Chapter-I

Introduction
The role of education as a key to human resource development and economic growth
is well recognised in contemporary society. Education not only broadens the mental
horizon of people but also promotes socio-economic well-being of family, community
and nation. It is an important means to achieve social mobility and move upward in
the social ladder. In Indian society, well known for its cultural diversity, we can see
sharp multiple inequalities and disparities in education and economic development in
terms of caste, creed, tribe, religion and gender despite prolonged struggle and
affirmative actions by the state to reduce social inequalities in independent India. Not
all social groups have equal access to available resources and opportunities
particularly in educational field. Women, in general, constitute the most deprived and
disadvantaged section of Indian society who have always faced multiple barriers in
getting educational opportunities. In independent India, however, women have made
significant strides by entering in every field of education. Even then, a large number
of women still remain restricted to vicious circles of family expectations, gender
discrimination and stigma. There are significant differences in women’s specific
status across regions, caste and class, communities and religions (Ministry of Women
and Child development, 2007).

Muslim women are among the most educationally backward and marginalised
section of Indian society who lag behind not only their male counterparts but also
women from all other communities. Thus, they find themselves in a doubly
disadvantaged position as women and as members of Muslim community which is not
only largest minority community in India but one of the most educationally and
economically backward community too as indicated by various surveys and
government reports like Gopal Singh Report (1983), National Sample Survey (2007-
08), Sachar Committee Report (2006) and Rangnathan Committee Report (2007) etc.
However, it is not true that the entire Muslim community is educationally backward
nor is it a fact that there are no educationally backward sections among non-Muslims.
Certainly, upper class Muslims would be, more or less, as advanced as their peers in
other communities in education as well as other walks of life. But, probably it is true
that among Muslim the backward section is larger in proportion to their population
than it is among non-Muslims. There is a big gap in the field of education between
different religious groups and Muslims are most backward among all religious
communities in India. Such variations in educational field at inter and intra
community level make one realise that education in any society is deeply rooted in its historical past and must be analysed in terms of its cultural requirement in the past and future aspirations. A brief historical overview of education among Muslims in pre- and post-independent India, at this juncture would help to understand complexities involved in educational disparities across communities.

Education has always been an integral part of Indian culture from earliest times. Formal education in India began as instructions in religious scriptures, observance of rules and regulations, rites and customs, performance of prayers and other injunctions prescribed by religion (Salamatullah, 2009). Before the advent of Muslim in India, education was considered to be monopoly of Brahmans. They excluded the lower caste people from acquiring knowledge. Thus, the common people were deprived of education. With the advent of Muslims in India, the Muslim rulers fought against this mind set prevalent among the masses (Ali, 2013).

The Muslims, when they first settled in India, tried to replicate the education system then prevalent in the Islamic countries. It was not, however, a true copy but a pale resemblance of the original. Muslims drew inspiration from Prophet Muhammad’s famous command “seek knowledge even if it is available in a distance country like China”. They established a widespread network of educational institutions- schools and colleges. All of these were community institutions run by the people without any interference from the government in power. Income from properties endowed by nobles, traders, Ulema (learned elite) and rulers provided financial resources for these institutions. Education in these institutions was free. Indigent students were provided even with residential and boarding facilities (Salamatullah, 2009). The reign of Akbar, during the sixteenth century, stands out as a unique period in the history of Muslim education in India. Akbar was the first monarch to set up a separate department of education and paid attention to the education of his subjects irrespective of their caste, colour or creed. Both Hindus and Muslims were taught together though a part of their respective courses of studies was separate catering to the needs of their specific faith (Salamatullah, 2009:12). However, during the Mughal period, less importance was attached to women’s education in comparison to that of men. Therefore, very inadequate provisions were made for development of mass education of women. Education was confined to the royal and high class sections of the population and to some extent to the middle class.
One of the most important factors that slowed down the progress of women education on a mass scale during this period was the practice of seclusion which restricted the freedom of movement of women and confined them to their homes preventing them from attending educational institutions. In cases, where they were allowed to study they were compelled to discontinue their studies due to widely prevalent custom of early marriage (Menon, 1981). After the disintegration of the Mughal Empire it was Shah Waliullah of Delhi, who spearheaded the first movement among Ulema and launched a powerful campaign to recapture the glory of Islam and regain political power. A prosperous merchant of Hooghly, Haji Muhsin, was the first to help establish an institution for secular education at a higher level. An earlier effort in the sphere of secular education was the establishment of Delhi College in 1824 which came into existence due to the transformation of the Madrassa Ghaziyuddin-an institution founded in 1692 for the study of oriental languages and became the nucleus of distinguished Muslims and scholars who aimed at bringing about revolutionary changes in traditional ideas and beliefs (Ashraf, 1982). Gradually, centres of higher learning were spread all over the country. Among the Hindus, higher education was based on Sanskrit learning and it was mainly confined to Brahmins. Persian, still being the official language, was popular equally among Hindus and Muslims. The social and culture life of the upper classes among both Hindus and Muslims were in many respects different from the life and culture of the lower classes (Mujeeb, 1967).

