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## POETIC RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS PURITANISM

Where there is power, there is resistance.  
(Foucault 1978a: 95–96)<sup>1</sup>

At the Sherpur shrine of Laldas, I was introduced to Jogi and Mirasi bards during a religious performance.<sup>2</sup> These bards were traditionally supported by the Meos under the *jajmānī* (patron–client) system, which gave the dominant Meos control over these socially and economically marginal Muslim communities. The landless and small landowner bards were hit most by the slow collapse of this patronage system. Additionally, the rise and popularity of the Tablighi Jamaat led most Meos to condemn their musical performances as perversion from Islam, which had once been greatly admired by them. Since the Tablighi doctrine frowns upon music, most Meos today see the bards' performances as incompatible with Islam. Consequently, the Jogis and Mirasis felt pressured to abandon their performances, even though this was their livelihood, and they cherished their artistry.

As socially and economically marginalised communities, the Jogis and Mirasis had to negotiate the opinions and stances of their erstwhile patrons, whose hostility to their performance now threatens their everyday survival. The Jogi and Mirasi minstrels are employing the lyrics of their new poetic songs as a form of passive resistance in response to the Meo patrons' interpretation of religious piety. More specifically, these minstrels are promoting a version of righteous behaviour that is universal and does not depend on organised religions.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier, it was noted that when Muslim devotees of saints faced pressure, they resorted to tactics such as secrecy and concealment in order to deal with the Tablighi idea of religious discipline. The examples in Chapter 6 were not related to issues of livelihood but rather to the right to freely profess one's religious beliefs in saints. It was evident that the attempted imposition of the religious authority of the Tablighi Jamaat had severe consequences for many individuals beyond Sufi believers. This same theme is now being explored in relation to Muslim bards and their passive resistance against their former patrons, the Meos. The Meos frequently encouraged the bards to abandon their musical profession, join the Tablighi Jamaat and adopt its reformist principles. Considering the Indic theme of cultural interaction in the formation of all these communities, it is important to analyse the past and present forms of their interrelations and the nature of their religious subjectivity. However, the emergence of the Tablighi Jamaat under the changed circumstances of the political economy<sup>4</sup> in Mewat altered the mode of social interaction among these communities. Hence, it is essential to provide an overview of the events that unfolded after the social dynamics in Mewat underwent a gradual transformation following the breakdown of the *jajmānī* system.

## THE PATRONS AND THE CLIENTS

The *jajmānī* system, also known as patron–client relationship, was a significant aspect of rural relations around peasant communities in India, with social, political, economic and cultural dimensions that have been extensively studied (Breman 1993; Commander 1983; Fuller 1989; Gould 1986; Mayer 1993). Meo peasants served as patrons for many castes in Mewat, utilising the services of the service castes for ritual and economic purposes and offering them gifts or payments in exchange. In the Meo *jajmānī* system, the Meos' land-ownership was the primary determinant of the power dynamics between patrons and clients. Their domination was not necessarily confined to requiring labour of 'lower castes' and being able to offer them payment.<sup>5</sup> The service castes or clients also performed various rituals in the social life of the Meos, and their social status varied. Meo dominance can be seen in all aspects of Mewati Muslim life, social, political and economic spheres including control over landholdings. According to F. C. Channing's late nineteenth-century settlement report, Meo peasants controlled most of the land in the southern part of the Gurgaon district, which includes

present-day Meo-dominated areas of Nuh, Ferozepur and Punahana tehsils (Channing 1882: 17–20). Ownership was under the *bhaicārā* (brotherhood) settlements, in which all holders were related to each other by blood ties (18). Similarly, most positions of social, political and economic importance in Mewat were and still are generally controlled by the Meos. The numerical domination of the Meos is also reflected in politics. For example, none of the elected politicians in Mewat's three Muslim-majority legislative units (Nuh, Punahana and Ferozpur Jhirka in Haryana) have ever been from a non-Meo Muslim background.<sup>6</sup>

The *jajmānī* system was a complex social and economic system in which the service castes fulfilled various roles for the Meo peasant community and were compensated for their work with a portion of the grain harvest. While the system was hierarchical and based on notions of social status, it was also characterised by a sense of obligation and reciprocity between patrons and clients. The relationship was not necessarily always based on the idea of exploitation. In some cases, such as the *kāmiyā* (labourer) and *mālik* (master) relationship in rural colonial Bihar, the master would provide food to their labourers during times of hardship, like drought or severe famine (Prakash 2003). The dissolution of the *jajmānī* system has had a significant impact on the landless castes such as Jogis and Mirasis, who were once closely tied to the Meos and relied on them for their subsistence income. This is illustrated by the experience of one of my interviewees, Harun. Harun was a young folk artist from the Muslim Jogi caste who had developed his traditional art of storytelling and singing into a professional career by performing in schools, for state-sponsored programs and at various national and international forums for the promotion of folk arts. According to Harun, he was forced to take his art beyond the traditional confines of Meo culture.<sup>7</sup> He used to accompany his father and grandfather to perform at Meo marriage festivities in the late 1990s. During traditional Meo marriage ceremonies, relatives from the bridegroom's side used to stay for four–five days in the village of the bride's family.<sup>8</sup> The bards were employed as the main public entertainers on these occasions, which presented them with abundant opportunities. Harun mentioned that under the influence of the Tablighi Jamaat's ideology, the new trend was to stop them from performing in the traditional marriage ceremonies of their Meo patrons. He recalled further that it was an acutely distressing experience to see that, just as they were about to perform, they would be stopped in marriage after marriage by the Meos saying, 'Don't sing, we will give you your share of money'.<sup>9</sup>

Under the traditional *jajmānī* system, the Jogi and Mirasi were entitled to receive money or grain for their work. Although the Meos still felt obliged to pay their traditional clients, they were no longer interested in their services because of their non-Islamic nature. 'More than a matter of money, it was a complete disrespect to our profession', Harun further claimed. Not being dependent anymore on the Meos or on begging alms for subsistence, Harun believed in using his art to earn income as a respected professional. This disintegration of the patron–client system did not happen suddenly but over a long period.

Over the past few decades, patronage towards folk artists has significantly decreased. Although many elderly Jogis and Mirasis continue to remember and recite folktales and folk stories, the extent of this practice has considerably reduced. The primary reason for this is the loss of their audience and the simultaneous emergence of alternative forms of entertainment, such as television, which gained popularity in the 1990s. This shift is also attributed to the growth of a new market economy, especially after India's economic liberalisation in the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> These new circumstances meant a weakening of the tie between patrons and musicians. Thus, the artistic skills of the bards, which had once flourished under the patronage of the Meos, were no longer required in the changed mode of economic production and social relations. The majority of these bardic caste members have, thus, been turned from a group of folk artists into labourers due to the necessity to earn a living. Without patronage, landless (or small landowning) culture-oriented communities like the Jogi and Mirasi fell under the yoke of free labour market forces. Consequently, the subsistence of the landless castes mostly depended on them selling their physical labour. For instance, many of the respondents from these two communities seasonally migrated to Mumbai and Gujarat in search of generating some additional income until the next harvesting cycle, at which point they returned to work in the area. Presently, the customary bardic profession is perceived as having minimal value, so performers are forced to seek better opportunities or struggle hard to maintain their daily survival. The majority of the younger generation did not want to take up the bardic profession as a medium of livelihood.

