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Bureaucracy, community, and land: The resettlement of Meos in Mewat, 1949-50

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Abstract

This article documents in detail hitherto unavailable what Shail Mayaram called an “onslaught by the modern bureaucracy of the postcolonial state” on the liminally placed Meo community in the Mewat region comprising the former princely states of Alwar and Bharatpur and the Gurgaon district of the former province of East Punjab. A people well-described as “in-between Hinduism and Islam,” Meos found themselves, at a time of “two-nation” theory and consequent “partition politics,” a misfit. This article begins from where the existing accounts of the story of Meos end i.e. 1949 and trace the fraught process of their reterritorialization on their own land, now part of a partitioned nation-state. Given the current ascendant culturally nationalist Indian state-society, it revisits the Mewat of 1949-50, representing it as a community lab of the early Indian nation-state, tests its claims of parity, equality and freedom and provides a ‘pre-history’ of the contemporary violence there.

Key words: Meos, Mewat, Partition, Violence, ‘Official Mind’

Word count: 10855 (excluding endnotes)

Introduction

Alongside socio-political identity, religio-cultural organization and community territorialization, land (or, property) has been a key trigger for violence in South Asia in colonial and post-colonial times. The lingering “partition violence” of 1947 has been explained majorly along the first three criteria and comparatively in a minor key, along the fourth factor. This is especially so, when one moves away from those provinces that were partitioned i.e. Punjab and Bengal.¹ Other centres of “partition violence,” and its considerable *afterlife*, like Delhi were as much about property and possibility of land, as they were about proselytizing religion and nation.²

The peculiar situation of the Meo community in the Mewat region comprising chiefly the former princely states of Alwar and Bharatpur and Gurgaon district of the former province of East Punjab, is a case in point. The Meos, residents of Mewat since the 12th c. represented “a people in-between Hinduism and Islam,” in the words of Shail Mayaram: the foremost scholar of their modern identity, marginality and agency.³ Their “marginality” vis-à-vis the state in Delhi has been traced back to the establishment of the Sultanate there.⁴ Inhabiting settlements around the southern periphery of Delhi, in the contemporary states of Haryana and Rajasthan, they were spread across a region that was historically and cartographically carved across British Indian provinces and Princely Indian states. At a time of “two-nation” theory, partition politics and state sanitization of social categories, they were looked upon as misfits and their “resettlement” became a matter of incursion by an ambiguous society and anxious state. *Ergo*, they were at the receiving end of a “fourfold onslaught” from early-1947: “by the state, by other social groups, by sections of the press and by the modern bureaucracy of the postcolonial state.”⁵

This article is interested in the fourth of these features namely the handling of the Meos by the political-bureaucratic apparatus of the post-1947 Indian state, from New Delhi downwards. Taking a closer look at this question, made possible by access to unused official sources of the time, it begins from where the existing accounts of the story of Meos end i.e. 1949, by when the well-recorded “partition violence” seems to have subsided,⁶ and rehabilitation of refugees, on one hand and resettlement of evacuees and internally displaced persons like Meos, on the other, seems apace. This reterritorialization of a community on a patch of land, which had been its medieval homeland, to which, however, it had no more an automatic claim because the land was now part of a nation-state, which had emerged out a

process of political partition and religious rhetoric, is a reflection of many of the fault-lines, with which the Indian nation-state became independent. Indeed, the Meos were another microcosm of the clash between competing idea(s) of India, waged within and through the conflicting directions emanating from the Union Government of India and its regional/provincial counterparts.

Given the current configurations of a culturally majoritarian Indian state-society, it is especially relevant to revisit such litmus tests of the early independent Indian nation-state. This article aims to reconstruct the story of this state's segmentation of Meos through its own files and follows Ann Stoler's work in showcasing these files "as sites of the expectant and conjured – about dreams of comforting futures and forebodings of future failures."⁷ These documents, with "itineraries of their own," comprised "the administrative apparatus" that, in turn, "opened to a space that extended beyond it. Contrapuntal intrusions emanated from outside the corridors of governance, but they also erupted...within that sequestered space."⁸ As such, "these archives are not simply accounts of actions or thoughts." They are records of "rubrics of rule [in] a changing world [of] efforts to 'catch up' with what was emergent and 'becoming' in new situations."⁹ The month of May 1949 provides a suitable starting point for two reasons: first, the fact-finding committee that had been set up in July 1948, alongside a census of Meos then undertaken, submitted its final report and second, the region of Mewat, with its four princely states of Alwar, Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli that had been functioning as the Matsya Union with a senior civil servant as an administrator and a ministry, was amalgamated in the United State of Rajasthan.

Prelude

The Meos, a mix of Rajputs, Minas and Muslims, had been driven out of their homeland in Alwar and Bharatpur states from March 1947 onward, as the communal polarisation of that year determined that Meos of Mewat, along with “the Momins of U.P. and Bihar [and] the Mapillas of Malabar” were “simply ‘Muslims’ and...nothing else...[a] ‘fundamentally’ different and ‘forever’ suspect minority.”¹⁰ It represented the climax of Alwar and Bharatpur states’ desire to help create a Hindu nation, assisted by the social agenda of the revivalist organization Arya Samaj, in display since the 1930s.¹¹ By the autumn of 1947, 40, 000 Meos remained in the Alwar state out of a population of 100-140, 000 and almost all of these had to “convert” to Hinduism in return for their lives. Similarly, about 60, 000 Meos had to leave the Bharatpur state. Some of these 200-250, 000 strong contingent moved to Pakistan but a majority stayed put in the villages of the adjoining Gurgaon district.¹² As pressure mounted on them to vacate these villages, they were urged by Gandhi on December 19, 1947 to die in their homeland as opposed to live elsewhere; a call that reverberates seventy years on.¹³ Calling them, the “backbone” of India, Gandhi urged them to remain and resist, promising his moral support as well as leaving behind many of his disciples like Vinoba Bhave and Mridula Sarabhai, who lent their voices to the Meos’ cause in corridors of power. Simultaneously, in November 1947, the All-India Congress Committee passed a resolution that recommended evacuees to return to their original homes and the Union Government proclaimed this policy. RC Hadow, of the British High Commission, was visiting Alwar that month, and, on successive days, he sent reports of Meos “on their way to Pakistan” and Meos returning, having “decided against going to Pakistan.”¹⁴

Through 1948, the Meos got caught in a binary with Punjabi Hindu and Sikh refugee rehabilitation, which was privileged in terms of land-allotment in Alwar, Bharatpur and Gurgaon. Not a refugee but rendered homeless in their homeland, their restoration or

resettlement paled in front of providing relief to refugees from Pakistan. As Ann Stoler has shown, “colonial administrations were prolific producers of social categories [through] unsure and hesitant sorts of documentation and sensibilities.” There was not much that was “hegemonic about how those [categories] worked on the ground” and “disquiet, anxieties, uncertainties repeatedly unsettled the conceit that all was in order, because papers classified people.”¹⁵ To a great many in the Indian state, including the Deputy Prime Minister Vallabhbhai Patel, who also headed the crucial Ministry of States (MoS) as well as Home Affairs, Meos struck like speck in the eye, best removed to Pakistan. But, they stuck it out, had the sympathy and support of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and influential social workers, like Pandit Sundar Lal, and clawed their way back into the “official mind,” which conceded a census, a fact-finding committee and a “compact area” scheme for first temporary and then permanent resettlement of Meos in four contiguous *tehsils* (administrative blocks) spread across the East Punjab district of Gurgaon and the princely states of Alwar and Bharatpur.¹⁶

Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf, a scholar and revolutionary from Alwar state, who had been a linchpin of Nehru’s Muslim mass-contact programme in late-1930s, was a participant in peasant movements in Alwar and Bharatpur in that decade. In his life-story one finds a slice of Meo history illuminated.¹⁷ Ashraf, along with others in the Communist Party of India, was involved in publishing the magazine *Naya Daur* against the “conspiracies of the communalists and the princely states” and for supporting the demand for popular government in latter. This incurred him the charge of “founding a small Pakistan or Meostan in Mewat.”¹⁸ Ashraf opined that “the integrity of the Meo nation” could “only be safeguarded in Mewat” and argued that “for a Meo there was nothing to choose between a Pakistani Muslim and an Indian Hindu.”¹⁹ He tried to “prevent the Meos from going to Pakistan” and welcomed their

return.²⁰ In this, he was supported by the Prime Minister himself, who chastized CM Trivedi, Governor of East Punjab, for “the Punjab Government [having] not quite grasped [our] basic policy about the Meos who had come back from Pakistan,” thus:

This Meo question has become a test issue and the people of Kashmir are closely following it...Apart from this, it is not quite clear how people are forcibly sent to Pakistan...Suppose, if they refused to receive them, as indeed they have stated on several occasions, how are we to push them across then?²¹

Summing up the statistical situation for Governor-General C Rajagopalachari, Nehru had tried to show the scales of “this Meo question” in July 1948:

The pre-migration population of Meos in Gurgaon-Alwar-Bharatpur was 431, 000. The number of Meos resident now is about 208, 000 [Alwar-7038, Bharatpur-1685, Gurgaon-174, 115]. Of these, 11, 000 have been converted to Hinduism. [Another] 10, 000 went to Pakistan and came back. The figures I have given do not tally. The main point is that there are at present 60, 000 Meos in Gurgaon district, belonging to Alwar and Bharatpur, who should go back to these states. The Meos [there] used to possess 400, 000 acres [of land]. Of these, 116, 000 acres have been temporarily leased to refugees and 150, 000 acres have been temporarily leased to local people...to avoid the land lying uncultivated. There are still 134, 000 acres lying empty, but these consist of rather inferior land..²²

Six months later, by February 1949, the resettlement of Meos had become important in Nehru’s thinking not only on its own count but also “in terms of food production.”

Reminding the Relief & Rehabilitation (R&R) Minister, Mohanlal Saksena, of the “great need for additional food production,” the Prime Minister pronounced it a “tragedy to have lands lying uncultivated in Alwar and Bharatpur because we cannot settle as to who should be sent there. Obviously, the easiest way of utilising those lands quickly is to send the old

residents of the place that is the Meos.”²³ Another two months were to pass before, in April 1949, in its final report, a fact-finding committee of the Gandhian Sudhir Ghosh, social worker Roshan Lal and a senior ICS officer, Tarlok Singh, recapitulated the story from September 1948. Then it had been decided to temporarily allot to Meos, both those who had remained in India throughout and those who, having migrated to Pakistan, had returned by the census of July 1948, 45, 987 acres of cultivated land in Nuh and Ferozepur Jhirka *tehsils* of Gurgaon district and 13, 315 acres of cultivated land in Tijara and Pahari *tehsils* of the Matsya Union. This reflected a glass half empty as Meos were not restored their original homes and land holdings, which had been declared evacuee property – upon their enforced departure – and distributed not only among Punjabi refugees but also local tillers.

Pending a scheme of permanent resettlement, to be given effect from the crop cycle of 1949, the Matsya Union had verified the claims of 6329 Meos, 3016 from Alwar and 3315 from Bharatpur, amounting to 70, 220 acres, 34, 400 in Alwar and 35, 820 in Bharatpur. In the villages ear-marked for them, 9449 acres in Alwar and 4567 acres in Bharatpur had been allotted. In Gurgaon, Meos belonging to the district had been allotted 19, 904 acres, of which possession had been taken to the extent of 19, 039 acres. A total allotment of 11, 635 acres had been made to the Meos of Matsya Union in Gurgaon district, of which possession had been taken of 5193 acres. In Ferozepur Jhirka, possession of 4808 acres had been taken out of 5748 acres allotted. It was only in the Nuh *tehsil* of Gurgaon, where the allotted area was 5887 acres that barely any possession had been taken; 385 acres only.

Instead, about 25, 000 Meos of the Matsya Union had managed to return to their original villages, taking the matter of their “restoration” into their own hands. This was despite tremendous official resistance and concerns about testy relations between local Jats, Meos

and Punjabi refugees, although men nearer the ground, for instance Matsya Union politicians and ministers, were welcoming of a community that knew how to till the drylands of Mewat, as against the Punjabi agriculturalist indulged by decades of colonial canalisation. By then, even in East Punjab, one-half of the *epicentre* of partition violence, it had been decided to restore to all Muslims, who had remained in the Indian Union, their land and property and it seemed that it was a matter of time before Meos, even if returnees from Pakistan, would be allotted permanently cultivable land, along with – if not adjoining to – the refugees from West Pakistan.²⁴ One could not be more wrong, as the following words document and, in doing so, detail how “administrative fiat itself served as a mode of displacement.”²⁵

May-June 1949: Skirmish at the apex

On May 14, 1949, on the eve of the amalgamation of the Matsya Union with the United State of Rajasthan, a high-powered inter-departmental meeting was held in New Delhi to consider the above-mentioned final report of the fact-finding committee. It was attended by VP Menon, the powerful Advisor in the MoS, AB Chatterjee, Joint Secretary, MoS, V Shankar, the influential Secretary to Patel, VD Dantiyagi, Joint Secretary, R&R, Sudhir Ghosh, Commissioner, R&R and Gopilal Yadav, the out-going Minister for R&R of the Matsya Union. The Meo question seemed to be in need of re-examination as Yadav explained that “Meos had, in fact, already filtered through to their original homes in the Matsya Union [as] the local people preferred to give them land as sub-tenants and Meos would rather work as sub-tenants or labourers in Matsya Union rather than take the lands, which had been reserved for them in Gurgaon.”

On the other hand, the “official” position as well as preference was that land had already been allotted in the Matsya Union and was in possession of nearly 50, 000 West Punjab refugees “in exchange for the land in Gurgaon district in which the Meos were to be resettled.” If now, the Meos insisted on returning to their original holdings or were to be allotted lands there, “these Punjabi refugees [must] be disturbed,”²⁶ at a time when they were to be encouraged for cooperative, mechanical farming (tractor cultivation) to contribute in the “grow more food” campaign.²⁷ The Meo community was, clearly, not playing the part – nor plying the land – assigned to them by the bureaucracy of the old-new Indian state. In doing so, they had a supporter in Sudhir Ghosh, who had been made a Deputy-Commissioner in the Ministry of R&R by Nehru, precisely with the hope that he would out-flank the bureaucracy beholden to its shibboleths as well as to Patel. Writing to Chatterjee, four days after the above-mentioned meeting, Ghosh, supported by Yadav, laid out the case for Meos:

The 25, 000 Meos who have gone back to Alwar from Gurgaon have gone back to their own lands and homes and the land allotted to and reserved for refugees in Alwar belong to those Meos who went to Pakistan. As regards Bharatpur, the total area left by Muslims is 1, 60, 000 acres (area temporarily allotted to refugees – 56, 000 acres, area belonging to Muslims who went to Pakistan – 10, 000 acres, area to which refugees are entitled under new scheme – 45, 000 acres; in consequence, area, which it will not be possible to restore to the Meos – 35, 000 acres (22%)). Therefore, 78% in Bharatpur and 100% in Alwar of the original holdings can be restored to Meos. If the Meos are to be resettled in certain segregated areas as was envisaged last year, it will entail displacing them from their own homes where they have already returned – 100% in Alwar and 50% in Bharatpur (18, 000/35, 000 Meos from Gurgaon). Matsya Union ministry [was] of the opinion that there [was] no risk of conflict between the Meos and the local population because things [had] returned to normalcy. This view is justified by the fact that although as many as 43, 000 Meos have already returned to the area there has so far been no untoward incident.²⁸

Chatterjee was not convinced “looking at the history of the Meos,”²⁹ but the Prime Minister was starting to match his sympathy for the Meos with support. He wrote to VP Menon and ML Saksena, Minister for R&R that it appeared from Ghosh’s and Yadav’s report that 43,000 Meos had been already settled in Alwar and Bharatpur, “quite peacefully and rather automatically.” This left 22% Meos behind and Nehru was hopeful:

There should be no difficulty in resettling them also in the same way as the others have settled themselves...no exact rule is necessary because *resettlement is taking place so peacefully and naturally that all one has to do is to help this process to continue...*³⁰

Plainly, Meos had been taking matters in their own hands. KB Lall, administrator Matsya Union, informed Chatterjee that about 90% of the Meos of Alwar had returned; 70% to their original homes. As for Bharatpur Meos, 50% were reported to have returned, though not to their old houses, which were occupied mostly by refugees. Lall, unlike Ghosh and Nehru, feared that “any encouragement to the Meos in their clamour of possession of their old houses” carried “the risk of precipitating a disturbance of public tranquillity,” as it “would upset the resettlement programme for refugees.”³¹ Every passing day brought new numbers. The evacuee land utilisation advisor in Alwar claimed that 95% of about 30,000 Meos had returned and except in the two areas of Ramgarh and Govindgarh, the returnees had moved into their old homes, “without permits.”³² This still left around 20,000 Meos, without homes and lands.

