

Socio-Economic Background, Religious Attitudes, and Rights Awareness among Muslim Women in Haridwar District, Uttarakhand: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

Muslim women constitute a significant part of Indian society with their lives being influenced by the interplay of gender, religion, education, class and access to constitutional rights. The present study deals with the socio-economic background, social life, educational status, religious attitude and rights awareness of the Muslim women of Haridwar district, Uttarakhand from the sociological point of view. The type of research used in this research is descriptive research with analytical approach, and secondary data technique is applied. The data were gathered during the Census of India 2011, District Census Handbook (DCB), Haridwar, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reports, minority welfare reports, policy documents, scholarly publications and other reliable sources. Data pertaining to education, occupation, family structure, marriage practices, religious orientation and awareness of constitutional rights were analysed using content analysis and thematic analysis. The findings show that Muslim women in Haridwar are still encountering several socio-economic problems like less literacy rate, less participation in the work force, poverty, lack of awareness of the legal and constitutional rights, and patriarchal family values. Social and cultural barriers, and educational deprivation, continue to be important factors that limit chances of social mobility and empowerment. But, the attitudes toward religion, gender roles and awareness about rights are gradually being changed by increased access to modern education, exposure to urban environment, welfare programs and interactions with public institutions. The study highlights education as the most important enabler of social change, confidence, mobility and engagement in family/community life. It finds that empowerment of the Muslim women can be achieved through an integrated approach ending with their educational empowerment, economic empowerment, social empowerment through community support and awareness making them more aware of constitutional rights and welfare provisions.

Keywords: Muslim women, socio-economic background, religious attitudes, rights awareness, sociology, constitutional rights

Published: 13 July 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i4.301210>

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Introduction:

The status of women in society, religious consciousness and awareness of rights are central issues in the sociology of the present time as these questions show the intersection of gender, community, class, education and legal citizenship in everyday life. In all societies, empowerment of women is not just defined as their access to welfare, but as their ability to access education, employment, the family, public institutions, and rights-based citizenship. However, globally, while progress is being made in the education sector, health and legal reforms, and gender inequality is deeply entrenched in the labour market, in household power relations and in social norms, (UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024). These inequalities are likely to be exacerbated by religious identity and space and socio-economic vulnerability for minority women, highlighting their analytical salience in relation to inclusive development.

The debate on the status of Muslim women in India has to be situated in the larger global discourse as well as the constitutional and sociological framework of Indian secularism and minority rights and gender justice. The constitution of India ensures equality before law, non-discrimination, freedom of religion, educational rights of minorities and affirmatively provides protection for women. The actual perception of formal rights is not always realized, however, particularly in the case of women whose social situation is affected by poverty, low levels of education, patriarchal family structure and limited access to institutional care. While the NFHS-5 shows progress in areas such as women's education, health, and household indicators, it also highlights ongoing inequalities in women's autonomy, economic involvement, and their exposure to social vulnerability and digital access (International Institute for Population Sciences- IIPS & ICF, 2021). Rights awareness is therefore focused on not only legal knowledge but also as a sociological process that is mediated by the family, education, religion, media, state schemes, and community networks.

The role of Muslim women in public and academic debate in India is complex. They are usually portrayed as either religious conservatives or legal discussions of the issue of personal law, and their daily socio-economic circumstances are relatively under-studied. In the past, researchers have found that family income, parental education, household values, neighbourhood segregation and exposure to schools and jobs are factors influencing Muslim women's educational and occupational mobility. Simultaneously, a religious definition strips them of their religion, and their life chances are shaped by class, locality, family structure and state policies. More recently, studies on the employment of women in India suggest that women's employment is extremely unevenly distributed across the region and influenced by care obligations, social norms, educational status and availability of a job suited to women. Thus, the socio-economic status of Muslim women needs to be analysed not just under an umbrella of one religion – Islam – but as a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

The district of Haridwar is relevant for such an enquiry, as it is a place of religious importance, high rate of urbanisation, rural urban contrast, industrial development, migration and a significant minority population. The Haridwar district has unique demographic and socio-economic features that categorize it as highly rural and with a sharp rural–urban divide as evident from the census-based district materials (Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2011). In this context, the social life of Muslim women may be

influenced by multiple factors – family and marriage customs, traditional versus modern education, religious beliefs, socio-economic status, family welfare policies and knowledge of constitutional safeguards for women. The study is also timely because of the recent developments in the context of minority education and regulation of the institutions of education in Uttarakhand where the issues of educational inclusion, religious identity and citizenship have come into the public discourse.