Members of these communities, Meo, Jogi and Mirasi, also criticised each other. The contradiction between public and private behaviour of Muslims from Meo and other Muslim castes may, however, be best understood by studying what James C. Scott (1990: 4–9)<sup>11</sup> calls 'the public transcript' and 'the hidden transcript'—the open and off-stage interactions between subordinates

and those who dominate. According to Scott, the public transcript refers to the open (public) interaction between subordinate and dominant groups. On the other side, every social group produces its own hidden transcript in which the private discussions among the members of the group contain offensive remarks about the other in contradiction to what they normally say publicly.<sup>12</sup> Thus, to identify the passive resistance practised by the bards of the Jogi and Mirasi castes, one needs to rely on James Scott's description of 'hidden transcripts'. Both groups create public and hidden transcripts in their own ways. A hidden transcript is, thus, an off-stage product that subordinate groups use behind the backs of the powerful. While sharing the public transcript, both subordinate and dominant groups embody etiquette and politeness.<sup>13</sup>

Scott refers to 'hidden transcripts' in the context of discussion about the public roles played by powerful and powerless groups, and the mocking, vengeful tone both groups display off stage. In the case of the landless castes of the Jogi and Mirasi, the bitterness of their thoughts was hidden from the socially and economically superior Meos but was expressed in front of fellow caste members. In their respective 'public and hidden transcripts', in Scott's terminology, the public transcripts upheld the idea of Muslim equality and homogeneity, while the hidden transcripts revealed an awareness of socio-economic difference. The expressions used by 'low-caste' Muslim communities echoed Scott's analysis of what the practice of dominance generates: '... the insults and slight to human dignity that in turn foster a hidden transcript of indignation' (Scott 1990: 7). In everyday life, the dominant Meos invoke their caste superiority and the 'low-caste' status of others both consciously and unconsciously. For instance, my close friends and informants from the Meo caste often made disrespectful remarks in the presence of 'low-caste' individuals. Such behaviour had two implications: first, it displayed Meo dominance; second, it denied 'lower-caste' members their human dignity.

Moreover, the presence of two self-conscious beings was evident in my frequent encounters with individuals of different castes in the villages of Mewat indicating disjunctions between public and private narratives. Often, the public behaviour of the village residents was entirely different from what people shared with me during personal interviews. Publicly, everyone talked of equality, brotherhood and harmony, but in one-to-one conversation, the central stage in my interviewees' narratives was occupied by differences and criticisms of each other. Their relationship also proved Hegel's analysis with regard to the dynamic arrangement of social relations. In the Hegelian

treatment of power, the mutuality of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated was a very dynamic one.<sup>14</sup> From this relationship or encounter, two distinct, self-conscious beings emerged (Hegel 1910: 163–219). Caste and labour relations under the *jajmānī* system and current tensions in their respective narratives reflected two distinct Hegelian self-conscious beings. The self-consciousness of the subordinates (Hegel's 'bondsmen') is realised through their work and labour.

Since the bards cannot leave their art as it is still a source of livelihood, an idea of passive resistance and the positive articulation of religious synthesis based on the messages of universal righteousness is taking root in their new songs. As most Meos believed in the reformist ideals of the Tablighi Jamaat that discouraged the culture of art and music, traditional musicians had been left without patronage. The next section explores the impact of Islamic reformism on the traditional bardic practices.

### ISLAMIC REFORMISM AND MUSLIM BARDS

Jogis and Mirasis' cultural resources for oral performance were drawn from Indic historical traditions that emphasised universalism, expressing ideas beyond the narrow confinement of religious categories. Communities like the Jogis and Mirasis were traditionally both 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', and beyond at the same time, while being closely interwoven into the power structure of the caste society. This type of universalism among such groups has had a long and important history in the subcontinent. The Bauls<sup>15</sup> of Bengal, for instance, conveyed in their songs the idea that ultimate reality did not lie in dogmatic creeds and doctrines but within oneself. Central to the Bauls' religious imaginary was divine love that is common to both 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' (see, for instance, Capwell 1988; R. Datta 1978; Urban 2003).<sup>16</sup> The Bauls faced disapproval from orthodox Muslims and Islamic organisations, leading to occasional issuing of *fatvās* (legal decisions) against them by Muslim reformist groups.<sup>17</sup> Similar to the songs of the Bauls, the themes of universalism and divine love found their way into the Mewati bards' performance. In one of their poetic songs, they sang a metaphoric Krishnaite song of divine love, human feelings and universal values:

*krisn is rūp me jab āpkā darśan hove  
aur āp dulhā bane aur jānkī dulhan hove*

*prem ki bāt jamāne mein nirālī dekhī*  
*aur prem se prem ki falte huye dālī dekhī*  
*ki prem darasal hai, ādarśh hai jivan ke liye*  
*aur prem mein sānti miltī hai sadā man ke liye*  
*ki prem hi vair ki dīwār hatā detā hai*  
*aur prem hi duśmanī varso ki mitā detā hai*  
*prem insān ko insān banā detā hai*  
*aur prem pathhar ko bhi bhagvān banā detā hai.*

Krishna when I see you in this form  
 And you are groom and Janaki is your bride  
 The idea of love is very amazing in this world  
 And [I] see the branch of love blossoming from love  
 That, love is real, ideal, for life  
 And in love the heart pacifies  
 That love separates the wall of grudge  
 And it is also the love that mitigates the years-long enmity  
 The love makes a human, human  
 And the love also turns a stone into god.<sup>18</sup>

This song was generally sung at urban venues. It adopted lyrical tones in imparting a message about universality and the essence of human life. The interviews conducted with other bards of Jogi and Mirasi origins opened up a window into the personal experiences of the Muslim bards in the face of pressure from the reform organisation. The stories of one of the Mirasi musicians, Ustad Rammal Khan (aged 55 years), from the Alwar district in Mewat, who had turned his house into a *sangeet kendra* (music centre) reveal various responses to these pressures.

Ustad Khan imparted teachings in harmonium, *veena* (an Indian chordophone) and various other musical instruments to children from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds. Ustad Khan's Hindu students, attending his training centre, respectfully referred to him as *gurūjī*, while Muslim children chose to address him as *ustād*.<sup>19</sup> Hindus (especially girls) outnumbered Muslim learners at his centre. His well-organised and very clean house was located in an urban *bastī* (slum) in the Alwar city. Upon entering the house, one would be greeted by images of musical instruments adorning the walls.

On the day of my meeting with him, Ustad Khan's Muslim appearance was signified by a skullcap, which immediately gave me a sense of his religious

beliefs. After offering refreshments—a cup of syrupy tea and snacks—he took me directly to a room filled with various musical instruments. On one wall of the room hung a portrait of a collective *namāz* offering at Mecca in Saudi Arabia. To my surprise, on the other side of the room, there was a large portrait of the Hindu goddess Sarasvati (the goddess of knowledge). Just below the portrait, a bundle of incense sticks was lit, filling the air with a delightful fragrance. Like his Mirasi ancestors, Ustad Rammal Khan believed in both religions. During our informal discussion he said, ‘This is our heritage and livelihood’. Every morning, either he or one of his daughters cleaned the room and prayed in front of the image of the goddess. At the same time, his family also offered Islamic prayers. Such practices indicate the possibility of religious connections and influences that existed across faiths and religious boundaries historically.