At heart of both the bureaucratic anxiety and the community action was the decision taken in June-July 1948 that “resettlement of Meos on their original holdings should be avoided as it would create law and order problem of major magnitude.” Instead, a “compact area scheme” was devised by the fact-finding committee, to not have Meos and refugees and local

Jats/Mahajans “mixed.” With the change in communal climate and given the situation on ground, the fact-finding committee, in its final report, went beyond its bureaucratic brief and advocated acknowledging the already afoot return of Meos to their original homes. This conflicted with the “official mind’s” sanitised solution,³³ and ministries in New Delhi, balked at swallowing it. The MoS, in particular, patronised by Patel waged a war with Nehru on this and there was a cleavage between the latter, his Secretariat and supporters Ghosh and Yadav, social and political workers, and Patel and his bureaucrats. If the summer of 1947 saw intense movement on ground by Meos, then summer of 1949 saw intense maneuvering on paper about them, as differences of opinion between bureaucrats based in New Delhi across and within three set-ups – MoS, R&R and PMS – and their political patrons mounted. At stake were the four pillars of “Nehru’s idea of India: democracy, religious tolerance, economic development and cultural pluralism.”³⁴ The MoS enumerated for Patel its objections to the return of Meos to their own, old homes:

(1) Mechanical cultivation scheme may be upset [as] a portion of the area in which the scheme is being operated belongs to Meos who did not migrate to Pakistan. (2) In Bharatpur, if the original holdings are restored, refugees settled on 46, 000 acres will have to be uprooted. [In all] most of refugee and cultivation schemes on the evacuee area of 4 lakhs acres would end up in smoke. Facilities may be offered, and arrangements may be made for the resettlement of Meos belonging to Alwar and Bharatpur, who have not gone to Pakistan, [elsewhere]. (3) *There seems to be a general impression that 100% of the Meos from Alwar and 78% from Bharatpur have come back and that this process is going on as a matter of course. This is incorrect, all that has happened is the Meos have just trickled back and in several cases occupied their old homes, hanging in the hope that they will be able to force the hands of the Central Government.* (4) This infiltration took place in the face of clear directions given to the Matsya Government....³⁵

Patel considered the above and decided that “the situation [was] not so much beyond control as was represented” by Nehru. His understanding of the “history of feuds between Meos and Jats” convinced him that “the present improvement cannot but be a passing phase,” and his desire to “avoid clashes between Meos and refugees” remained paramount, notwithstanding the improving communal climate. There was always the specter of Pakistan bringing India “into disrepute in international world” by indulging “in further stories of persecution of minorities.” He held the line that “any return of Meos to their original homes/holdings must be subject to the conditions of mechanical cultivation schemes, ‘grow more food’ schemes [and] refugee resettlement plans.” Where Meos had already returned to their original homes and holdings, his hands were tied but otherwise he wanted to adhere to their separate, compact resettlement. Over-shadowing the irony and injustice inherent in this situation i.e. that Meos were getting second-preference in their own homeland and were being made a scapegoat for “partition violence” in West Punjab, Patel was more invested in lashing out at how Meos managed to return, in the process leaving no room for doubt as to where his sympathies stood.

Here is a case in which specific directions were given to the Matsya Government not to allow Meos to return. The Matsya Government flagrantly violated these and presented us with accomplished facts, largely occasioned by...*their preference for the devils whom they knew to their countrymen whom they did not know.*³⁶

Here was a written variation on the spectrum that Ann Stoler drew “to distinguish between what was ‘unwritten’ because it could go without saying and ‘everyone knew it,’ what was unwritten because it could not yet be articulated, and what was unwritten because it could not be said.”³⁷ Whether or not they were devils, Meos were certainly not Patel’s countrymen. The latter distinction was reserved for the non-Muslim refugees from Pakistan. Bolstered by

their minister's prejudice, the MoS pushed with all the phantom force, they could muster. Meos were becoming an "over-weighted case;" they had been "residing" for over two years in Gurgaon and had just started "infiltrating" into Alwar and Bharatpur; refugees were "anxious" and Meos "apprehensive;" if refugees could be displaced then why not Meos, "in the interest of their own security," from their original homes to "compact area," and, finally, what about those Meos, who had left for Pakistan; these returnees did not "qualify" for restoration.³⁸

The MoS mandarins then confabulated with their R&R counterparts and condemned the collusion between East Punjab government, which "had put pressure on the Meos in Gurgaon to leave," and the Matsya Union government, which "had actively interested themselves in permitting the return of the Meos." Permits had been granted, almost all the Meos of Alwar had returned – with 95% to their homes, the number varied in Bharatpur from 60-80%, and, all this had rendered villages of "mixed populace." It was no longer possible "to insist on Meos occupying the compact area without uprooting them [again] from their homes." The officials admitted that "local population or a large percentage of it welcomed the return of the Meos" and were now focussed on those Meos who "had not occupied their homes," as "they could be directed to compact areas." The MoS' conflicts with the Matsya Union government along these lines reveal another underlying and enduring layer of tension in the official-political apparatus.

Mindful that Patel was "angry that the two governments concerned have sabotaged the scheme as envisaged by the Government," they magnified his thoughts, "what purpose taking decisions which will be disregarded by all concerned?," and meekly agreed with him that "the resettlement of Meos alongside Hindus and other locals will in the long run create a

situation similar to the past.”³⁹ Based on this meeting, a note was prepared for the upcoming meeting of the Cabinet Committee that concluded with the observation that despite all this gnashing of teeth about half of displaced Meos remained in a “fluid position.”⁴⁰ All this while, Nehru was terming “the old idea that the Meos should be put in compact areas” as “impractical” and wanted to give them “a chance to go ahead and cultivate the land” for the next harvest. To him it was “very important that neither the Meos nor the crops should suffer.”⁴¹ He was drawing these conclusions, unlike Patel, based on his talks with local politicals/ministers like Gopilal Yadav.

Accordingly, on May 25, 1949, Nehru presided over a crucial meeting of the Committee of the Union Cabinet for Rehabilitation. Patel, who had been keeping poor health for almost a year now, was indisposed and was represented by his two departmental secretaries, MK Vellodi and HVR Iengar, while the R&R was represented by its senior-most officials, CN Chandra and VD Dantiyagi. Among Nehru’s cabinet colleagues, ministers of transport, finance and health were present. The R&R group set the ball rolling by summarizing that notwithstanding the decisions taken in 1948, the actual position in 1949 was that in Alwar, 95% Meos were in their original homes and 50% on their original holdings; in Bharatpur, 50% were in their old, “more or less compact,” villages (175/350) and 50% in a “fluid state.” The MoS set followed by reading out Patel’s lament on this state of affairs, “neither in the interests of the Meos nor in the interests of the general population...undesirable from the point of view of the internal situation [and] international opinion.” Nehru commented now and in an interesting manner:

Sardar Patel is obviously thinking more of the events that occurred in the past. When the Cabinet met last, the Meos had not begun to move into these states in any appreciable number. The situation has, however, changed completely...The Meos are now in Alwar and Bharatpur and it would...be awkward to disturb them. [Their] uprooting from their homes might become a source

of embarrassment vis-à-vis Pakistan. Of course, care should be taken to see that our plans re: tractor cultivation and 'grow more food' were not upset and that refugees settled in the area were not disturbed..⁴²

He was supported by his cabinet colleagues and it was decided that the existing situation should be allowed to continue subject to necessary adjustments but nobody *in situ*, whether Meos or refugees, should be disturbed. Tractor scheme for refugees and a loan scheme for Meos were to be facilitated and 40, 000 acres of land, now available in Gurgaon after the Meos had moved to Alwar and Bharatpur, should be allotted for cultivation..⁴³ This was the second such occasion (once in 1948) on the question of Meos, when Nehru could take advantage of Patel's absence and over-powered his officials. Patel was left "most unhappy" and lashed out at the Rajasthan Government instructing them to have immediate inquiries made as to the circumstances, persons and agencies, which had encouraged "the influx of these Meos." Next, he wanted them "to prevent further influx of Meos;" they were to be "careful and vigilant about the Meos from Pakistan." He ordered them "to have, as soon as possible, a census taken of Meos who are already in Alwar and Bharatpur for ascertaining how many are covered by the lists of the census taken last year and secondly, how many have infiltrated from Pakistan.." ⁴⁴

What added insult to injury was a letter received from the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah. In it, Abdullah congratulated Patel on the "heartening decision" to resettle Meos "on their lands," adding that "small concessions here and there made to the deserving Muslims in India [were] conducive to a sympathetic understanding between the people of India and Kashmir.." ⁴⁵ Alongside, Abdullah had forwarded a representation from the president, District Jamiat Ulema Gurgaon, which contained a list of requests like rehabilitation of homes to not only Meos but also non-Meo

Muslims, restoration of mosques, madrasas and Jama Masjids in Gurgaon, Alwar and Bharatpur, return of abducted Muslim women, reinstatement of ousted Muslim employees, posting of unbiased and fair-minded officials, “as present officials do not view Muslims favourably,” granting of loans, instructions to police not to interfere with Muslims in performance of their religious rites, restarting *azaan* and *namaaz* hitherto forbidden in Alwar and inclusion of Urdu script in educational institutions.