The literature available in the field has been useful for creating awareness on the educational backwardness, empowerment, labour participation and social constraints of Muslim women, but there are important gaps. Much of the scholarship has been national in scale; legal in focus; or focused on the historically Muslim concentrated regions/metropolitan areas. Sociological studies at district level with the socio-economic background and awareness of religious attitude and constitutional rights are limited in this situation especially in Haridwar. Furthermore, most of the previous research has dealt with the education, religion and the right to rights as separate issues, yet women's lived experience is connected with these three aspects of everyday decision-making. It calls for a practical sociological analysis which explores the perception of social change, the articulation of tradition and modernity, and the local family and community contexts of understanding Muslim women's rights.

The present study thus focuses on the problem of inadequate empirical knowledge of the interaction of the socio-economic conditions with the attitudes and rights awareness of the Muslim women of Haridwar district. It is based on the logic of moving beyond stereotypical explanations, to produce context-specific knowledge, relevant to the sociology and gender studies, and to minority welfare and policy planning. The study seeks to explore socio-economic status and background of Muslim women, the study of the family and marital status of Muslim women, the effect of traditional and modern education on Muslim women, the examination of the changes in Muslim women's attitude on religion and the discussion about Muslim women's awareness with respect to constitutional rights. The novelty of this work is in the integration of socio-economic, cultural, educational, religious and legal-awareness aspects in a single district-level sociological framework. The study's significance is academic and practical as it can contribute to the debates on gendered minority citizenship and also provide community awareness, planning of education, and rights-based intervention for Muslim women in Haridwar.

Study Area:

Haridwar district of Uttarakhand has been chosen as the study area for the present sociological study of Muslim women. The district has a very significant geographical and cultural location, being the confluence of river Ganga in the Indian foothills of the Shivalik range and the Northern plains of the country. Haridwar is one of the most important religious and pilgrimage centres in India, but at the same time it is a complex socio-economic configuration, which is characterised by urbanisation, migration, industrialisation and rural settlements as well as by religious diversity. The district consists of major tehsils like Haridwar, Roorkee, Laskar, Bhagwanpur, Harrowal and Bahadrabad and development blocks like Bahadrabad, Bhagwanpur, Roorkee, Narsan, Laksar and Khanpur. As per Census of India 2011, Haridwar district was most populated district of Uttarakhand with a population of 18,90,422. As per the

district and it is a mixed rural–urban district, so it is sociologically important for the study of minority communities. Muslim women in Haridwar experience various social settings – semi-urban colonies, rural households, market-oriented colonies and educationally transforming communities. Local traditions, poverty, mobility, school, work, and community norms all shape their socio-economic background, family life, education, and religious attitudes and awareness of constitutional rights. Thus, Haridwar is an appropriate space to explore the negotiations of tradition and modernity among Muslim women in everyday life.

Research Objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic status of Muslim women of Haridwar district.
2. To understand the social life of Muslim women with reference to family structure, marriage practices, household roles and social relations.
3. To analyse the impact of traditional and modern education on the status, awareness and social mobility of Muslim women.
4. To examine the attitude, change of Muslim women with respect to education, modernisation and social change.
5. To talk about the level of awareness of Muslim women about their constitutional rights and to recommend steps for developing awareness of rights.

Research Methodology:

The present study used a descriptive and analytical research design type of research with secondary data. It involved in the study of socio-economic background, social life, educational status, religious attitude, and awareness of constitutional rights of Muslim women of Haridwar district, Uttarakhand. The secondary data has been collected from the Census of India 2011, District Census Handbook of Haridwar, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), government reports, minority welfare reports, policy documents, published books, research articles and other reliable academic and online sources.