Both the Hindu and Muslim system of education were fairly widespread at the beginning of the nineteenth century but very few children especially girls got the benefit of education. However, in Bombay it was found that Muslim families had a system of educating their daughters at home and the same was true of well-to-do Hindu families. The indigenous institutions suffered a severe blow during British rule. Amongst many reasons for the elimination of indigenous schools from the educational scene of the country, the most important being the destructive role of the British rule in India that cut at the very root of the economic and social structure from which these schools obtained their sustenance (Salamatullah, 2009). The indigenous system of education gradually faded away due to lack of grant which according to the policy decision of 1835 could not be given to any other type of educational institutions other than those which catered to western education. Moreover, in 1844, the government linked proficiency in English language as an essential qualification of all public
employment which, in turn, led to the popularity of English-medium schools and forced more and more students to leave the traditional schools.

It is noteworthy that the response to the new system of education introduced by the government was not uniform among the Indian people as a whole. Different sections of the people reacted to it differently depending on the impact of British rule on their economic and social conditions of life. This was, further, complicated by the fact that the schools founded by the Christian Missionaries were the forerunners of government institutions and they combined the teaching of English with the teaching of Christianity, despite the so called policy of religious neutrality of the government (Dutt, 1949). Throughout their history, Muslims had been accustomed to the idea that the real basis of all knowledge was a faith in the values which were included by their religion. Now, they were confronted with a serious threat to this conviction. Several religious movements that arose in the wake of the emergence of the East India Company as a ruling power reinforced their animosity towards all things that emanated from the government (Chandra, 1971). On the other hand being suspicious of the loyalty of the Muslims, the British government was already unfavourably inclined towards them. In the revolt of 1857, in which many Ulema participated actively, the Britishers made the Muslims the main target of persecution and reprisals. Their leaders were liquidated, their lands confiscated and their means of subsistence—crafts and professions—destroyed (Faruqi, 1963).

All this culminated in the economic and educational backwardness of the Muslim community as a whole. The non-Muslims however, utilized the educational facilities provided by government schools and those established by the Christian Mission and by the Hindus themselves, and supported by the new system of grant-in-aid. The Muslims, by and large, did not care even to utilize this opportunity due to the same curriculum prescribed for the government schools as well as for the aided institutions which the Ulema characterised as repugnant to their beliefs and traditions. Though this was the situation prevalent almost all over northern India in the south, the situation was somewhat different. This was true of Bombay Presidency, where the prosperous Muslim trading community spread the benefits of modern education among Muslims. The impact of British rule, along with the infiltration of western culture and education, on the traditional society of India found expression in several ways. Notable among them have been socio-religious reform movements influenced
by western values of democracy and rationalisation of modern education. There was also a parallel movement which was mainly conservative and backward-looking in nature. Among Hindus, the Brahmo Samaj was founded by Raja Rammohan Roy, one of the early propagator, in 1829 on the twin pillars of reason and the Vedas and Upanishads. The Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, undertook the task of reforming Hindu religion in northern India. Most of these social reformers worked for education of both men and women. Reform movements among Muslims, on the other hand, were slow to appear. The extremist and the liberal attitudes in the Muslim community towards western culture and modern education led to the establishment of Darul-Ulum at Deoband and M.A.O. College at Aligarh. The political and social roles of both institutions were self-contradictory as the former was politically progressive but socially conservative for it opposed foreign rule tooth and nail but doggedly stuck to the traditional way shutting itself off from the fresh air of change. The latter on the other hand, was socially modern in its outlook, but politically reactionary as it tried to nurture a scientific attitude towards social reality but served to strengthen the hands of the foreign rulers (Salamatullah, 2009:26-27).