Patel’s reply showed his frustrations and fears: “People have, for the time being, forgotten their old quarrels but having regard to the history of Mewat area, we cannot be certain that this will last very long. I should like to explain, however, that the problem of Meos is not a Hindu-Muslim problem at all. It is virtually a problem of internal feuds between two sects viz. Meos and Jats.”⁴⁶ Meanwhile, VP Menon fired off a missive to Pandit Hiralal Shastri, the first Premier of Rajasthan, mincing no words against the former Matsya Union ministry and its Premier Sobha Ram “completely bypassing decisions regarding Meos.”⁴⁷ But, most outrageous was the formal communication of fresh instructions that were issued by the MoS to Chief Secretary, Rajasthan, in the name of the decisions taken by the Cabinet Committee on May 25:

(a) Only such displaced Meos of Alwar and Bharatpur as were included in the census held in July 1948 should be allowed to return. (b) Meos belonging to areas in Alwar intended for the resettlement of [refugees], should not be restored to their original holdings but allotted land in Tijara tehsil in lieu. (c) In Bharatpur, the [refugees] resettled in 60 villages should not be disturbed. Similarly, the Meos who have gone back to the compact area in their 175 villages need not be disturbed. Adjustments may be made in the remainder of the villages numbering 115, so that Meos and the displaced persons are consolidated in different villages.⁴⁸

If the Matsya Union had flagrantly disregarded the MoS, then this was the MoS flagrantly disregarding the Prime Minister, who was not amused. Nehru archly pointed to Vellodi that “prima facie his rigid letter [was] at variance with decisions [taken on May 25] and [came] in the way of permitted adjustments,” demanding an explanation.⁴⁹ It also omitted any mention of loans to Meos, while the R&R had already moved ahead with a sum of Rs. 1 million.

Vellodi hid behind three predictably bureaucratic traits namely separate “detailed verbal instructions as regards the implementation of the Cabinet’s decision,” the “file has been sent to Sardar,” and “the whole matter is to be considered again by the Cabinet Committee on 24th June.”⁵⁰ It was time for yet another direct engagement between the duumvirate of the post-1947 Indian state reflecting a clash between their respective understandings of the post-1947 Indian nation.

Patel wrote from Dehradun, where he was convalescing, at length, enclosing a note summarizing “the new problems” of the Meos question. It seemed to him that the only course open, “consistent with previous decisions,” was “to restrict the resettlement of Meos in their original homes and holdings to those who remained in India, and who were included in the census held in 1948.” For others, he insisted that “they go into the compact area comprising Gurgaon and the adjoining portions of Alwar and Bharatpur, which was originally fixed for their resettlement.” Anything else, to him, “compromised” the rehabilitation of refugees. Reminding Nehru that he had “always expressed apprehensions regarding the security problem,” Patel asserted that “Meos have never settled down peacefully and will never do so.” The only way “to avoid recurring feuds was to settle [them] in a compact area, [which] the social workers and the Alwar Ministry made impossible.” The only thing to be done now was “to ensure that ‘grow more food,’ mechanical cultivation schemes and refugee resettlement schemes are not disturbed by the resettlement of Meos.” Then, there was “the

problem of Jats who would be displaced as a result of resettlement of Meos.” Here too, Patel took recourse to the “history of feuds between Jats and Meos” and repeated that “any Meos who are to be settled in addition to those who were included in Gurgaon census must be settled in the compact bloc, set apart.” Finally, Patel turned on the “undesirable social workers,” who had “developed a habit of misrepresenting Government decisions [and] using pressure tactics on lower revenue officials to allot lands to Meos.”⁵¹

The accompanying note covered old ground barring new figures about groups of Meos from UP and Bombay – 49, 000 – who were not included in the 1948 census and cast doubts on their claims, as these could have been persons who had gone to Pakistan and returned. It also dispensed with the earlier held fiction that all lands evacuated by Meos were meant for refugees by readily admitting that in Bharatpur, “lands evacuated by Meos were settled by the Bharatpur government with Jat cultivators so that these would not lie uncultivated. The leases given to them were temporary for one year, but they had been assured by the government of Bharatpur before integration that they would be given permanent possession of land.” On this basis, they had paid the due *nazrana* (tribute) as well as certain debts and other charges, due from the earlier landholders i.e. Meos. The note claimed that if these Jats were to be displaced now, they would claim a compensation worth Rs. 2 ½ lakhs and “who should pay this compensation?”⁵²

Nehru responded and at greater length. Reminding Patel that Nehru’s opinion, for long, had been that “the best solution” was “for the Meos to go back to their original homes without major upsets,” the Prime Minister called it the “natural course [with] every reason in favour;” one that also reflected “Bapu’s [Gandhi’s] assurance to them.” The East Punjab government did not want Meos and “wanted them to go” to the Matsya Union, where “many people were

agreeable to it.” The ironic fact that “land in the Matsya Union was not very good or very suitable for other refugees, was also an inducement [for] food production would suffer because newcomers would not take easily to the land.” Finally, the age-old “economic set-up there for many hundreds of years was a further reason.” Nehru then moved to Patel’s main point of law and order and argued that there too were “two opinions as to which course was more conducive.” To him, “there was in fact greater danger to law and order if the Meos were forcibly put elsewhere and not far away from their old homes...They will feel aggrieved and resentful.”

Then there was the wider aspect of “the way we treat our Muslim citizens...the Muslims of Kashmir were disturbed.” The ground reality was that “owing to stress of events, the Meos were back roundabout their old lands and homes...to push them out would require a major operation and create a tremendous uproar” notwithstanding “the question of the [local] Jats,” who – to Nehru – did not have “any special importance in this connection.” They had “no claim at all to evacuee lands.” As for social workers, which meant Vinoba Bhave and his group, Nehru appealed to Patel that because of their old associations, “surely [they could] trust Vinoba Bhave to act correctly and not to create difficulties.” Ultimately, what Nehru was worried about was that “owing to slowness of governmental machine,” a whole month had passed “in argument” and nothing was done.⁵³

For Nehru, this was tantamount to failing the Meo question that for Gandhi had become “a test case of our bona fides,” in his last days. And so, he had urged the Rajasthan Premier, Hiralal Shastri, “to pay special attention to this matter.”⁵⁴ Next, he sent a strong note to the MoS. He brought up Vellodi’s letter of instructions to Chief Secretary, Rajasthan and reminded them that he did not think “it conveyed that decision correctly.” In any case, that

“letter itself was sent nearly three weeks after the decision, which was supposed to be an urgent one.” His note seeking an explanation of the above had not yet “had an answer.” Now, he had read from Premier Shastri and Vinoba Bhave, who expressed “great deal of confusion, embarrassment [given] difference of opinion [and] conflicting directions from the Government of India.” To the Prime Minister, “nothing [had] been done although nearly a month [had] passed since the Cabinet Committee’s decision...progress [had] not only been slow but might be said to be absent.” He was calling a meeting of the Cabinet Committee, “because of this confusion and lack of coordination.”⁵⁵