During the conversation with Rammal Khan, I inquired about the theologians or Mullahs’ opinions on his profession. He revealed that his art had faced pressure from within the Muslim community, particularly from Tablighi workers who attempted to convince him to abandon his work in favour of Islam. Rammal Khan explained that this had not been an issue in the past and added, ‘Religious disciplining is a new concept in Mewat; it was not a major concern for Muslims and Meos in particular’.<sup>20</sup> Although Rammal Khan believed that the teachings of the Tablighi Jamaat were useful in promoting Islamic religious values, he also thought that they had created divisions not only between Muslims regarding Sufi ideology but also between Muslims and Hindus. To illustrate this point, he recited a couplet from an Urdu poet, Shafiq Jaunpuri (1903–63), concerning the implications of the Tablighi Jamaat’s work:

*vō andherā hī bhalā thā ki qdam rāh pe the  
rōśni lāī hai manjil se bahut door hamen.*

That darkness was still better so that our steps were on the path  
The light has brought us very far from the goal.<sup>21</sup>

This couplet expressed Rammal’s views on the reformist teachings, that the knowledge that generates no love in the heart is not knowledge. His anxieties were directed against the unwanted imposition of discipline by the reform organisation. He could not openly express his views against many Meo Mullahs and the members of *ummāh* (the notion of a community based on



the idea of brotherhood in Islam). Rammal Khan told me that whenever a group of Tablighi workers approached him, he would take them into the room filled with the instruments. The reformist thinking on music found immediate expression by designating the instrument room ‘a place of *harām*’ (a place of prohibited practices in Islam)<sup>22</sup> where *namāz* cannot be offered. Nonetheless, Rammal Khan used his music as a starting point for dialogue. He always raised the question of his livelihood to counter the reformist ideologies. He would often say to the reformists, ‘This is my work. If I leave it, my family and I will die.’<sup>23</sup> He further used to say to the workers of the Tablighi Jamaat, ‘Give me a regular income, and I will leave the work, and join you.’<sup>24</sup> The rationale behind his arguments was thus not a theological one but was entangled with his everyday life and survival. The Tablighis could not respond to these questions by Rammal Khan.

In the late twentieth century, the *jajmānī* system experienced varying degrees of disintegration, with some social relations completely breaking down, while others persisted or underwent changes based on the relevance and resilience of specific occupational groups. Although the Meos currently strive for a Sunni Muslim identity and practice, it was challenging for the bards to abandon their profession in favour of Islam, as advocated by the Meos and Tablighi clergies. For the bards, their livelihood was at stake. In contrast, the affluent peasant status of the Meos allowed them to embrace a purist Islamic movement without jeopardising their means of living. In such circumstances, the construction of a ‘new’ religious identity was intricately intertwined with everyday livelihood concerns.

In order to fill the void left by the cessation of patronage, bards like Harun, Yusuf and Rammal Khan sought alternative avenues for employment. For example, when the Manganiyar community (literally, beggars) in western Rajasthan lost the support of the Rajputs, they turned to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the global music industry to maintain their cultural traditions (Ayyagari 2012, 2022).<sup>25</sup> Likewise, many Mewati bards economically survived by performing at local Hindu cultural-religious events. Festivities and ceremonies like *jāgrans* (‘all-night awake’), Hindu marriages and the birth of a child provided new performance opportunities. More renowned artists, though few in number, had opportunities to perform at local, national and even international levels. The second-grade artists formed music bands to perform whenever opportunities arose. This new pattern of employment differed from the traditional patronage system, in which bards were tied to Meo families regardless of their talent. Instead,

bards were now hired for various social, religious and political events, such as singing *bhajans* at temples, performing for foreign tourists and dignitaries in palaces and recording songs for the thriving local music industry.<sup>26</sup> While these activities helped sustain the culture and the artists to some extent, they could only support a small number of musicians, and the new opportunities also demanded new technical skills.

### THE STYLE OF RENDITION

As their main vocation was to sing and perform folktales, successive generations of the Jogi and Mirasi bards were trained to become oral performers and storytellers. Their tales were passed on from generation to generation, by either fathers or grandfathers, through memory and recital practices. Both minstrel castes used to sing and recite the two great 'Hindu epics', the Mahabharata (locally known as *pandun ke kade*, the couplets of the Pandavas) and the Ramayana, called *lankā kī caḍhāī* (the raid on Lanka) for their Meo patrons. Both the performers (Jogi and Mirasi) and the audience (Meo) were Muslims who enjoyed the cultural performances of the two 'Hindu epics'. Likewise, there are multiple oral recitations of the Meos' experiences with colonial and pre-colonial states, folk tales of feuds between the local Meo heroes and other symbols of power, and the relationship with other castes and groups in the area. The bardic castes sang mythic instances of Meo bravery in relation to pre-colonial, colonial and princely states (Mayaram 1997a, 2003, 2004a). The Meos were centrally placed in these performances by virtue of being the patrons of these bards.

Apart from narrating and performing the Meo community's history, the Jogi and Mirasi castes were also singing accolades about a living person to increase their earnings during some particular events. Mewat's history and important Meo political events had been recorded orally for the past several centuries by these groups in the form of what I call the 'human archive'.<sup>27</sup> The effectiveness of this human archive was entirely dependent upon the capability of the bards to recollect folktales and stories that amounted to several hundred hours of narration.

Most of these folktales belong to a genre called *mewāti bāt*<sup>28</sup> (see Mayaram 2003: 318–19) and are sung in the form of couplets designed and performed in the manner of a dialogue with an audience. The *mewāti bāt* is closer to the prevalent western Indian oral genre of the *vāt* (tale), widespread

across Rajasthan. In Mayaram's words, 'the Rajasthani *vāt* means "tale/epic" or "prose narrative" [and] is rooted in Sanskrit *vārtā* (accounts) traditions' (Mayaram 2003: 315–19). A closely related term *vrāt* stands for 'fasting'. A *vrāt* (meaning vow/fasting) also has religious significance when females in South Asia undertake a vow of fasting in the name of a particular deity, either for the well-being of the entire family or most commonly for the long life of their husbands. In Sanskrit *vrāt kāthās* (fasting tales), a story is often recited by a Vyas<sup>29</sup> (pundit) to an audience mostly made up of religiously fasting women (Wadley 2005: 36–52). These fasting ceremonies usually end in the evening, with the audience listening to a tale attributed to the particular god in whose name the fast was observed. During the narration of the folktale, a *vrāt kāthā* requires the audience to intervene actively from time to time. This is done simply by nodding or hailing the god's name—a gesture signifying the audience's attentiveness. Likewise, the Mewati and other bards employed similar methods<sup>30</sup> in most of their folktale performances in a style of performance known as *dohā-dhānī sāīli* (*dohā dhānī* style).<sup>31</sup>

In classical Hindustani music, the rendition of various *rāgs* conveys the feeling (*ras*) or desire of spiritual and worldly love. In the folk music of Rajasthan, as Shalini Ayyagari (2012: 13) shows in the case of the Manganiyars, the feeling is expressed through the *dohās* or 'the poetic couplets'. In the *dohā dhānī* style of folk music, the Mewati bards fused a classical music genre *rāg dhānī* with *dohā* (couplets). Thus, it shared features of both classical and folk music and thus attains what Peter Manuel (2015: 82) terms 'an intermediate sphere'—a betwixt and between zone neither fully classical nor fully folk music. All the traditional folktales of Mewat including the telling of the Indic (Hindu) epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, corresponded to the *dohā dhānī* style of folktale renditions. Generally, the couplets (*dohā*) were sung by a lead singer, followed by an in-depth description (*dhānī*) of each couplet. The second part (*dhānī*), which was both sung and narrated description, was always accompanied with instrumental music, melodies and rhythms.

While the traditional style of oral storytelling used the *bāt* form, the new songs in which passive resistance ideas surfaced belong to another popular folk music genre called *rasiyā* (literally, 'epicure'). More particularly, the songs belonged to the Mewati-style *rasiyā*—a subgenre. Historically, the Mewat has also been influenced by the Braj literary and music cultures. Inspired by the myths of Krishna and Hindu themes of love and devotion, the area has also experienced an intermingling of diverse cultural traditions. Although the region is now heavily influenced by Islamic culture and religion, it retains

the zest of the vernacular Braj tradition and culture. *Brajbhāṣā*, the language of the Braj area of Mathura, Agra, Aligarh and Bharatpur, was primarily associated with vernacular literature and music about the god Krishna (Busch 2010a, b). Mewat constituting a neighbouring region of the Braj was heavily influenced not only by the Braj language and culture but also by mainstream ‘Hindu’ (Indic) traditions.