Historically in India, women’s education was viewed by most communities as unnecessary. Large section of society and especially Muslims were satisfied with existing traditional forms of education to women and did not favour modern education for women in government schools. Women’s education was first introduced in the three presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and subsequently in the provinces (Zoya, 2005). Promotion of education among Hindu women was an important aspect of much of the early social reforms among Hindus for the upliftment of the status of Hindu women. The need for promotion of modern education among Muslim women, who also needed modern education, was not felt by Muslims due to the ascendancy of the British which had driven the Muslims in to the grip of political and socio-economic despair and psychological insecurities. Thus, while Hindu women were gradually breaking shackles through education, Muslim women’s education did not receive required attention. Therefore, they never caught up and lagged behind (Saiyed, 1992).

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan emphasised that education for women was to be undertaken after Muslim boys had been educated. He insisted on the fact that no satisfactory education can be provided for Mohammadan families until a large
number of Mohammandan males receives a sound education (Hasan and Menon, 2005:6). Reform movements to improve educational condition of Muslim women developed later under the leadership of few individuals like Shaikh Abdullah and his wife Begum Wahid Jahan in Aligarh and Karamat Husain in Lucknow and Allahabad. The emergence and spread of women’s education in India in the pre-independent period is therefore, the legacy of British colonialism and nineteenth century reform movements among Hindus and Muslims which led to an intensive debate particularly on purpose and form of women’s education.

By the early twentieth century the initial opposition to women’s education was overcome with preference of modern education over home education. As a result, the efforts to educate Muslim girls increased significantly in independent India but these efforts were hindered due to opposition to co-education, preference for separate schools for girls and the desire to preserve Muslim cultural identity (Hasan and Menon, 2005:16-17).

Thus, Muslim community as whole and Muslim women in particular lagged behind their counterparts. In contemporary times, too, the educational status of Muslim women is not comparable to women belonging to other religious communities. There are various reasons for educational backwardness of Muslims women which include economic, cultural and social. In effect, there was a steady increase in the number of Muslim boys in the schools, but the proportion of girls attending school was very less in number (Mondal, 1997).

The literacy rate among Muslims as indicated by 2001 census was 59.1 percent which is far underneath the national average of 65.1 percent. Dropout rate among Muslims is the highest at the Primary, Middle and Higher Secondary level. 25 percent of Muslim children in the age group of 6-14 have either never gone to class or have dropped out. Just 17 percent Muslims over the age of 17 years have completed matriculation when compared with 26 percent for all socio-religious groups. The gap between Muslims and other socio-religious groups increases as the level of education increases. As indicated by Sachar Committee report (2006) the gap between education of Muslims and advantaged section has broadened since independence because Muslims have not possessed the capacity to react to the test of enhancing their educational status. In spite of the fact that the educational attainments of Muslims
have enhanced over the years, it has been at a steadier pace than other socio-religious groups (Government of India, 2006).

Available literature on Muslim women clearly demonstrates that educational status of Muslim women in India is inferior as compared to women belonging to other Socio-religious Group. Khan (1993) highlighted that educational status of Muslim community is very poor as compared to others. He identified poor economic condition and traditional mode of occupation as the major cause of their low level of education. The study pointed out poor economic status of the families does not allow parents to send their children to school. As a result children from poor economic background had highest percentage of drop out. At all levels of schooling the percentage of girls was found to be very low. Archnachaturvedi (2004) argued that the educational condition of Muslim women in India is quite depressing. They are suffering from higher rate of illiteracy and low rate of school enrolment at all levels. Majority of the Indian Muslim girls remain confined within the four walls of the house and taught to read the Quran. They receive primary education in Maktabs (an Arabic word meaning elementary school) that offers education on religious matters and, usually, neglect the modern education. Hasan (1993), in his study showed that Muslims are not responding adequately to the expansion of educational facilities in India and they are educationally very backward. The main reason of their backwardness is weak economic base. This has resulted into a vicious sphere of illiteracy, poverty, lack of interest in education and conservative attitude. Nasrin (2013) argued that the condition of Muslim women is different today from yesterday in all walks of life. They are coming out of their purdah and are partaking in greater tasks pertaining to national reconstruction. However, the educational status of the Indian Muslim women is still very low because of their economic conditions, lack of honest leadership in the community, lack of availability of schools, and lack of resources in the available schools, more drop outs and lack of interest in education. These factors create problems in the way of women education. Qamar Jahan (1998) found out that the socio-economic and educational status of Muslim women is very low. Restriction on Muslim women on the pretext of integrity is the main reason to suppress them. Quranic guideline is not completely practiced in the present day society. Muslim women face the problems of social restriction which is imposed on them by the society in all walks of life, including education.
The studies on Muslim women clearly show that the educational status of Muslim girls and women remain far more backward even after 68 years of independence. There still exists a great disparity between educational level of Muslim women and their counterparts belonging to other Socio-religious (SRC) groups. The social and educational backwardness of Muslim women has led to discussions and debates concerning Islam and women among intellectuals. The backwardness of Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular is generally analysed in terms of their strict adherence to religious values which is believed to prevent them from getting access to educational opportunities. Adequate attention is not paid to socio-structural referents. “With a few notable exceptions, the spotlight has always been on the role of religion in Muslim life and culture, largely producing sociologies of religion (often distorted and in the abstract) rather than a sociology of Muslims. In this perspective, Muslims were typically seen as a monolithic entity in terms of Islam that is all-pervasive and primarily prescriptive, ignoring data on the heterogeneity of Muslim communities, their culture, and their social organization” (Hasan and Menon, 2004:1-2). Such misconceptions about Muslims and Muslims women persist because of ignorance and misunderstanding about basic tenets of Islam and lack of empirical studies concerning Muslims particularly Muslim women.