With the duumvirate in direct contact, the ministry for R&R could barely get in a word. On the Meo question, as on other matters of relief and rehabilitation, it often found itself between a rock and a hard place. In 1948, it had briefly lost its *locus standi*, when the Prime Minister had handed this matter over to his confidante, N Gopalaswamy Ayyangar, Minister without Portfolio.⁵⁶ So far as it was concerned, it had no objection “to the return of the Meos, listed in 1948 census, to their homes/holdings in Matsya Union.” Here, it was with Patel. In Alwar, it wanted that 5% Meos, who belonged to the area already allotted to refugees, should be resettled in the compact block in Tijara *tehsil*, to not disturb the refugees. This was neither here nor there. In Bharatpur, it did not want either the refugees in 60 villages or the Meos in 175 villages to be disturbed. Here, it was with Nehru. In the remaining 115 villages, it preferred “adjustments” for separate consolidation. Of course, it had its own figures and claimed that instead of 35, 000 Meos in Bharatpur, nearly 54, 000 had returned. Siding with Nehru, it agreed to resettle them all, but, siding with Patel, it did not want to do anything with the social workers assisting in this resettlement.⁵⁷

At the next meeting of the Committee for the Cabinet for Rehabilitation, held on June 24, 1949, Vinoba Bhave and Hiralal Shastri joined Nehru, while an absent Patel was once again represented by Vellodi. Nehru began with the need to be “more precise” in terms of actions desired and agencies responsible, “so as to avoid any misinterpretation.” The committee decided that the Meos to be included in the resettlement scheme should be “those covered by the census as well as those who were present in Alwar and Bharatpur at the time and numbered about 9-10, 000. Thus, roughly the total number to be provided for was 70-72, 000.” The agency for undertaking this work now was to be the Rajasthan Government and resettlement was to be based on “general enquiries and not enquiry into each individual case.” On the question of temporary allotment to local persons of 75, 000 acres of land in Alwar, in order to avoid land remaining untilled, the committee decided that “the claims of the refugees were paramount,” though some of this land had been temporarily allotted for cultivation to local persons and that cultivation should not be interrupted, as in any event, the refugees could not undertake it for this season. Finally, on the thorny question of coordination between social workers and governmental agencies, Bhave and Shastri were asked to keep in touch. Insofar as this round of discussion and decisions went, they represented a domination by Nehru of the MoS and this time Vellodi faithfully reproduced all the above in the formal order to Chief Secretary, Rajasthan.⁵⁸

June-October 1949: Settlement on the ground

As attempts began to expedite the resettlement of Meos in villages, occupied by local cultivators, a new problem emerged, threads of which went all the way back to March 1947 and showed the admixture of prejudice and profiteering that went hand in hand in de-territorializing the Meos then and re-territorializing them now. When large-scale communal

disturbances had broken out in Bharatpur state in March 1947 and Meos had been forced to leave, the then-government of Bharatpur had decided, by July 1947, in a transparent bid at dispossession that if arrangements were not made for cultivation of the large areas left behind by the Meos, there would be considerable loss of land revenue as well as crops. The Revenue Minister submitted a scheme for resettlement of these areas on July 21, 1947, which was approved by the Dewan. The chief feature of the scheme was that under Bharatpur's revenue code, the government was competent to transfer "abandoned" land to other persons *in perpetuity*. This scheme was sanctioned by Bharatpur State Council on August 8, 1947.

The second item of this scheme declared that even those who could not take possession immediately could get lands reserved on payment of one year's land revenue in advance, subject to the condition that such persons would bring the land under plough within three months. The third item added that while only rights of tenants were to be conferred on persons gaining possession in that year i.e. 1947, the government gave an assurance that such persons will be made proprietors *in lieu* of payment of a *nazrana*, which was to range from ten to thirty times of the assessed land revenue. Under this scheme, as much as 23, 792 acres of land was allotted. In addition, proprietary rights in five, formerly Meo, villages were sold outright for Rs. 90, 000/-. Contrary to the claim about compensation of Rs. 250, 000 to be paid to these local cultivators, if Meos were to be resettled on their old lands, made above by the MoS, Khem Chand, Collector of Bharatpur, who was looking into the matter expressed his inability to ascertain "the exact amount of 'advance land revenue' paid by these cultivators," for lack of revenue records. He also clarified that while in the *tehsil*-level account books, the advance land revenue was shown as *nazrana*, it was not so.

These were distinct categories under the above-mentioned items two and three, respectively, and the Collector was categorical that no *nazrana* was ever received. When, in March 1948, the Bharatpur state was integrated with the Matsya Union, the latter did not follow the policy of the former and herein lay the fault-line. Now that both did not exist and had been amalgamated into Rajasthan, the question was whether any advance land revenue paid for the reservation of land by the locals, in 1947, should or should not be refunded to those, who were now to be evicted and were insisting on the payment of this amount as a pre-condition to their giving up the lands, which were never theirs.

It is obvious that not many in Bharatpur state and society believed and hoped that the leaving Meos would ever return. Those who moved in to possess their lands therefore proceeded, in some cases, to pay the dues outstanding against the former landholder (i.e. Meos) with cooperative societies in the state. This too was to be decided on the principle whether any amount realised from these locals, which were outstanding against the Meos, should be refunded to them. How confident, and comfortable, most were that Meos would never return, can be seen from the fact that many had invested in repairing the former houses of Meos. These houses, which “were never allotted formally” by the Bharatpur Government, were thus occupied in an unauthorised manner. Yet, “in view of the contention of the [locals] that they were given assurance by the-then Bharatpur government that they would be made proprietors,” their claim could not be dismissed. Further, ministers like Gopilal Yadav and social workers like Vinoba Bhave, in urging these locals to vacate homes and holdings of/for the returnee Meos, had supported these claims for compensation and made them hopeful.

From his preliminary survey, however, Khem Chand felt that “the investment of the [locals were] not very great and their claims [were] certainly exaggerated. The legal position is that

they are not entitled to any compensation...Morally, of course, their claim is not without substance as they...did have some hope of becoming permanent settlers.”⁵⁹ This last point, of course, was loaded with irony. For a bureaucracy, which was so concerned about the moral claims of local Jat cultivators or Mahajan moneylenders, it had not given much thought to the hopes and moral claims of an equally native Meos. Now, two years later, boot was on the other foot, as demands of cultivation meant that orders were being issued to lease temporarily “land earmarked for refugees to local people.”⁶⁰

The locals were restless and the watching Meos could be excused, if they felt more than a moment of *schadenfreude*. On one, typical, occasion, seven villagers of Tilakpuri village, Bharatpur travelled to Dehradun to petition Patel on June 27, 1949. After a patient hearing and promise, Patel handed them to V Shankar, who wrote about them to MK Vellodi, who was out of New Delhi, and the villagers met with Chatterjee, who forwarded their grievances to NR Chandorkar, Administrator Alwar. Their representative story was illustrative of the insensitivities of state *against* society; bureaucracy against community(s) – Meos, refugees and local agriculturalists:

We settled in village Tilakpuri, Pahari tehsil, Bharatpur state in November 1947. This village was allotted to us by the state government permanently and we spent about Rs. 60, 000/- on purposes connected with agriculture. Now, we are being asked by the present government to leave these lands and make them over to the Meos. Why we are being displaced at a time when rains have fallen and when we have prepared land for sowing [and] for no fault of ours... We request that we may not be disturbed in the circumstances stated above and permits for the settlement of the Meos in our village may be cancelled. We are the best cultivators of land and no one can compare us in agriculture and we assure you that we would be able to produce as much food as possible..⁶¹

More than this pitiable representation, it was the perverse response of the officials that is interesting. Chatterjee wrote to Chandorkar in touching terms, which were absent when he was writing about the Meos: “I shall be glad if something could be done to help these poor unfortunate people, some of whom have come from long distances and *can almost be described in that sense as refugees.*”⁶² In reply, DR Pradhan, the advisor on evacuee property to Rajasthan Government, wrote equally tenderly.