The Braj region has also been a leading centre in the development of numerous folk poetry and folk musical styles. Inspired by the themes of *krishnaite bhakti* (devotion) and romantic tropes about the love of Radha and other peasant girls, the folk art of these bards intersected the divine and the profane world.<sup>32</sup> In the *milieu* of the love affairs of a god, the folk genre *rasiyā* spread into adjoining local areas in diverse local forms. In modern times, a new form of *rasiyā* has been adopted into saucy and spicy songs depicting mundane feelings about love, teasing and erotic desires (Manuel 1994, 2015). *Rasiyā* when sung has the power to evoke love, romance and erotic emotions. However, the Mewati bards did not model their current songs on the spicy style but instead modelled their prosody in the traditional manner of *rasiyā*. Performed in this way, *rasiyā* can generate powerful feelings in one’s heart. Using the traditional-style *rasiyā* prosody in Mewati *bāt* form, all the new songs performed by the bards expressed messages of religious unity and the transcendence of religious differences.

It is noteworthy that during the recitation of the initial verses of a ‘Hindu’ religious text known as the *śhiv katha* (the story of Shiva), the Jogi singers would chant the name of Allah and the Prophet as a gesture of reverence. They then invoked their *ustād* (master or teacher) who had taught them their artistic skills. These Islamic invocations were then followed by the main attractions of the night—singing, dancing and reciting Lord Shiva’s wedding story:

*avval soch allāh, pahal mābūd manāū*  
*mitā jikr kā fīkrā, gīt hajrat kā gāū*  
*mero dile umange daryāv, hūkam mūrśad sū cāhū.*

Allah is the supreme idea, first and foremost [I] worship him  
 the concern of mentioning him is fulfilled, now I sing the song of  
 Hazrat [Mohammed]  
 My heart is full of passion like the ocean, it seeks the permission from  
 my teacher.<sup>33</sup>

The only instrument these balladeers used was the Bhapang (see Figure 7.1), which looked like Shiva's *damru* (a small hand drum) but produced different melodies. The name of the instrument involves a curious blend of the Vaishnava, Shaivite and Nath *panth* (path/orders). The first Hindi word *bha* stands for Bhole (another name for Shiva), *pa* for pundit means the god Vishnu, and *ga* for guru Gorakhnath—whom all the Jogis consider their patron saint. Like the Muslim Jogis, the Mirasis commemorate the patron Hindu goddess Bhavani (Durga) before beginning a performance. The Mirasis used to offer homage to Bhavani at her shrine at Dhaulagarh near Lachmangarh in the Alwar district of the Mewat region (Mayaram 1997b: 7).



**FIGURE 7.1** A Bhapang

Source: Yusuf Khan.

The stories about the origin of the Bhapang provided further insights into the origins of the Muslim Jogis and the various synthesising processes of 'Hinduism' and 'Islam'. For instance, in the following couplets, Allah is responsible for creating the Hindu god Shiva in the process of creating life on earth:

*yā duniyā me dekho bhapang kahā su āyo,  
dharan nahī, ambar nahi, nāthe surajbhān  
śeṣani pe kutbī tāro, huye ujādo bhān  
śankar ko allah-tālā ne pahlo but banvāyo  
yā duniyā me dekho bhapang kaha sū āyo.*

See brother! How Bhapang originated in this world,  
there was neither the earth and the sky nor the sun and the moon  
only the polar star gleamed above  
first of all, Allah made the body of Shankar [god Shiva]  
See brother! How Bhapang originated in this world.

Thus, their art derives sacred inspiration from the (Indic) symbolism of Hinduism, involving strands from diverse religious traditions: Nath, Shaiva, Vaishnava and Islam. In the Jogis' performative traditions, elements of both 'Hinduism' and 'Islam' figure prominently. For instance, the verses above bring together the elements of both religions, dealing with the demands of monotheism through the creation of Shiva by Allah. Shiva is popularly known as *bābā ādam* (literally, grandfather *ādam*, the first man sent to the earth by Allah in Islamic theology) and thus has a high status in the narratives of Jogis. This kind of reverence for Shiva translated into musical renditions of genealogical narratives that indirectly connected the Jogis to the Nath and Shaivite traditions:

*bhapang-2 sab kare, bhapang hai apne hāth  
bha se bhole, pa se pandit, ga se gorakhnath  
gorakh ke augarh huye, augarh ke ismail nath  
vākī hum aulād hai, suno hamarī bāt.*

Everyone iterates Bhapang-2, Bhapang is in our hand,  
'Bha' for Bhole, 'pa' for Pandit, 'ga' for Gorakhnath,  
Augarh became disciple of Gorakh, of whose disciple was Ismail Nath,  
We are the sons of him, listen to our words.

The Muslim Jogi tradition suggested that Ismail Nath (note the Muslim first name) is responsible for founding the Muslim Jogi sub-order within the Nath belief system. Through their performances, the Muslim Jogis connected with both Shiva and Allah at the same time. But I argue here that their choice of ascetic ideals to articulate their collective self is rooted in their marginalised socio-economic experience. In contrast to the Meos' claim to *kṣatriya* status, the Muslim Jogis believed that their community descended from the Hindu ascetic god Shiva and his disciple Gorakhnath. Gorakh, a revered guru of the Nath order, advocated the renouncement of household life and material attachments in order to be a true *yogi*. Such ideas are essential to the Nath tradition. In Nath folklore, there are also stories of kings (Bharthari and Gopichand) renouncing their kingdoms to join the order, and Gorakh saving his Guru Machhendranath from sexual and worldly desires, signifying the futility of the material world (Gold 1999). Individuals were inspired to leave household and material attachments behind to attain the true meaning of life. Although these ascetic ideals of the Nath order were transformed by the insertion of a household category among the Naths (Gold 1999; Gold and Gold 1984), the inspirational values still run high among the lower socio-economic groups, including peasants.

Both kinds of Jogi bards, the Hindu Jogi and the Muslim Jogi, derive their identity from the Nath cult of the Shaivite tradition (see Briggs 1998 [1938]).<sup>34</sup> Oral traditions claim that Ismail Nath settled in the Bengal region where there was an inevitable confrontation between him and the goddess Kamakhya of tantrism or the Shakti cult:

*kangrū des me kumkā devī jāne duniyā sārī,*  
*jahan base Ismail jogi*  
*sahja jogan ko hai ismail, vāki carcā bhārī*  
*kumkā devī kū bas me karke, jogī muslim dharam calāyo.*

Kumka devi lives in Kangru *dēs* [region], the whole world knows,  
 In the same region settled Ismail Nath Jogi,  
 Ismail is the son of Sahja Jogan, people talk a lot about him,  
 After controlling Kumka Devi, he spread the religion of the Muslim Jogis.

Thus, a Nath *yogi* was responsible for the dissemination of the Muslim Jogi form of Islam. Kamakhya Devi, whose main shrine is in Assam in eastern India (historically part of colonial Bengal), was famous for black magic and

*tāntric* practices (Fell 2000; Urban 2001).<sup>35</sup> Apart from this, the differences between religious communities seem not to have been organised in terms of religious identities. For instance, according to the origin story of the Jogi bards, the emergence of Islam among the Muslim Jogis took place in Bengal under the patronage of Shiva, when Ismail Nath controlled the negative forces of the goddess Kamakhya, an idea which is rooted in the Indic nature of the creation of sacred things.