Most of the studies focused on the role of religion in determining social position of women. Other conceptualizations which might reverse the position by examining the role of other institutions have largely been ignored. This has generated the need for adopting a sociological perspective which might explain the interplay of different institutions in a society. As Parsons has suggested that survival of any social system may be thought of as being conditional upon four functional requirements: Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration and Pattern Maintenance. The first refers, broadly, to economic task; the second to political ones; the third is concerned with maintaining harmony and solidarity; and the fourth with the continuation with basic value patterns.

A particular social institution (religious or educational) may primarily be concerned with any of these tasks but most of the institutions are involved in the performance of all these tasks. Such an approach can enable to examine not only the role of religion but, more importantly, as to how role of religion is conditioned by other social institutions. Moreover, the importance of understanding the ideal and
contextual realities of Muslim women in determining their role perspective and consequent self-concept has hitherto not been realized (Siddiqui, 1992). Thus, it can become pertinent here to discuss the textual and contextual realities of Muslim women’s lives.

Women and Education in Islam

The status of women in Islam is one of the significant themes that have attracted the attention of scholars, intellectuals and litterateur for quite some time. Quranic injunctions and Hadith clearly demonstrate that men and women are made from a single soul. For instance, Quran says:

“He (God) it is who did create you from a single soul and therefrom did create his mate, that he might dwell with her (in love) (Qur’an 7:189).

The Creator of heavens and earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves (Qur’an 42:11).

And Allah has given you mates of your own nature, and has given you from your mates, children and grandchildren, and has made provision of good things for you. Is it then in vanity that they believe and in the grace of God that they disbelieve? (Qur’an 16:72).

In Islam there is no distinction between men and women as far as their relationship to God is concerned, as both are guaranteed the same reward for good conduct and the same punishment for evil conduct. In Islam both men and women will be subjected to equal treatment for their deeds. The Qur’an says:

“And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women” (2:226).

“We shall reward the steadfast according to their noblest deeds. Be thy men or women, those that embrace the faith and do what is right we shall surely grant a happy life: We shall reward them according to their noblest actions” (Quran, 16:97).

It is apparent from the above verses of Qur’an that women are equal to men. It affirms that role of women is not less imperative than man; she is equivalent to him in bearing personal and common obligations and in accepting rewards for her deeds. The privileges of women are similar to that of men in almost all regards.
In consonance with this spirit of equality the Prophet of Islam Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) constantly reminded his followers that female children should be treated exactly in the same manner as male children. Prior to Islam, in Arabian society daughters were looked upon with disfavour and as a kind of economic and social burden. The birth of a girl child was looked as a calamity and disgrace to the family in that society. As a result of this, the custom of female infanticide was prevalent. The Arabs used to bury alive their baby daughters because of the fear that an increase in female offsprings would result in economic burden as well as the fear of the humiliation frequently caused by girls being captured by the hostile tribes and subsequently preferring their captors to their parents and brothers. If at all a girl was allowed to live, she was forced to be married at an early age. At the back of this custom was the fear of parents that their daughters might be dishonoured, if they were not given in marriage before attaining puberty. In pre-Islamic period marriage by purchase, capture and contract were very common. Polygyny was both popular and common. There was no reciprocal right for the wife (Jabeen, 1996). The result was that male members of the family enjoyed a respect which was denied to those of the fair sex. All this was discouraged by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) who upheld the rights of women and insisted on their being treated on a footing of equality (Syed, 2004).