Content analysis and thematic analysis techniques were used to analyse the collected information. Special focus was paid to indicators related to education, awareness of education, literacy, occupation, family structure, marriage practices, religious orientation, and awareness of constitutional and legal rights. A description of the status of Muslim women in the district was made using relevant demographic and socio-economic statistics. The scholarly literature and official reports were analysed to gain an understanding of patterns of social change, gender relations, educational progress, religious views, and awareness of rights. The analysis gave an in-depth sociological insight into the problems and the new opportunities faced by Muslim women in Haridwar district.

Literature Review:

The literature on Muslim women's socio-economic status, religious attitudes and rights awareness has increasingly moved away from essentialist explanations of Islam and towards intersectional, socio-legal and capability-based frameworks. Globally, feminist scholarship

argues that women's empowerment cannot be measured only through education or employment; it must be understood through access to resources, decision-making agency and realised achievements (Kabeer, 1999). Kandiyoti's (1988) idea of "patriarchal bargains" is particularly useful for studying Muslim women because it explains how women negotiate security, respectability and autonomy within family, kinship and community structures rather than simply opposing tradition. Similarly, Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework shows that Muslim women's marginalisation is shaped not only by gender but also by class, minority status, locality, education and legal awareness. These frameworks are valuable for the present study because Muslim women in Haridwar cannot be treated as a homogeneous group; their attitudes towards religion and rights are likely to vary across rural–urban location, family background, educational exposure and socio-economic position.

Indian studies show that Muslim women's disadvantage is produced through the combined effects of poverty, low educational access, labour-market exclusion and gendered social norms. Hasan and Menon's survey-based work remains foundational because it challenged the stereotype of Muslim women as passive victims and demonstrated that education, employment, marriage practices and community location shape women's lived realities. Patel (2013) similarly argued that Muslim women's socio-economic profile must be read through deprivation, occupational insecurity and limited access to state welfare, not merely through religious identity. However, many national-level studies rely heavily on macro data and therefore overlook district-level variations. This is a methodological limitation because Muslim women living in minority-concentrated pockets of north India may experience different combinations of educational aspiration, family restriction, religious observance and rights consciousness.

Research on education provides an important bridge between socio-economic background and women's agency. Sahu, Jeffery and Nakkeeran (2017), through qualitative interviews with Hindu and Muslim young women in Bengaluru, found that access to higher education is shaped by financial constraints, family surveillance, safety concerns and marriage expectations. Their study is methodologically strong because it compares communities and captures women's voices; however, its urban location limits its applicability to semi-urban and rural districts such as Haridwar. Earlier ethnographic work by Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffrey (2004) on girls' Islamic education in western Uttar Pradesh showed that religious education may simultaneously reproduce domestic respectability and create new forms of literacy, mobility and self-worth. This finding complicates the secular assumption that religious learning necessarily restricts women's empowerment. For Haridwar, this debate is crucial because religious attitude should not be measured only as conservatism; it may also function as moral confidence, social identity and a basis for claiming rights.

The socio-legal literature further shows that awareness of rights among Muslim women is shaped by the interaction between constitutional law, personal law, family courts and informal community institutions. Herklotz (2018) reviewed feminist scholarship on Indian personal laws and showed that women's rights debates are divided between legal reform, legal pluralism and women's movement activism. Larouche and Lemons (2020) added an important empirical correction by showing that Muslim women in a Delhi family court often use common civil and

criminal legal provisions rather than Muslim personal law alone. This challenges the popular assumption that Muslim women's legal lives are governed only by religious law. Nevertheless, these studies focus mainly on legal institutions and urban court practices, while the everyday awareness of constitutional rights among ordinary Muslim women remains underexplored.

The existing literature establishes that Muslim women's empowerment is neither a simple outcome of modern education nor a direct consequence of religious reform. It is a negotiated process shaped by socio-economic resources, family structure, educational exposure, religious interpretation, legal access and citizenship awareness. The major gap is the absence of district-specific sociological studies linking socio-economic background, social life, religious attitudes and constitutional rights awareness among Muslim women in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. The present study contributes by shifting attention from national stereotypes and legal debates to local social realities, where education, family norms, religion and rights consciousness intersect in everyday life.