Colonial ethnography put the Meos in the category of ‘lax Muslims’ (Mayaram 1997a, 2004c). Their blended culture gave them a complex religious identity. Like the Meos, the Jogi and Mirasi bardic castes have a blended religious history and a liminal identity. For instance, as already mentioned, the Muslim Jogi community, like the Hindu Jogis, worships both Shiva and the founder of the Nath order, Gorakhnath. All Jogis consider Shiva and Gorakh as their patron god and lord (Nath) respectively. Similarly, the Meos still consider themselves as the descendants of the Hindu gods and mythological figures. Therefore, a significant aspect in the histories of the Meo, Jogi and Mirasi communities is the issue of the religious synthesis of some common strands of Hinduism and Islam in their life, marked by shared narratives of the Indic world.

## NEW SONGS OF HINDU–MUSLIM COMPOSITE HERITAGE

In 2010, an interview with the highly renowned Bhopal artist Umar Farookh Mewati<sup>36</sup> was published in a local edition of a newspaper (see Figure 7.2).<sup>37</sup> The headline in Figure 7.2 reads, *dil me Allah, kanth me Shiva* (Allah in heart, Shiva in voice). Umar belonged to the Muslim Jogi caste. He and his many associates of both Hindu and Muslim Jogi caste backgrounds voiced the idea of religious indifference. They advocated Hindu–Muslim unity through lyrical artistic expression. The lyrics of the poetic songs sung by Umar Farookh and his associates can be seen as passive resistance and a desire to be attached to a Hindu–Muslim dual cultural heritage. The lyrics of the new songs by these bards constitute a type of hidden transcript.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, power can manifest in various ways and not solely through negative means that lead to physical resistance. It can also have positive outcomes by ‘generating forms of pleasure, systems of knowledge, goods, and discourse’ (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42). In the same manner, the bardic castes produced songs in order to create a discourse based on positive messages. The





FIGURE 7.2 The newspaper cutting of Farookh’s interview

Source: Yusuf Khan.

new songs concern the question of power. But they also take a high moral position by creating a tone and language that express resistance through harmonious messages. They do not openly criticise Muslim reformism, Hindu fundamentalism or political behaviour. They take an anti-hegemonic stand and express a firm belief in a shared religious culture. For instance, the song cited here eloquently raises the issue of artistic concern about religious differences. It respectfully adds a different perspective to the divisive nature of current socio-political processes:

*idhar ko masjid, udhar ko sivalā  
 ek pe tasvī, ek ko mālā  
 vahī ālif, vahī kakke main  
 vahī kāsī, vahī makke main*

*ranj ko samjhe nahī*  
*yā rab kya andher hai*  
*bāt to kuch bhi nahī bus samajh ka pher hai.*

this side mosque, that side temple [of Shiva]  
 one is bowed [as in during *namāz*], the other is offered garland [*mālā*]  
 the same sound in both *ālif* and *kakkē* [Urdu and Hindi alphabets  
 respectively]  
 he is in Kashi [Banaras], he too in Mecca  
 no one understood this difference  
 O, my lord! what is this darkness  
 Nothing is this issue except a matter of understanding.<sup>39</sup>

The new songs of the bards have evoked the notion of religious synthesis against a background of Hindu–Muslim antagonism. The lines cited earlier suggest a spiritual-philosophical interpretation of the oneness of God. Despite differences of symbols, the couplet assumes a fundamental commonality across religious divides. The lines of the couplet have themes of presenting the true human essence beyond narrow religious classifications. In the changed circumstances, the bards opted to express their uneasiness and concerns of religious disciplining through their artistic medium and folk musical compositions. After the loss of their traditional audience, current performances raise issues not only of identity and cultural heritage but also of livelihood. Significant in these changes is the way that the medieval Indian themes of the Nath, Sufi and Bhakti religious streams<sup>40</sup>—which conventionally stressed upon the conception of transcending Hindu–Muslim religious divides—are moving towards the expression of a discourse of religious synthesis. Despite their compulsory identification with Islam now, the bards continue to advocate for a Hindu–Muslim composite heritage. By expressing messages of universal righteousness in their songs, the Mewati bards indirectly questioned the ascendant Islamic purist ideologies and reform groups on the one hand and the divisive Hindu versus Muslim politics on the other.<sup>41</sup> From such oppositions, the Muslim bards drew on an Indic theme and the symbolism of Hinduism to represent a ‘Muslim self’ in contrast to the rhetoric and symbolism of the unfamiliar version of Islam (the Tablighi one) that represents the ‘Muslim other’.<sup>42</sup>

The songs for local consumption were circulated in audio-visual forms through recordings on mobile chips, pen drives and CDs. These songs did not express the resistance theme, as this risked attracting the wrath of the Meo patrons. The local music industry also did not record songs containing messages of passive resistance or promoting religious unity by celebrating mixed religious practices. Such songs were unlikely to find consumers. For these bards, remaining in the Meos' favour was still necessary for political and social reasons, even if it means not performing anymore.<sup>43</sup> Only the more famous bards could afford to voice passive resistance in the songs. They performed most often for non-Meo gatherings in large cities and urban areas. Employed to display the distinctiveness of their culture, the singers would start by emphasising the unique religious blending.

Unless otherwise shared with a documentary film-maker or given to a researcher like me, the lyrics of the songs are restricted for personal use only. They are sung on specific occasions to express special feelings about the vitality of the bards' art and livelihood, the value of religious unity and above all culture. Anonymous and obscure references in the couplets are open to multiple interpretations by different audiences. For a gathering in cities, the references could refer to Hindu-Muslim politics at the national level. To someone familiar with the area, the lyrics could express uneasiness about Tablighi Islamic theology. For the bards themselves, as many of them recalled in interviews, the lyrics are both a reference to their own plight and a message to both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>44</sup> While different groups may interpret the lyrics differently, what is obvious to all listeners is the uneasiness the lyrics evoke about the ideologies of religious extremism, puritanism and divisive politics.

The loss of the Meo audience has without doubt negatively impacted the bards' lives. Nonetheless, their main concern within the subsistence economy remains to articulate positive messages of their Indic historical tradition. What are these characteristics of Indic life? And how do they help the bards navigate the pressure of reformism or the politics of Hindutva and Islamic reformism? One of the songs written by Umar Farookh, but also widely performed by other minstrels, is helpful in unpacking these Indic meanings. Before reciting a few lines on the tune of Bhangang, Umar Farookh used to make a disclaimer: 'I am from a Muslim Jogi family, but I am a follower of Shiva too. I keep a special feeling in my heart'. Somebody from the group

would then ask him, ‘What is that special feeling?’ and the musicians would begin the song. The couplet generally starts like this:

*ki hum hātho me gītā rakhēngē  
aur sinē main qurān  
hum kābā bhī rakhenge aur kāsi bhī  
aur mel badhāye āpas main  
vo dharm aur imān rakhenge  
hindūyo ka mandir, muslmāno kī masjid  
sikhō ka gurudvārā, īshaiyo ka girjā  
yahā girjā, vahā girjā  
idhar girjā, udhar girjā  
aur ye cāro usi ke dar hai  
cāhe jidhar girjā.*

that we will keep the ‘Gita’ in our hands  
and the ‘Quran’ in our hearts  
we will keep Kaaba [Mecca] as well as Kashi [Banaras]  
and that which promotes harmony  
is the religion and faith we will keep  
temple of Hindus, mosques of Muslims  
the gurudwara of Sikhs, the church [*girjā*, literally, ‘bow down’ in  
Hindi] of Christians  
you can bow down here or there  
bow this side or that side  
all four are his abodes  
bow down wherever you want.<sup>45</sup>

While this appears to be a well-thought-out strategy to please a Hindu audience, it also served as a stage from which the bards could voice a contrary opinion to that of the powerful. Thus, neither the bards’ former patrons, the Meos, nor the Tablighi Jamaat were confronted directly. Hindu gatherings would cheer when they heard Muslims invoking the name of Shiva. The bards’ critique of their Meo patrons’ version of religious purity is thus performed not to Meos but to a different audience. In practice, the critique did not reach the ears of Meos. Irrespective of the change in the patrons’ behaviour, the bards still respect the social-religious relationships. However, contrary to the Meos’ stand, they emphasise

religious righteousness that is universal and thus needs no organised religion.