There is no doubt that they were invited by the-then government...that oral assurances were given... [but] changes occurred before the Bharatpur government could give effect to its intention... While, therefore, they cannot legally retain the lands, their moral and equitable claims cannot be denied... We have decided to return whatever money they have paid and invested. But, this has naturally not satisfied them... To permit them to continue will give rise to difficulties in rehabilitating the Meos... There will, however, be no objection to giving them land elsewhere...⁶³

Underlying all this, of course, was that it helped that both the local tillers and refugees were non-Muslims and it hindered that the equally native Meos, non-Hindus. In any case, the category of “locals” was left suitably vague. They could be natives of Bharatpur state or from outside. At times, it was claimed that they had come from “long distances” but it was clear that they were not “refugees.” Nor were they “displaced” in distress and, it was admitted that “before [coming] to Bharatpur, [they] had source of livelihood elsewhere in India.” It was plainly “not desirable to allot them lands in Bharatpur or Alwar at the cost of [either refugees or evacuees].”⁶⁴

Between August and October 1949, R&R sent four letters to Alwar, Bharatpur and Jaipur seeking a copy of orders of the Rajasthan authorities regarding termination of lease of the local cultivators, so that their original holdings could be restored to Meos. Finally, on

October 19, 1949, Chief Secretary, Rajasthan sent a copy of the note submitted to the Cabinet on the subject. It was easy to issue this order, difficult to implement it on ground. In many villages, these cultivators started creating obstructions. In village Livana in tehsil Kama of Bharatpur, they refused to leave and invited eviction by force. In the same *tehsil* were those five, formerly Meo, villages, in which proprietary rights were sold for Rs. 90, 000/-, which the government was willing to return. It was also willing to consider compensation for improvements done to houses of Meos, by these “unauthorized” tenants. As for investments done to improve the lands, the government considered that as the Meos were to now inherit and avail such improvements, this amount was to be recovered in installments from them. Similarly, it decided to refund the amount realized from the cultivators of dues outstanding against the Meos and to recoup it from them in installments.⁶⁵

The leases for uncultivated land were extended for the crop cycle of 1949-50.⁶⁶ By the middle of August 1949, on paper, 78, 846 Meos had returned to Alwar and Bharatpur, including about 16, 000 new returnees from Pakistan. These numbers, like many others in this article, carry a whiff of what Ann Stoler refers to as “non-events...records of things that never happened.”⁶⁷ Anyhow, at a meeting held on September 13, 1949, between the Rajasthan Government and New Delhi, it was decided that given these number of Meos resettled, no more were to be allowed, “as that would affect the plans for displaced persons.” Instead, a loan of a million rupees was sanctioned by the R&R. Thus, in February 1950, there remained 1, 13, 885 Meos in neighboring Gurgaon; close enough to their former homes but not in it.⁶⁸

May-November 1950: “...as the rebels of 1857”

In summer-autumn 1950, almost exactly three years from their expulsion, life came full circle for Meos. Kashi Ram, President of Alwar District Congress Committee, sent a report to Patel, which was about the 4000 Meos of sub-*tehsil* Govindgarh and 1000 Meos of sub-*tehsil* Ramgarh of Alwar, who had not been resettled in 1949 “on the pretence that Govindgarh and Ramgarh area were reserved for tractor cultivation.” Now, Kashi Ram claimed that “the real reason was not this.” These Meos were asked to go to the designated “compact area” in Tijara *tehsil*, “an impracticable proposition as that area [was] quite at the other end, and when all other Meos were allowed their holdings in their own villages throughout the district.” The Govindgarh Meos “were prepared to accept land in other villages of that very sub-*tehsil*” and “enough area was available,” but, wrote Ram now, “instead of acceding to the legitimate demand of the Meos fresh batches of refugees were rushed into the area.”

After the passage of a few months, “the farce became clear. Tractor organisation proved utter failure and was disbanded. The Meos became tenants of refugees;” on their own soil, in their own homes. This was not all though. As old refugees failed to cultivate areas allotted to them, their areas started to be “revised and reduced.” Thus freed-up area could have accommodated the Meos and Kashi Ram moved “more than once” to the Rajasthan Government, only to hear that “officials of the States Ministry and the Union R&R ministry were against rehabilitation of Meos.” Kashi Ram could not understand how, on one hand, the Nehru-Liaquat Pact was being signed in Bengal,⁶⁹ and, on the other, Meos were being refused land, “which legally belongs to them.” Kashi Ram’s concluding sentences were ironical:

The Meos are in their own villages but without land...In case, they are to remain in India, they should be given land when it is available, the other alternative is to let them go to Pakistan...There is no use showing one thing to the world and doing another..⁷⁰

Patel was not moved by the plea, but he was certainly moved “to enquire whether what [was] said [was] correct.”⁷¹ It transpired that “Kashi Ram had settled, of his own initiative, 5283 Meos on 13, 072 acres mechanically cultivated area, [although] the area was reserved for [refugees].” However, “as mechanical cultivation did not [work], it was decided in May 1950 that these Meos may not be disturbed. The Meos of Govindgarh *tehsil* were asked to go to Tijara but, here too, Kashi Ram pointed out lands to them in Govindgarh itself.” Ram’s claim that “the scale of land allotment to displaced families was revised because old refugees failed to cultivate the area allotted to them” was dismissed. That decision was arrived “to settle more” refugees. In any case, it was not meant for Meos. Finally, his statement that “officials were against rehabilitation of Meos” was declared “absolutely incorrect.” By way of evidence, it was added that another group of 18, 000 Meos were being settled in Tapookra sub-*tehsil* although they were reluctant to go and preferred to cultivate lands, in their old villages, “as sub-tenants and farm labourers.”⁷²

There the matter, which now served “no useful purpose” for the MoS,⁷³ would have rested, unlamented, had it not been for Sardar Sajjan Singh Mirgindpuri, a member of legislative assembly from East Punjab and a resident of Amritsar. In a 1900 words letter, accompanied with 19-pages of enclosures, enumerating in extraordinary detail the plight of more than 3000 Meo families from Alwar and Bharatpur, written to Nehru, the Sardar set the dying embers of the Meos’ question ablaze.⁷⁴ That it came from a Sikh, the community that had lost so much during Partition, meant that it could not be easily dismissed by the “official mind.” It provided a moment of reckoning for them as to how their “colonial sense and reason conjoined social kinds with the political order of colonial things.”⁷⁵ This was the third letter on this subject that Sajjan Singh was sending, urging Nehru to make the bureaucracy do, what should be done, “with clean hands” and to remove the “highly objectionable brakes on

the honest working of law.” He began by noting that the “compact area scheme, ‘reservation of area’ and ‘alternate lands for original holdings” were things that brought “no credit to the government,” as there could be “no two opinions that land owners who live on cultivation cannot put their souls and hearts in their work if they are forced to accept other than their original holdings.”

Having recently visited twelve villages of Alwar and Bharatpur districts and meeting the Meos there, Sajjan Singh had heard their “woeful tales of suffering and unspeakable hardships of life brought about through the callous, anti-Muslim and communal-ridden policy of local administration.” They had no confidence in the administration of Alwar district wherein the presence of “those very officers who hunted them down during 1947” was “bound to create mistrust in their minds.” Having also met government officials, Singh had no doubts that “the secular character of the State is doomed,” given the nature of Meos’ main grievances:

In the city of Alwar, all mosques have been demolished...On the vacant side of Lal Shahi Masjid, a new building has been erected...The site of Jama Masjid has been occupied and shops have been erected thereon. On the vacant side of another Masjid, a new building [is] being constructed...Meo boarding house and Sarai are being occupied by refugees...at Lakshmangarh town, debris of a mosque has been auctioned by the government.

On the question of resettlement, those Meos who had been resettled in their villages had not been restored their lands. Even when “permits were issued by the government, local officers refused to comply...in full,” leaving some with “only a minor part of their holdings.” In some cases, owners holding land in more than one village were “restored their land in fragments;” in other cases, lands had been restored “but homes refused.” In yet others, “homes restored

but land refused.” They were living “either in newly built huts or in adjoining villages.” In many cases, even those included in the July 1948 census, had neither received their lands nor homes. To still others, land was allotted in adjoining villages “but full area [was] not given.”

Then, “many Meos restored or allotted land last year [had] their possession partly disturbed this year [with] some lands taken away from them.” No wonder that Sajjan Singh found “the Muslims most depressed, demoralised and dejected.” The vengeful local administration, “while refusing to allot an inch of their lands in some villages where they had resettled in their original homes [had] tried to starve them.” In many cases, they were “refused possession of their *pucca* houses.” Despite all orders and “as a delaying tactic,” “district authorities [had] failed to bring the census record from Gurgaon up [to-date] till 5 July 1950,” because of which, many Meos could not be settled. Singh too confirmed that “in leasing of lands, which could not be allotted to the refugees, preference has been given to the local Hindus over Meos, though the latter were the owners of these.” Sajjan Singh, with enough experience of the evacuee establishment in East Punjab, saw that in Mewat,

...owners [were] not allowed to get their own land even on lease... [refugees had] been allowed to occupy the land and homes of even those Muslims who are present... The authorities [had] not been able [or, willing] to differentiate the properties of those migrating to Pakistan and living in India.