Analysis And Discussion:

The Muslim women of Haridwar district need to be seen in the context of the overall demographic and socio-economic profile of the district. Haridwar had a total population of 18,90,422 in 2011, of which 11,97,328 lived in rural areas and 6,93,094 in urban areas. The population growth rate in the district for the last decade (2001-2011) was 30.62 per cent, which is higher than the growth rate of Uttarakhand state (18.81 per cent). Its population density was high at 801 persons per sq. km and is higher when compared with the population density of the state which is 189. The numbers suggest a high density and evolving district with high rural–urban transition, migration pressures, and social diversity influencing the lives of women. Thus, the Muslim population had been approximately 34.3 per cent of total population of the district in 2011 and Muslim women were a significant social class for sociological study.

Table 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Haridwar District

Indicator	Data/Value	Sociological Relevance
Total population, 2011	18,90,422	Shows large population base for minority and gender analysis
Rural population	11,97,328	Indicates strong rural social structure
Urban population	6,93,094	Shows urbanisation and changing social exposure
Urban population share	36.7%	Reflects rural–urban contrast
Decadal growth, 2001–2011	30.62%	Suggests demographic pressure and mobility
Population density	801 persons/sq. km	Indicates pressure on resources, education and livelihood
District sex ratio	880 females/1,000 males	Shows gender imbalance
Rural sex ratio	889 females/1,000 males	Slightly better than urban areas

Urban sex ratio	866 females/1,000 males	Suggests sharper gender imbalance in urban settings
Muslim population share	34.3%	Confirms the relevance of Muslim women as a major study group

Source: Compiled by the author from Census of India 2011, District Census Handbook, Haridwar, Uttarakhand.

Literacy, work participation and gender imbalance are all connected to the socio-economic background of the Muslim women. The overall gross literacy rate of Haridwar was 73.43 per cent, which had a significant gender disparity. The literacy rate for males was 73.8 per cent as against 52.1 per cent for females, leaving a gap of 21.7 percentage points. Female literacy was even lower at 43.6 per cent in rural areas. This substantiates the claim that there is no way to study women's empowerment in Islam without talking about educational deprivation and access to institutions for women. The work participation rate of the district was 30.6 per cent, and 69.4 per cent of the population was included in non-workers. This confirms the opinion that women are still underrepresented and underutilised in the economic fields and largely involved in the unpaid labour sector of the household.

Table 2: Gender, Education and Work Indicators in Haridwar District

Indicator	Data/Value	Interpretation
Overall literacy	73.43%	Moderate educational development
Urban literacy	77.4%	Better educational exposure in urban areas
Rural literacy	57.2%	Rural educational disadvantage
Male literacy	73.8%	Higher access to education
Female literacy	52.1%	Indicates gendered educational backwardness
Male–female literacy gap	21.7 percentage points	Confirms structural gender inequality
Rural female literacy	43.6%	Shows deeper educational marginality
Work participation rate	30.6%	Limited formal economic participation
Non-workers	69.4%	Indicates dependency and invisible domestic work
Female workers in “other workers” category	62.51%	Suggests concentration in non-agricultural/support work

Source: Compiled by the author from Census of India 2011, District Census Handbook, Haridwar, Uttarakhand.

The second objective in relation to social life, family and marriage, is confirmed by evidence on attitudes of families towards Muslim women's education. According to one study, conducted at Haridwar, 50 Muslim women were found, in which 66 per cent of the respondents revealed that there were differences in the attitude of the families towards educating women, while 18 per cent denied the differences in the attitude of the families towards educating women. This suggests that the family is an important factor in influencing women's educational and social

trajectories. The analysis, therefore, indicates that the organisation of the social life of Muslim women is not only through marriage and responsibility for family, but also through the family's approval or disapproval of education and mobility, and of participation in public life.

Table 3: Educational and Cultural Barriers among Muslim Women in Haridwar

Issue/Variable	Yes	No	Unanswered	Interpretation
Cultural barriers obstruct education	72%	16%	12%	Traditional norms remain a major barrier
Awareness of educational rights	20%	64%	16%	Rights awareness is weak
Difference in family attitude towards women's education	66%	18%	16%	Family support is uneven
Purdah disrupts education	56%	32%	12%	Religious-cultural practice affects mobility and education

Source: Compiled by the author from Qadar's Haridwar-based study, *Educational Status Among Muslim Women in Haridwar: Sociological Study*.