Among the possible explanations for the lyrics of the couplets above is the Muslim bards' contemporary concern for religious unity and brotherhood. It is entirely ahistorical to assume a historical past without violence or skirmishes happening. Violence, feuds and struggles have been present in all historical epochs. At a very fundamental level, the bards of Mewat reflect the reality of 'new age religious intolerance' (Nussbaum 2012).<sup>46</sup> This new age of religious intolerance is more exposed in the wake of growing consciousness of the two fundamental cognate categories of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims'. Interest in this intolerance was renewed in India after the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992. Like all other social identifications, religious identification seeks solidarity in what could be called the burden of fundamental commitment created under the impression of false consciousness. 'False consciousness' alludes to the broader processes of contemporary Hindu-Muslim politics. Fear and danger, for example, are predicted to be existing all the time citing some previous instances of actual violence such as the partition violence of 1947. The fear of such violence is used by social, religious and political groups like the Tablighi Jamaat, the Arya Samaj, the Congress and the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). However, in such situations, this false consciousness created by political and religious elites makes it seem that there is danger and fear all the time in everyday life. The Mewati bards respond to this fear manufactured by political-religious elites. The bards refer to the mixed origin of cultures to present a rich and complex heritage. Their cultural references demonstrate a long tradition of resisting institutions and institutional ideas. The couplet cited earlier is not merely a reflection about the past but also draws material from the cultural context of medieval India, Nath, Bhakti and Sufi themes to resist the ideological and political power domination in the present.

Previously, the bards did not face the same danger of making their patrons unhappy. Their messages about transcending religious boundaries drawn from Nath, Sufi and Bhakti teachings could, in those times, find easy expression in highly personalised and self-referential couplets. More importantly, the songs of the Mewati bards take a didactic approach and respectfully present the issue of the religious divide without radically denigrating or mocking the stand of the Meos and their ideological and social power. Their art—and their need to earn a living—requires that they remain civil in expressing disagreements and anxieties. However, their songs are neither completely hidden nor entirely offstage. But these days they are

performed for a different audience. More importantly, the very act of making, producing and performing these didactic songs provide a domain through which the performers can convey messages they cannot express directly, and they do so by disguising them in an artistic form.

The lyrics of orally performed new songs, thus, act as a strategic tool. Their performances thus help them express issues of religious identity and everyday livelihood through poetic artistry. Scott comments throughout his writings on the passive resistance of subordinate groups (or subalterns) through means such as folk songs, gossip, jokes and mimicries. Such domains create a hidden transcript which can be displayed openly (Scott 1990: 77–90) but which often works indirectly behind the back of power.

Sometimes, the tone of a language in an artistic work shows the intensity of the resistance, with a more direct verbal demonstration of anger. In the aforementioned case, however, the philosophical orientation of the lines does not compromise the civility of the art. Despite the existential danger to their folk art, the bards maintained a civil discourse. In response to the ideologies of the religious fundamentalists, the Jogis and Mirasis performed passive resistance and acts of dissent through a positive articulation of their worldviews. The bards' desire to regain a lost audience is not as evident in the songs as is their foregrounding of the question of shared culture and identity.

Another song written and compiled by the Jogi bards (recited and provided to me by Yusuf, the son of Umar Farookh) is worth citing here. It evokes a sense of an ideal human (*insān*). Many saints including Kabir, Nanak, Gorakh, Ravidas and Tukaram evoked in their teachings the notion of a 'human' who represented neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. Similarly, in their lyrics, the bards evoke the idea of a true human being who could be anyone based on good actions. The lines of the song below imply a lesson about Hindu–Muslim unity relevant to current circumstances. Yusuf revealed the song lyrics as follows:

(i) *ser-i-hindū kā kahnā hai ki musalmān burā hai*  
*muslim bhī yahī kahtā ki hindū hī burā hai*  
*nā hindū burā hai, nā musalmān burā*  
*aa jāyē burāī pe to vo insān burā hai*  
*ye hī hindū–muslim me rad-o-badal hai*  
*udhar ābe-zamzam, idhar gangā jal hai*  
 (ii) *idhar bhī to sita pe tohmat lagī thī*

*udhar bhī to maryam pe ungalī uthī thī*  
*udhar abu zayd paidā huyā thā*  
*idhar kans, ravan bhī paidā huye thā*  
*udhar bhī khudā pe sitam dhāne vāle*  
*idhar bhī prabhu ko burā kahne vāle*  
*duniyā me dekho kitna-kapat chal hai*  
*(iii) mandir bikate, masjid bikte*  
*śaikho, brahaman, mullah bikte*  
*masjid ke vo cande bikte*  
*gitā bikatī, qurān bikte*  
*yahā tak ki vo imā(n) bikte*  
*madīna ka vo pānv biktā*  
*gangā kā vo jal bhī biktā*  
*dono ko milākar dekho, dono ek jal hai.*

*(i)* The Hindu patriot claims Muslims are bad  
 Muslims also iterate that Hindus are bad  
 neither Hindus nor Muslims are bad  
 the one who commits bad actions is a bad human  
 this has been falsified/altered [*rad-o-badal*] among Hindus and  
 Muslims  
 that side is the well of Zamzam, this side the water of Ganga  
*(ii)* this side too was Sita blamed  
 that side too was finger pointed out at Maryam  
 that side Abu Zayd was born  
 this side too Kans and Ravana were born  
 there are people on that side who enrage *khudā* [god]  
 there are people on this side too who ridicule *prabhu* [god]  
 See, how much cheating and fraud prevail in this world  
*(iii)* temples sell, mosques sell  
 Sheikhs, Brahmins, and Mullahs sell  
 the donations of that mosque sell  
 the Gita sells, and the Quran sells  
 Even that integrity sells  
 The water of Madina sells  
 that Ganga's water too sells  
 put two together and see, both are the same water.<sup>47</sup>

What is significant in the song is the distinction between ‘we’ and ‘they’ in the form of ‘this side and that side’. The division is not articulated along the lines of religious self-identification of the bards with Islam. Despite being Muslims themselves, the Muslim Jogi and Mirasi bards and writers position themselves as representing Hindu religious symbols and culture in comparison to the Islamic self. The symbols of the Arab or Islamic world in the song—Abe-Zamzam, Maryam, Abu Zayd, Khuda, mosques, the Quran—are put into the category of ‘that side’. The parallel is the symbols of religion and culture of ‘this side’: Ganga’s water, Sita, Kans and Ravana, temples, the Gita and so on. The two categories of ‘this side and that side’ are not simply geographical differences between the Indian and the Arab world but express the Muslim bards’ embeddedness in ‘local’ religious symbols. The lyrics express a culturally deep-rooted Hindu, or more particularly an Indic, derivation of notions of ‘good and bad, sacred and defiled, justice and injustice, and honesty’.