He followed his claim with an illustration. In Govindgarh town of Alwar district, Chaudhary Nathoo, who was the owner of 550 bighas of land, had been restored 140 bighas, including 70 bighas belonging to some other Muslim. Then, more callously, in Lakshmangarh, which had the most fertile lands in the region, “neither the refugees [had] been allotted any lands nor the Meos [had] been given back their land in full, [with] lands [being] leased to local

Hindus on nominal rents.” Shyam Lal, the Deputy Director, R&R Rajasthan, admitted to Singh on July 19, 1950 at Alwar that those Meos who had been restored their property “do not enjoy proprietary rights and no decision has been taken by the Rajasthan government in this respect.” Singh then gave an instance of “alternate allotment.” In village Dhakadinapur, *tehsil* Deeg, district Bharatpur, 55 families of Meos were living before Partition. During the disturbance of 1947, 5 families left for Pakistan. The remaining 50 were entitled to 12.61 bighas of land in their own village, but had been resettled in 5 different, adjacent villages. His next series of queries juxtaposed prejudice next to bureaucratic claims of parity, practicality and preference:

In Rajasthan, constitution is being violated to please the *goddess of communalism*...under what provision of law, the ‘compact area, reserved villages and alternate holdings’ proposals have been put up? There is no justification...to order the Meos to be resettled *without* disturbing the refugees...The refugees should be put into possession of evacuee property only. *There is no reason why the Meos and other Muslims of Rajasthan be victimised for the rehabilitation of the refugees.* Government has no right to rehabilitate the refugees *at the cost* of Rajasthan Muslims.

Having ranged over moral and legal landscapes, Sajjan Singh moved to “human psychology” and government’s failure to appreciate it. He brought up “every human being’s unbounded love for own home and holding,” and willingness to “sacrifice everything to save their existence;” Meos being no exception. As a fellow agriculturalist, he understood their attachment to ancestral land and their difficulty in seeing their “home and holdings in sight and [yet be] unable to get hold of them.” That the state had created “such helpless situation” was deplorable. How far double standards had permeated this project could be seen by the fact that the same “compact area scheme” had been “relaxed in the case of Meos of Gurgaon district,” but not “in the case of Rajasthan Meos.” Thus, Singh declaimed that “every

displaced Muslim who is now in India has a right to get back his original property. Even returnees from Pakistan...have [this] right as the presumption of law goes in their favour.”

Questioning the whole basis of the census of July 1948, he asked why that census of Meos in Gurgaon, Alwar and Bharatpur districts took place, when nowhere else in India, displaced Muslims had been subjected to it.

While the MoS tried to dismiss Sajjan Singh’s letter as “impracticable” and feigned ignorance “regarding the demolition of mosques etc.,”⁷⁶ it roused the Union Ministry of R&R, which asked the State Rehabilitation Department, Jaipur to investigate it.

Consequently, an inquiry was initiated in September 1950 by a reluctant State Government, following which, K Radhakrishnan, Chief Secretary, Rajasthan reported on November 15, 1950 mentioning more enquiries, appointment of a commission and release of a questionnaire on the subject. In other words, it did not contest the contents of Singh’s letter.⁷⁷ Instead, writing three days later, Radhakrishnan sought to question Singh’s character and motives. Sending a spurious report on “seriously objectionable” activities of Sardar Sajjan Singh, he claimed that the latter was “encouraging the Meos to take the law into their own hands.” The offending passage, from a letter written by Singh, pointed to by the Chief Secretary, read as under and reveals more about the bureaucracy, he headed: “Muslims are being treated in Rajasthan as the rebels of 1857 were treated by the Britishers...You should not sit as a mere spectator.”⁷⁸

Conclusion

This article has aimed to offer an account of the conflicted political and bureaucratic working out of the Meo question after Partition. In this sense, it seeks to complement existing

accounts that focus on the community of Meos, the shaping of their “Muslim identity” and the consequent making of their “marginality,”⁷⁹ by tracing the process of the incomplete project of Meos’ resettlement in independent India. In this case, it is more than the nearby Punjab story of “agency, denial, corruption and refugee-state tensions.”⁸⁰ Meos’ presence, forced absence and scattered return, threatened the state order, social set-up and resource structure. In the process, humanitarian concerns and moral principles were far from many minds, given that they represented “the internal other” for the old-new “official mind(s).” Officials, from local to “national” levels, were complicit in a corruption of communalism. Their sanitized and standard juxtaposition of Meos’ restoration and resettlement vis-à-vis refugee relief and rehabilitation flattened a complex reality. It echoes Levi-Strauss’s assertion that “the primary function of writing . . . is to facilitate the enslavement of other human[s].”⁸¹ Officials and politicals of the government(s) of India and Rajasthan,

...reeled uncomfortably between attention to the minutiae of domestic arrangements and generic social kinds, between probabilities and positivistic evidence, between what could be known about the past and what could be predicted for the future, between abstract principles and a keen awareness that what mattered as much was...everyday lives..⁸²

In pursuing these concerns, different echelons of government stumbled in the face of differences among them as much as between them and the Meos. Of course, the latter’s “affections and attachments...were often impervious to the meddling priorities of a supposedly ‘rational’ and reasoned state.”⁸³ That Meos returned at all was more to do with their autonomy of action, resisting more the bureaucracy and less the neighboring, non-Muslim community, which accepted – howsoever reluctantly – the return and resettlement of Meos in their own territories, albeit without their former land-owning status. The culture of corruption here was both material and moral. That they survived what Shail Mayaram called

“the attempted extermination by the princely states in 1947” was heroic in itself; that they survived the post-1947 state-formation of “sovereignty, nationalism and religious identity” and its attempt to “create an ethnically favourable population,”⁸⁴ is no less salutary. Sikh/Hindu refugees on one hand and local tillers (Jats), moneylenders (Mahajans) and neighboring others – all were preferable to the Meos: “inhabitants of decades and centuries.”⁸⁵

As the independent Indian “nation” sought to forge its “state,” it intensified the clash within the idea(s) of India/n and culminated in a question mark over the “in-between” Meo community. Their status and *habitus* were reduced and redefined, respectively. This reflected in the tension within the state apparatus, from the duumvirate at the political-ideological apex to the interest-oriented multitude on the ground. It fed into the broader question of “Muslim belonging in secular India” in partitioned times and its long *afterlife*,⁸⁶ whose subsequent subterranean existence has been cruelly exposed in the ascendant “majoritarian” electoral democracy and “committed” government service sheltering the recent increase in violence against Meos.⁸⁷ From land then to law today, the Meos’ access to attributes of independent Indian nation-state has been circumscribed through their condensed, communal characterization. The contemporary crisis of “official secularity” in India, as evidenced in the region of Mewat, was foreshadowed in the incursions of a colonial bureaucracy, intentions of nationalist leadership, negotiations between competing claims to identity and, the consequent community resettlements.

Endnotes

¹ Among recent writings, on Punjab, see Ilyas Chattha, “Competitions for Resources: Partition’s Evacuee Property and the Sustenance of Corruption in Pakistan,” *Modern Asian Studies* 46 (2012): 1182-1211 and “The impact of the redistribution of Partition’s evacuee property on the patterns of land ownership and power in Pakistani Punjab in the 1950s,” in Roger Long and others (eds.) *State and Nation-Building in Pakistan: Beyond Islam and Security* (London, 2015), 13-34. On Bengal, see Haimanti Roy, *Partitioned Lives: Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947-65* (New York, 2012).

² On Delhi, see Rotem Geva, “The Scramble for Houses: Violence, a factionalised State, and informal economy in post-partition Delhi,” *Modern Asian Studies* 51 (2017): 769-824. On all-India law, see Rohit De, “Taming the Custodian: Evacuee Property Law and Economic Life in the Indian Republic,” in Gyan Prakash and others (eds.) *The Postcolonial Moment in South and Southeast Asia* (New York, 2018), 87-106.

³ Shail Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity* (Delhi, 1997), 208.

⁴ Shail Mayaram, *Against History: Against State, Counterperspectives from the Margins* (New York, 2003), 23.

