktab the girls are also trained in public speaking. They are taught to memorise lengthy poems and speeches written in flowery Urdu which they recite on special occasions. Though this may not seem very creative, at least it helps the girls gain confidence by giving them their first chance to speak out and be heard. When I visited the *maktab*, two of them recited an Urdu poem on the importance Islam gives to girls' education and a third, brimming with confidence, delivered a short speech on Islamic history.

The *maktab* is at present run in a mud room (*kutchra*) which is kept spotlessly clean. Despite some opposition from a faction of the Meos of Sakras, who see the setting up of the *maktab* as a ploy to win votes, the *sarpanch* is making arrangements to house it in a more permanent building. He hopes to turn it into a girls' school where both secular as well as religious subjects are taught. It is only by combining the two, he says, that the Meos will be able to appreciate the value of girls' education.

(ii) The Kulliyat-ut-Tahirat (The School for Pure Girls) is the girls' section of the sprawling *Meel Ka Madrasa* at Meel Khedla in Bharatupur, Rajasthan. It was started in 1993, (the boy's section of the *madrasa* was set up as early as 1965). Its founder and principal is *Maulvi* Qasim, grandson of a well-known Meo, Miyanji Musa, who played a leading role in the spread of the Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic reformist movement in Mewat. "We realised," says the 62-year-old *maulvi*, "that one of the major reasons for our backwardness is that Meos are not getting good mothers. Hence we decided to set up our girls' *madrasa*." Today, about 300 girls study here, mostly Meonis.

The girls are taught many of the subjects and books contained in the *dars-i-Nizami*. The Kulliyat-ut-Tahirat, however, has attempted to introduce some elementary mathematics, Hindi and home-science in its curriculum. *Maulvi* Rashid, the *nazim-e-talimat* (director of education) says that this has not been able to proceed very far due to their inability to pay the high salaries demanded by trained teachers of these subjects. Therefore, they have to rely on *madrasa* products who have actually not received training for teaching secular subjects.

Girls are admitted to the school at the age of seven and allowed to study until they are twelve, when they approach puberty and are 'ready' to be married off. They stay together in one wing of the *madrasa* along with the all-female teaching staff. No male is allowed to enter this portion. The girls are barred from stepping out of their wing. They may go home only twice a year for a total of two months. For the rest of the year they must stay within the confines of the four walls of their hostel. *Maulvi* Rashid, while agreeing that this is in marked contrast to the free movement the children are used to in their own villages, stresses that this is the only way to keep them safe. This, he says, is the only girls' boarding school in the whole of Mewat, for few other



maulvis are willing to take the great risks entailed in such a venture.

Dressed in spotlessly white *shalwar-kameez* and green *dupattas*, the little girls look very neat and well-looked-after. The contrast with the Meo girls who are forced to toil in the fields and look after their younger siblings at home is striking. For parents who cannot afford the monthly fees of Rs 125 (including tuition, boarding and lodging costs), the *madrasa* grants fee waivers. Meos and Muslims from elsewhere regularly send contributions to the *madrasa* to keep it going, so that it can continue with its pioneering educational work among Meo girls.

Critics of the *madrasa* are, however, not lacking. A Meoni from Kameda village in Gurgaon, whose

relative's daughter studies at the *madrasa*, says that when this girl came back home for her *Eid* vacations she could do absolutely no hard physical work at all, for in the *madrasa* they are not made to toil, unlike at home. "This girl might be enjoying herself and learning a lot now," says the Meoni, "but when she gets married, how will she manage the tough physical work that we Meo women have to perform?" The principal of Kameda's Arabia Ashraful Imad Madrasa answers that the graduates of the Kulliyat-ut-Tahirat will not have to worry on that account, for, being among the few educated Mewati girls, they can get married into better off families where they will not have to work. Does this then mean that the education the girls receive at the *madrasa* really helps only the more prosperous families? According to Swaleh Mohammad Khan, a leading Meo advocate of Ferozepur Jhirka, the education system in the Kulliyat-ut-Tahiyat and other *madrasas* should be made more practical and less theoretical to help even ordinary families. He opines that the *dars-i-Mizami* syllabus, formulated nearly three centuries ago, badly needs to be updated and brought closer to present-day conditions. Otherwise the education that the children receive at the *madrasas* will not be very relevant to their needs and those of Meo society.

(iii) Perhaps the most impressive and remarkable of the girls' education projects in Mewat is the Bibi Fatima school at Duha (Gurgaon), close to the Alwar (Rajasthan) border. It is the private school of the *sarpanch*, 35-year-old Fajruddin Khan. Khan has been holding the post of *sarpanch* continuously since 1983; he is so popular that he has always returned to the post unopposed. He is much loved, not only among the Meos but also by the village's Malis, Punjabis and Dalits.



Meo boys singing

Khan is barely literate himself, having passed only class three, yet his enthusiasm for education, especially for females, is boundless. He says that since 1983 he has been spending 60 per cent of the *panchayat*'s entire budget on education alone. As a result of his untiring efforts, Duha now has a government high school, a government girls' school and its own Bibi Fatima primary and middle school, which started functioning in 1992. This school has over 170 girls on its rolls, most of them Meonis but many also from the local non-Muslim castes as well. The school's all-female staff is mixed in terms of religious and caste affiliations.