The bards’ self-identification with ‘this side’ is represented through familiar mythic-historical characters like Kans, Ravana and Sita. Traditionally, the bards sang or narrated stories about the virtues of these figures in the cultural performances of Mewati folk tales and folk songs. While proud of their Muslim identity, through songs like the one mentioned earlier, the bards suggest that what is more meaningful to them is to maintain the tradition of Hindu–Muslim synthesis.

Another notable point in the song is the issue of female sexuality. Maryam and Sita are paralleled with one another to compare shameful instances where women’s chastity has been questioned in both religions. Here, ‘Maryam’ is the name Muslims use for the Christian religious figure and the mother of Jesus called ‘Mary’. The tradition of associating Christian figures with Islam is an old one. But the Tablighi Jamaat used this reasoning to link such figures to an Islamic claim for Mohammed’s (570–632 CE) preceding era, thereby incorporating the figures of other religions under Islam. According to this logic, many of the gods, pious beings, messengers and charismatic authorities of other religions are among the thousands of prophets sent by Allah before the final one who brought Islam. In Islamic belief, therefore, Maryam (Mary) is not a Christian figure but the mother of one of their prophets. The Muslim bards’ conscious choice of Maryam to represent an instance where a woman’s chastity was questioned, as happened with Sita in the Ramayana, is also an attempt to juxtapose parallel symbols of different religions and their cruel attitude to women.<sup>48</sup> The parallel of the two women figures is also mediated by the discursive rationale of Islamic



theology, considering both women related to Muslim ‘prophets’: Maryam, the mother of Jesus, and Sita, the wife of Ram.

The Tablighi Jamaat tries to deny the claims of the Meos and Jogis to be descendants of the Hindu gods Ram, Krishna and Shiva by placing these gods in the long list of prophets within Islam.<sup>49</sup> I noted an immense respect among the Meos for the two Hindu gods, Krishna and Ram. The Meos like to invoke the names of Krishna and Ram as *autāris* (incarnated ones) and as their prophets. During sermons in religious gatherings, the Mullahs of the Tablighi Jamaat advised the Meos to abstain from using the language and signs of disrespect for these two and other Hindu gods.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, among Mewati Muslims the Hindu god Shiva is remembered as *bābā ādam* (the Christians’ Adam). Hindu as well as Mewati Muslim mythology claims that Shiva was the first creation to be sent to the earth by Allah. In Mewat, these gods and the Muslims’ stories related to them are thus a symbol of the Indic world. The pertinent question here is what messages the bards are trying to convey through their songs. They express the assumption that religions are human constructs, and that the ultimate truth does not lie in our religious identities but in our actions. In response to the reformists and other seen and unseen pressures at social-political levels, the bards invoke the idea of being a good human first. For the bards, Hindu and Muslim identities can be likened to water from separate sources. Once the waters are blended, it becomes indistinguishable as to its true origins. Similarly, the lyrics convey the idea that Hindus and Muslims, like water from distinct sources, are fundamentally the same in essence. When kept within separate containers, just as how society categorises people, the waters can be associated with either the stream of the Ganga or the water from the well of Zamzam. However, once they are mixed, it becomes impossible to distinguish the two different sources of its origins.

## NOTES

1. The fundamental concern of resistance is power. Power in a Foucauldian sense is not static; it is a historically evolved and culturally perpetuated phenomenon dispersed through various means. Power relationships are hierarchically organised around groups and individuals in any social-economic set-up (Foucault 1982: 777–95).
2. The Jogi and Mirasi are two different communities; they used more or less the same oral resources in their folk artistry. Socially different from the Mirasis,

who were ‘untouchables’ for the Meos 30 years ago, the Muslim Jogi caste enjoys a comparatively higher social status. The Jogi community exists across the religious divides as Hindu Jogis and Muslim Jogis, unlike the Mirasis, who are only Muslim. Until recently, the experience of both the Jogi and the Mirasi communities has been of extreme poverty and marginality contrary to the experience of the Meo community. Both communities were dependent on the Meos under the patron–client (*jajmānī*) system.

3. It was a passive resistance for various reasons. Many bards felt uneasy to voice their opinions in front of Meos, but they were vocal about these issues behind their back. Many musicians were also unhappy because Meos used to coerce them to stop playing an instrument in front of a gathering. There were various such instances where these bards were not allowed to perform during marriages.
4. I am using the term ‘political economy’ more in the sense of cultural materialism here to understand the link between the Meos, their peasant/landholding status, centrality in the *jajmānī* (patron–client) system and the implications of the reformist politics of Meos upon the subordinate groups such as the Muslim Jogis and Mirasis, and for Meo and non-Meo women. The disintegration of the *jajmānī* system has both positively and negatively affected religious practices in Mewat.
5. The use of the term ‘domination’ here does not mirror the concept of power in the Foucauldian sense of power as a medium of coercion and oppression. Rather, I am using the term in the Hegelian perspective of social relations, in which domination also operates in cultural terms in subtle ways.
6. See a list of all the winning MLAs so far from three legislative assemblies here: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/assemblypolls/haryana/ferozepur-jhirka.html>, <https://www.mapsofindia.com/assemblypolls/haryana/nuh.html>, <https://www.mapsofindia.com/assemblypolls/haryana/punhana.html>, accessed 3 June 2018.
7. Interview with Harun, 15 July 2016, Alwar, Rajasthan.
8. This period has now been reduced from four or five days to one night or so, which has also negatively impacted the bards’ profession (Mayaram 2003: 318).
9. Interview with Harun.
10. The policies of economic liberalisation expanded the market and made it more service oriented and created conditions for the movement of labour. Both foreign and domestic investment increased after the liberalisation process. However, the impacts of this policy on the poor and its role in increasing income inequality in India are still debated.

11. James Scott is the pioneer thinker on the issue of everyday resistance to power through passive means. His numerous published works analyse the hidden meanings in the actions of powerless groups. Borrowing from his understanding from the book, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Scott 1990), the purpose in this chapter is to look for messages of resistance in the new songs of the minstrel castes in the wake of pressures like religious discipline and intolerance.
12. Thus, the public transcript requires a certain degree of civility, a willingness to smile at others and a little acting. Contrary to the public transcript, the hidden one exposes the reality of the social relationship between the dominant and the subordinated. When the mask of the hidden transcript is removed, both the powerful and the subordinated are found to use opprobrious expressions about one another, mostly off stage and within their respective like-minded group members.
13. Scott's (1990) observation holds true when he states that the public transcript often necessitates the exchange of pleasantries and smiling at others, even if our personal opinions or evaluations of them do not align with our outward behaviour during social interactions.
14. Hegel makes it quite obvious that 'the social relation in which domination operates is always based upon some cultural form as a practice, and this form is inherently contradictory' (Miller, Rowlands and Tilley 1995: 64). In analysing the master–slave relation, Hegel (1910: 182–88) shows that power is dialectic in nature.
15. The Bauls are a liminal group like the Meo Muslims and the Muslim Jogis. They are considered 'low caste' and are despised for their anti-institutional behaviour. They play an instrument known as the *ektara*. Engaged in esoteric practices, the Baul songs emphasise religious universalism.
16. These works cite Baul songs that necessarily express a different viewpoint to institutionalised religious orientations. For example, one Baul song reads, 'The Lord is fixed at the door of devotion; whether Hindu or Muslim, in his vicinity there is no discrimination'. A similar Baul song of Lalan Fakir, the head figure of the sect, points out a Kabir-like critique of sectarian motives,

If you circumcise the boy, he becomes a Muslim—what's the rule for women, then? I can recognise the Brahman man from his sacred thread; but then how am I to know the Brahman woman? Tell me, just what does caste look like? I've never seen with these eyes of mine, brother. (Capwell 1988: 129)