Regarding education, it is said by Quranic authorities that Islam strived for making education compulsory and universal. In Islam women have been accorded equal rights as men to gain knowledge. The Quranic word IQRA (to read) is about education. The credit Quran grants to women’s material and spiritual conditions seem to be the same as those granted to men. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advocated that it is incumbent upon every individual both male and female to gain education. So, it is clear that in Islam there is no discrimination between men and women in regards to educational pursuit and it is essential for every Muslim male and female to get knowledge (Engineer, 2005: 207; Siddiqui, 1987).

From the above mentioned facts one may draw an inference that being the followers of Islam all the Muslim women would be literate and highly educated section of the society. But, on the contrary, contextually we find that majority of them are educationally most deprived section of Indian society. Such a gap between textual and contextual view with regard to Muslims has been discussed by a few researches
which contend that 'true Islam' implies uniformity between the genders and that Muslim women’s mistreatment is because of patriarchal misinterpretations of Islam. (Hassan and Menon, 2004; Lateef, 1998; Khursheed, 2013.) As time passed, Muslim women were stripped of a number of the roles that were purportedly allocated to them in the early Islamic periods. The primitive traditions were implanted into the Muslim society and the teachings of Quran were interpreted by the Islamic theologians in such a way to suit the rulers and their way of life. Therefore, the status of women was declined to a lower level. While Islam presents equal rights to men and women, the status of Muslim women must be considered in connection to the interaction between gender, family and society (Fouzia, 2013; khan, 1990). Asghar Ali Engineer (1994), said that “The Islamic theologians (known as the ‘Ulema) often point out that women were treated like chattel before Islam and they acquired great dignity because of the Qur’anic teachings. But what the ‘Ulema do not realize is that what was done by the Qur’an to improve women’s situation was, to a great extent, undone by the ‘patriarchization of Islamic law’ in later centuries”

It should, however, be realised that gradually noticeable changes have taken place among Muslims in post-Independent India as a result of higher educational attainment, changed economic and occupational status and urban residence which largely affected the status of Muslims women in their families and society. What is to be emphasised here that these changes have not followed a uniform pattern due to heterogeneity and diversity within Muslims community. The social values governing their lives vary among different socio-economic groups and regions. Being the follower of Islam which provides enlightened legislations for giving a respectable and dignified position to women, they are expected to be in a privileged position in society. The reality, however, is different, as different other factors like class, regional culture, local customs and patriarchal social values affect their lives to a great extent.

A review of available literature, at this juncture, would be helpful in understanding the role of multiple factors, other than religion as it does not work independently but acts as a part of social network, which affects Muslim women’s lives in various ways.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Issues concerning Muslim women, particularly Muslim women’s education has recently attracted the attention of social scientists and scholars. In the following pages an attempt has been made to review some of the important available studies on Muslim women that deal with their socio-educational condition.

Menon (1981) in her study of Muslim women in four districts of Kerala tried to discover the role of education in improving the social status of Muslim women. The study attributed the practice of seclusion among Muslims as the main reason for the low level of education among Muslim women. Without proper male accompany Muslim women are not expected to go outside their house. As a result, in the absence of a proper male escort to company them to school regularly a majority of the Muslim women are forced to discontinue their education. Many of the respondents were against girls being sent to co-educational institutions, especially at secondary and college level in view of the fact that girls attain maturity at this stage. The study, also, pointed that the main reasons of educational backwardness of Muslim women is traditional customs and practices centring around marriage which still continue in Muslim society and compel women to be entirely dependent upon men. The practice of early marriage, lack of job opportunities and separate schools for girls prevent Muslim women from continuing their education before and after marriage.