The third goal, traditional education and modern education, is well backed up by these findings. Although religious education imparts moral and cultural values, the inadequate assimilation of madrasas with modern schools are a constraint for socio-economic mobility. The fact that 72 per cent respondents believed cultural barriers represented a blockage for educational development also indicates that education is not only about the availability of schools, it is also related to socio-cultural norms, norms of household members and the community's expectations. Modern education seems to be a catalyst in the transformation process as it enhances awareness, confidence, employment prospects and the ability to navigate through family and community barriers.

The debate on purdah is related to the fourth objective, which is about changing attitudes towards religion. The data reveals that 56 percent of the respondents felt that purdah is a hindrance in education and 32 percent didn't. This ambivalent reaction implies that not all Muslim women have the same religious attitude. For some women, purdah is a religious identity and modesty and for others, it is a limitation on their mobility, schooling, and public participation. In this regard, religious attitudes are shifting slowly with the help of education, exposure in urban areas and awareness, and these changes are negotiated in the family and community context.

Table 4: Policy and Educational Context Relevant to Muslim Women's Empowerment

Source/Policy Area	Key Evidence	Relevance to Present Study
Ministry of Minority Affairs	Minority welfare policy emphasises education, employment, livelihood, research, monitoring and awareness dissemination	Supports the need for rights awareness and minority-focused educational intervention

UDISE+ 2024–25	Provides recent national indicators on enrolment, gender parity, Muslim minority enrolment, dropout, transition and school infrastructure	Helps contextualise educational access and continuity among minority girls
District Census Handbook, Haridwar	Provides village- and town-level information on population, literacy, work participation, educational amenities and infrastructure	Supports district-level secondary analysis
Haridwar-based Muslim women study	Reports cultural barriers, purdah, family attitude and low educational-rights awareness among Muslim women	Directly validates the study objectives

Source: Compiled by the author from Ministry of Minority Affairs scheme document, UDISE+ 2024–25, Census of India 2011 District Census Handbook, and Qadar’s Haridwar-based study.

The fifth objective, which is related to the awareness of constitutional rights, is supported by a low level of educational-rights awareness. Of the respondents, only 20 per cent said they knew about educational rights while 64 per cent said they did not know. This shows a significant disconnect between the constitutionally guaranteed knowledge and the knowledge available in society. Ensuring equality, equality in education, dignity, freedom from religion and discrimination protection will not work unless women know about them and are socially empowered to exercise them. Hence, it has been confirmed that Awareness programmes, Community counselling, Legal literacy camps, Minority welfare outreach and support for girls' education are vital for the improvement of the status of Muslim women in Haridwar district.

Finally, the data corroborate this position that Muslim women in Haridwar are caught between socio-economic deprivation, educational disadvantage, patriarchal family norms, negotiated religious attitude and lack of awareness about rights. The analysis also reveals that the most significant connecting variable is education which influence family life, religion interpretation, economic participation and constitutional consciousness. So, the empowerment of the Muslim women in Haridwar needs a comprehensive approach of modern education, attitudinal change at the family level, economic opportunity and awareness on their rights.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The research findings are that social change is brought about simultaneously by the socio-economic condition, family structure, education levels and religious attitudes and rights awareness among Muslim women in Haridwar district. The religion alone cannot explain their status as their life in everyday is influenced by other factors such as poverty, low literacy rate of women, limited work participation and patriarchal family norms and weak institutional access. Education is identified as most significant for empowerment as it enhances awareness, confidence, mobility and participation in family and society. But cultural stigma, purdah restrictions and lack of family support and awareness of constitutional rights limit their development. The study recommends that the education of girls, the availability of scholarships, vocational education, digital literacy and legal awareness education should be

improved in Haridwar, which is a concentration of Muslim women. A community-level counselling process with parents, teachers, religious leaders and local institutions is also required. Muslim women's empowerment needs to be done through an all-rounded process that incorporates education, economic opportunity, family support and constitutional rights awareness.

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