17. Urban (1999: 29) writes that ‘the Bauls were among the most immediate object of this reformist attack. The apparent licentiousness, immorality and religious syncretism, not to mention the unorthodox, seemingly antisocial and antinomian lifestyle of the Bauls represented, for the reformers, the worst corruption of Islamic culture by Hindu polytheism and idolatry’.
18. I am thankful to Mirasi Sadab Khan for providing this song. The song was a part of *kriṣṇ-līlā* stories that he performed for.
19. The Hindu/Sanskrit word *gurūji* and the Urdu word *ustād* have the same meaning, that is, ‘teacher’ or ‘master’.
20. Informal conversation with Rammal Khan.
21. The English translation is mine. For more information about the poet Shafiq Jaunpuri, visit [www.rekhta.org](http://www.rekhta.org), accessed 10 March 2018.
22. The Islamic prohibition or *harām* categorises permissible and prohibited actions. Polytheism is a strictly prohibited act in Islam. It is assumed that keeping idols and images generates faith and causes one to deviate from the devotion to Allah. Rammal explains that he was undergoing moral policing at the hands of regular Tablighi Jamaat visitors.
23. Informal conversation with Rammal Khan.
24. Ibid.
25. The Manganiyars is a community of bards in west Rajasthan like the Jogis who depended on Rajput patrons.
26. These opportunities to perform were also limited and available to well-connected bards.
27. The reason I call the Jogis’ and Mirasis’ memories a form of ‘human archive’ is simply because of their ability to remember tales of historical and mythological importance. Their tales and songs do not differ from an official state archive. If the memory of the folk singers could be contested, so could the facts kept in archives. I interviewed many bards and singers who helped me to understand not only Meo and Mewat history but also their tradition of telling folktales and folklore.
28. *Mewāti bāt* is a style of folktales rendition. The term *bāt* means the lines in quotidian dialogue or conversation.
29. Vyas is a Brahmin scholar specialised in reading religious stories and tales. He is invited to narrate *vrat kathās* (fasting tales) such as *satyā nārāyan ki kathā*, a story widespread across north India and attributed to Hindu god Vishnu (Wadley 2005).

30. To continue with this style of oral reciting, the Jogi and Mirasi engaged in dialogues on the stage, with the lead singer posing a question and somebody in the group offering an answer.
31. The term *dohā-dhāni* is made up of two words: the term *dohā* means ‘couplets’ and the *dhāni* stands for ‘a form of classical *rāg* music’.
32. For instance, the *rītī* poetry and the folk music genre *rasiyā* originated and prospered in the Braj region. More details about *rītī* poetry can be found in Allison Busch’s works (2010a: 267–309, 2011).
33. This and the following are excerpts cited from my interview with Bhangang artists of the Muslim Jogi community. I am immensely indebted to Yusuf Khan and his father—the late shri Umar Farook Mewati—an internationally renowned Bhangang artist, for providing me with detailed information about the Muslim Jogis, their history and performance. The collection of *dohās* or more particularly the *Mewāti bāt* was translated by me with the assistance of a Mewati friend, Aadil. Fieldnotes, August 2016.
34. For more information on the Nath order, the classic work of G. W. Briggs is important. Although much has been written primarily about the Hindu Jogis, Briggs’s work provides a detailed account of different kinds of Jogis found all over India and Nepal. Briggs’s work also helps in understanding various nuances of the Jogi (Nath) cult.
35. This opposition to a Shakti cult appears to be a narrative strategy to differentiate the practices between them and the Naths, even though the Jogi traditions valued both religions equally. In this case, however, there is an opposition between the two cults; thus, these oral traditions show the differences were sect based instead of religious communities.
36. Umar Farookh wrote a good number of new songs. He formed a group with many Mirasi and Jogi friends to promote the art. The group has performed at numerous national and international events. After his sudden demise in 2017, his son Yusuf is determined to take the art to a new level. I conducted a few meetings and interviews with Umar Farookhji and his son Yusuf. I am immensely indebted to both for not only providing materials for this chapter but also their assistance in making me understand the material and their careful translation of certain words.
37. ‘Rajasthan Patrika’, Alwar edition, 10 February 2010, Bharatpur Hindi Pustakalaya, Bharatpur.
38. Less obvious forms of resistance were overlooked in the writing of these Subaltern scholars. In contrast to the Subalterns, the famous works of James

Scott (1990, 2008) on themes such as ‘weapons of the weak’, ‘domination and resistance’ have led to considerable writing and debate about the passive resistance of the marginalised. But in this context, too, there is little scholarly engagement with the issue of passive resistance to religious reform ideologies conveyed through the artistic means of folk songs.

39. The song was given to me in both handwritten and video forms. Translation of songs was done with Yusuf’s help. Any error in the translation is entirely mine.
40. Apart from singing local versions of the great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, the bards mostly sang life stories of various religious figures of Nath, Bhakti and Sufi backgrounds. These themes were very prominent in their songs that I would unfortunately not explore here due to the thematic limitations.
41. Hindu reformist groups such as the RSS, the VHP and the Arya Samaj see these bards’ performances of ‘Hindu’ religious epics and songs as a connection to Hinduism. Therefore, they target them to convert to Hinduism. This aspect of the impact of Hindu reformist politics on Jogi and Mirasi musicians is not dealt with in this chapter because it primarily concerns with Islamic reformism. The impact of Hindu reformist politics upon Muslims is explored elsewhere (see Kumar 2022b).
42. The bulk of the fieldwork for this chapter was carried out among those Muslim Jogi and Mirasi singers who still practice their art in Alwar. Much of their lifestyle still oscillates between symbolism of art that draws on Hinduism (for example, praying to the goddess of knowledge, Sarasvati) and their personal religious faith (Islam). Not only do these groups see themselves as rooted in a caste society but also consider their local practices such as venerating Hindu gods and goddess as a completely natural phenomenon. Thus, their indigeneity creates a different Muslim self, one that is rooted in local practices. An idea of the ‘Muslim other’ appears in their narratives, indicating a version of Islam alien to India.
43. The bards are seen as Muslims. The Meos are social and political elites among Muslims in the area. So, it is imperative to remain in the Meos’ favour for several reasons.
44. This was expressed by many bards and singers such as Jumme Khan, Umar, Yusuf, Rammal Khan and others.
45. This song was collected from Yusuf. The song is also available in a documentary film; see Sudhir Gupta, ‘Three Generations of Jogi Umer Farookh’. The documentary was filmed in 2010, by the Public Sector Broadcasting Trust &

Prasar Bharati, <http://www.cultureplugged.com>, accessed 17 April 2018. The English translation is taken from Sudhir's documentary.

46. I am using the term 'the rise of new religious intolerance' to refer to the emergence of a different kind of religious consciousness. This consciousness was shaped as much by the British colonial forces as postcolonial politics.
47. This song was provided by Yusuf. Again, the translation is mine completed with Yusuf's help.
48. In the epic Ramayana, Sita was condemned by the god Ram as an unchaste woman when she returned from the captivity of the demon king Ravan. She had to undergo a fire test to prove her innocence. Similarly, Maryam's chastity was questioned when Jesus was considered to be conceived before she married Joseph.
49. The Tablighi Jamaat claim that before the arrival of Prophet Mohammed, Krishna and Ram were among the millions of messengers sent by Allah.
50. This is not to suggest that such practices among the Meos have disappeared entirely but that the majority people now accept the Tablighi Jamaat's version of Islam. As this study has shown, many mixed practices are still alive but have significantly shrunken compared to the past.