The Haryana Board syllabus is followed by the school despite all its limitations and cultural inappropriateness for rural children. Interestingly, English, which elsewhere in Haryana is taught only from class six onwards, is taught right from the primary stage at this school. Religious education is imparted to Meo girls by a Meoni teacher two hours every day after class hours. Classes in crafts, sewing and health care will soon be started. The school is recognised by the government, and the Mewat Development

Agency, a Haryana government body, pays the teachers' salaries. The fees are Rs 20 a month and they are waived for about 30 girls from very poor families.

The idea of setting up the school, says Fajruddin Khan, came to his mind when he saw for himself the cruel exploitation of Meoni labourers in the stone quarries in Mewat that businessmen from outside have now begun indiscriminately exploiting. He then realised that the only way they could fight against this oppression was by becoming educated about their rights. Moreover, he adds, mothers are schools for their children. To educate a girl is to educate a family; to educate all girls is to educate the entire community.

Establishing the school brought in its wake opposition from several Meos themselves, including some *maulvis*. Some accused the *sarpanch* of wanting to Hinduise their girls. He, however, effectively silenced his critics by telling them that it was not their acquiring education which was un-Islamic, but rather making their daughters toil in the fields, jungles and quarries. After all, he said, the Holy

Quran states that the acquisition of knowledge is a duty for all believers, men as well as women. He even got a group of like-minded *maulanas* to deliver lectures to the villagers on the importance Islam gives to female education. As a result of this, he says, most of his former opponents have now been so convinced by his stand that they even invite him to address their gatherings (*jalsas*).

To begin with, the school had no building of its own. Classes were conducted in Khan's own house and he had to shift for a while to a mud hut. The school, under Khan's loving care and the able administration of Principal Urmila Sharma, soon began running so well that it succeeded in attracting nearly all the students from the local government girls' school. Parents even requested Khan to accept their boys as his students. He decided to take them provided they sent their daughters as well. As a result, there are a few boys studying in the school now, but Khan plans to set up a separate boys' school soon.

Meanwhile, the crusading *sarpanch* is now faced with pressure from a totally unexpected quarter - old Meonis who want to enroll in his

school to learn Urdu and Arabic in order to be able to read the Holy Quran!

Khan has a word of advice and caution for social reformers in a hurry. Changing fossilised beliefs, customs, values and institutions is a long, drawn-out affair, a gradual process. Policies and programmes that ignore local cultural sensibilities, more often than not, are doomed to failure from the outset.

Footnotes

Material for this paper was collected during three field trips to Mewat in November, 1992 and January and March, 1993. I am particularly grateful to Salmaji, Mohammad Swaleh Khan, Bani Aroraji, Maulvi Rashid Saheb and numerous other Meos, for the information that they freely shared with me.

1. In 1947, an estimated one-third of the Meo population, along with almost the entire non-Meo Muslim population of Mewat, fled to Pakistan. The number of Meos who left was far higher in the princely states of Alwar and Bharatpur than in British-ruled territory, as the rulers of these two states had mounted a fiercely violent campaign to drive Meos out of their domains.
2. Over the past few years a microscopic number of Meonis, generally in the towns, have begun donning the *burqa*. They belong to

families that have experienced improvement in economic fortune so much so that they can afford to dispense with the participation of their women in agricultural work.

According to *Maulvi* Abdul Majeed of the Meo village of Neemli (Alwar district), there are three types of *purdah*, the last two of which some (though few) Meonis have now begun practising.

- (i) Keeping women confined within the four walls of the house. This is meant for women of loose character (*zani*) and those whose presence outside might cause corruption (*fitna*) in society. This is not practised in Mewat.
- (ii) *Hazrat Umm Kulsum Ka Purdah* - the *purdah* of Hazrat Hafsa, another wife of the Prophet. Here the entire face is covered with a *dupatta*.

The *Maulana* claims that these two forms of *purdah* do not interfere in agricultural operations as these are normally worn only by women working in their own fields. Even if they are sometimes joined by men, it is by men of their own families, not by strangers. The *maulvi's* claim that *purdah* does not hamper work in the fields is, of course, open to debate.

3. Salma plans to do her Ph.D. on the women of Mewat. She had earlier wanted to work on modern education among Meonis but changed her mind upon realising that the universe of her study would have been microscopic, not more than 0.001% of the Meoni population.
4. Meos generally marry only among themselves. Marriage outside their community, even to other Muslims, is greatly looked down upon.

All photographs accompanying this article are by Priya Watson □

Women Bhakt Poets

Available in an attractive hardbound edition with laminated jacket. Contains accounts of the life and work of Mirabai, Andal, Avvaiyar, Muktabai, Janabai, Bahinabai, Lal Ded, Toral, Loyal and other and translations of their poetry, many appearing for the first time in English.

120 pages, profusely illustrated.

Price: Rs 100 + Rs 15 registered postage.

Overseas Price: US\$ 20 + US\$ 5 postage.

Makes A Beautiful Gift