⁵ Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*, 206.

⁶ See Ian Copland, “The Further Shores of Partition: Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan in 1947,” *Past and Present* 160 (1998): 203-39.

⁷ Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009), 1.

⁸ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 1-2.

⁹ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 4.

¹⁰ Gyanendra Pandey, “Can a Muslim be an Indian?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (1999): 610-1, 626.

¹¹ Mayaram, “Belonging/Unbelonging to the Nation,” in RC Tripathi and Purnima Singh (eds.), *Perspectives on Violence and Othering in India* (Delhi, 2016), 73-5. Also see, Majid Siddiqi, “History and Society in a Popular Rebellion: Mewat, 1920-1933,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 28 (1986): 442-467.

¹² See Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes* and Copland, “The Further Shores of Partition.”

¹³ See <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ghasera-where-mahatma-gandhi-s-legacy-lives-on-waits-for-india/story-I8Z0XY4IrAW07aIc3pw48I.html> (accessed 13 September 2018).

¹⁴ Quoted in Pandey, ““Can a Muslim be an Indian?”” 628.

¹⁵ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 1.

¹⁶ See Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*.

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- ¹⁷ Horst Kruger (ed.) *Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf: An Indian Scholar and Revolutionary 1903-1962* (Delhi, 1969), 297-304, 390. I am grateful to one of the reviewers suggesting this reference.
- ¹⁸ Chowdhry Abdul Haye, "The freedom movement in Mewat and Dr. KM Ashraf," in Kruger (ed.) *Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf*, 311, 326.
- ¹⁹ Haye, "The freedom movement in Mewat and Dr. KM Ashraf," 326-28.
- ²⁰ Haye, "The freedom movement in Mewat and Dr. KM Ashraf," 330-35.
- ²¹ Nehru to Trivedi, July 5, 1948, S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (hereafter *SWJN*) (Second series Volume seven), (New Delhi, 1988), 37-38.
- ²² Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi. Nehru to Rajagopalachari, July 13, 1948, No. 1000/PM, JN (SG) Papers, File No. 11 (Part I).
- ²³ Nehru to Saksena, February 11, 1949, *SWJN* (Second series Volume nine), (New Delhi, 1990), 263.
- ²⁴ National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi. April 24, 1949, final report of the fact-finding committee, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (Ministry of States-MoS, Government of India-GoI).
- ²⁵ Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*, 206.
- ²⁶ NAI. May 14, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ²⁷ See Taylor C. Sherman, "From 'Grow More Food' to 'Miss a Meal': Hunger, Development and the Limits of Post-Colonial Nationalism in India, 1947-1957," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 36 (2013): 571-588.
- ²⁸ NAI. Ghosh to Chatterjee, May 18, 1949, DO No. RHA-502 (78), File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ²⁹ NAI. Chatterjee's note, May 18, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ³⁰ NAI. Nehru to Menon, Ghosh and Saksena, May 19, 1949, No. 519-PM, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ³¹ NAI. May 19, 1949, Chatterjee's note, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ³² NAI. Kashi Ram to Lall, May 20, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ³³ NAI. H Soni's note, May 20, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ³⁴ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (Delhi, 2004), 12-13.
- ³⁵ NAI. Ganesan to Patel, May 21, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ³⁶ NAI. Shankar's note, May 22, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ³⁷ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 3.
- ³⁸ NAI. Ganesan's note, May 23, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ³⁹ NAI. Vellodi's note, May 25, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).

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- ⁴⁰ NAI. Dantyagi's note, May 25, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁴¹ Nehru to ML Saksena, May 20, 1949, *SWJN* (Second series Volume eleven), (New Delhi, 1991), 97.
- ⁴² NAI. Vellodi to Patel, May 25, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁴³ NAI. Minutes of the meeting, May 25, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁴⁴ NAI. Shankar's note, May 31, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁴⁵ NAI. Abdullah to Patel, May 31, 1949, No. 1343/PRS, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁴⁶ NAI. Patel to Abdullah, June 8, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁴⁷ NAI. Menon to Shastri, June 12, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁴⁸ NAI. Vellodi to CS, Rajasthan, June 16, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁴⁹ NAI. AV Pai (PPS to PM) to Vellodi, June 18, 1949, No. D/S/4996, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁵⁰ NAI. Vellodi to Pai, June 21, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁵¹ NAI. Patel to Nehru, June 21, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁵² The note was prepared by officials in MoS, with inputs from Pradhan, advisor Rajasthan government and Chandorkar, Administrator Alwar.
- ⁵³ Nehru to Patel, June 23, 1949, *SWJN* (Second series Volume twelve), (New Delhi, 1991), 111-13.
- ⁵⁴ Nehru to Shastri, June 4, 1949, *SWJN* (Second series Volume eleven), (New Delhi, 1991), 98-99.
- ⁵⁵ NAI. Nehru's notes, June 20 and 23, 1949, Nos. 829 and 862-PM, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁵⁶ NAI. KB Lall to MK Kirpalani, June 20, 1948 and Kirpalani's note, June 23, 1948, File No. F.8 (14)-G (R)/48 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁵⁷ NAI. R&R's note, June 23, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁵⁸ NAI. Vellodi to CS, Rajasthan, June 25, 1949, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁵⁹ NAI. Chand's report, June 25, 1949 and Chandorkar to Chatterjee, July 5, 1949, File No. 8 (3) – R./49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁶⁰ NAI. R&R, Jaipur to Administrator Alwar, June 26, 1949, File No. 8 (3) – R./49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁶¹ NAI. Petition to Shankar, June 27, 1949, File No. 8 (3) – R./49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁶² NAI. Chatterjee to Chandorkar, June 29, 1949, File No. 8 (3) – R./49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁶³ NAI. Pradhan to Chatterjee, July 25, 1949, D3618-R/49, File No. 8 (3) – R./49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁶⁴ NAI. MoS' note, August 22, 1949, File No. 8 (3) – R./49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁶⁵ NAI. Note by Niranjana Swaroop, October 25, 1949, 1858/RR, File No. 8 (3) – R./49 (MoS, GoI).
- ⁶⁶ NAI. MoS' note, October 27, 1949, File No. 8 (3) – R./49 (MoS, GoI), NAI.

⁶⁷ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 5.

⁶⁸ NAI. February 27, 1950, File No. F.8 (2)-R/49 (MoS, GoI).

⁶⁹ See Pallavi Raghavan, "The Making of the India–Pakistan Dynamic: Nehru, Liaquat, and the No War Pact correspondence of 1950," *Modern Asian Studies* 50 (2016), 1645-1678.

⁷⁰ NAI. Ram to Shankar, May 31, 1950, File No. 12 (10) – R/50 (MoS, GoI).

⁷¹ NAI. Bhanot-Nisar to CS, Rajasthan, June 15, 1950, No. D1429-R/50, File No. 12 (10) – R/50 (MoS, GoI).

⁷² NAI. CS, Rajasthan to Bhanot-Nisar, August 23, 1950, F-12 (91) RR II/50, File No. 12 (10) – R/50 (MoS, GoI).

⁷³ NAI. September 7, 1950, File No. 12 (10) – R/50 (MoS, GoI).

⁷⁴ NAI. Singh to Nehru, August 4, 1950, D.2073-R/50, File No. 12 (14) – RC/50 (MoS, GoI), NAI.

⁷⁵ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 9.

⁷⁶ NAI. MoS' note, August 23, 1950, File No. 12 (14) – RC/50 (MoS, GoI).

⁷⁷ NAI. Radhakrishnan to Bhanot-Nisar, November 15, 1950, DO No. F.12 (91)-RR/II/50, File No. 12 (14) – RC/50 (MoS, GoI).

⁷⁸ NAI. Radhakrishnan to Ganesan, November 18, 1950, DO. No. 513/PA/CS, File No. 12 (14) – RC/50 (MoS, GoI).

⁷⁹ See Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes* and *Against History, Against State*.

⁸⁰ See Ian Talbot, "Punjabi Refugees' rehabilitation and the Indian State: Discourses, denials and Dissonances," *Modern Asian Studies* 45 (2011), 109-130.

⁸¹ Quoted in Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 1.

⁸² Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 2.

⁸³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 2.

⁸⁴ Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*, 203

⁸⁵ Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*, 206.

⁸⁶ See Pandey, "Can a Muslim be an Indian?" and Taylor C. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad* (Cambridge, 2015).

⁸⁷ See media coverage of/since the lynching of Pehlu Khan in April 2017.