Shah (1983) highlighted various social factors like early marriage, practice of Purdah, poverty, restricted lives within four walls of the house and superstitions etc. due to which Muslim women and girls in India suffered from various form of inequity. Such inequalities disallowed them from satisfying their needs individually and play their part effectively in the family, in civil life, in the community and at work. He argued that superstitious belief and restrictions on women is the main reason of educational backwardness of Muslim girls. The purdah system confined Muslim women inside the house and made their education enormously complicated. Even where both the sexes i.e. boys as well as girls were allowed to go to school, the numbers of drop-out among girls was very high at very early age.

Siddiqui (1987) in an attempt to analyse the changes in the status of Muslim women argued that the literacy level of Muslim women is slightly low as compared to general women literacy in rural areas. Majority of the respondents recognized their
illiteracy as closely linked to their family circumstances. The study found that most of the parents did not send their daughters to the school. Majority of the respondents, both from rural and urban areas, disclosed that they themselves were not interested in receiving education while some others felt that it was their socio-economic condition which prevented them from getting education. A very low percentage of respondents recognized purdah as the main reason for their illiteracy. Religion was not found to be hurdle in the way of Muslim women education. Infact, the poor economic background of the family was found as an important cause of Muslim women’s illiteracy.

Talat Ara Ashraf (1992) conducted a study in Patna, where a large number of Muslims have been living for centuries. The study shows a remarkable improvement in the educational level of younger generation of Muslim families as majority among younger generation is matriculate as compared to a small percentage of matriculate among the older generation. The study revealed that the majority of the Muslim women are illiterate. Some of the reasons for their illiteracy were found to be lack of interest, ill health, bad treatment by step mothers, lack of separate school for girls and reluctance towards co-education. But a majority of respondents have stated lack of encouragement from parents due to parents’ illiteracy to be the main reason of their illiteracy. The study found it interesting to note that most of the illiterates and semi educated persons were not in favour of co-education while most of the highly educated persons favoured co-education. It mentions a consistent fall in the percentages of disfavour with the rise in educational level. Besides, it was, also, pointed out that the practice of segregation of sexes among Muslim, because of their strong beliefs that Islam does not permit men and women especially young girls and boys to sit together, prevent them to go to co-educational institutions. Some other problems which the study highlighted are the feeling of insecurity and lack of job opportunities in the government department for Muslims particularly for Muslim women as responsible for lack of interest in higher education that create hurdles in the way of Muslim womens’ educational pursuit.

Hasan’s (1993) study observed that Muslims are not responding adequately to the expansion of educational facilities in India and they remaind educationally very backward. The main reason of backwardness was found to be their weak economic base. This has resulted into a sadistic sphere of illiteracy, poverty, lack of interest in education and conservative attitude.
Khan (1993) in his study bring out that educational status of Muslims community is very poor as compared to others. The major reasons for their educational backwardness have been poor economic conditions and traditional mode of occupation. Children from poor economic background had highest percentage of drop-out rate. At all levels of schooling the percentage of girls was found to be very low.

Beevi (1993) observed that most of the problems of women are related to family, particularly, husbands because of marital dissensions, waywardness, cruelty, and maladjustment with the family environment. These problems related with marriage, separation and divorce are increasing day by day as majority of the Indian women whether educated or uneducated depend upon their husbands for meeting their day to day needs. In the case of separation and divorce, the question of maintenance and custody of children also rise. They are put in complicated economic situation when they are divorced. A woman is psychologically linked with her children. The custody of the children is also an issue on separation of spouse.

Mondal’s (1997) study conducted in West Bengal depicts very depressing and disheartening picture of educational condition of Muslim women’s education. Only 22.89 percent of the Muslim women were found literate in the villages under study. As far as the educational standards of the Muslim women is concerned only 68.22 percent have education up to primary level, 27.63 percent up to secondary level, 3.35 percent up to Madhyamik or higher secondary, the percentage of Muslim women having education up to graduate levels is 0.75 percent. The majority of the Muslim men do not consider education important for their women. They think that to spend money on women education is simply wastage because women are not going to take jobs outside, so there is no need to educate them. Most of the Muslim has the feeling that women activities are mainly confined within the fourwalls, so they think that religious education and the ability to read and write are enough for them. They are of the opinion that the present situation is not amiable to send their daughters to school outside their respective areas and the proper infrastructural facilities for the girls are not available in their localities. The study found that majority of the people have desire to provide religious education to their daughters. There is a lack of realisation about the very need of modern education for the women in Muslim community. The dropout rate is high among the Muslim girls after primary and secondary level
mainly due to their feeling that the educational atmosphere is not culturally in favour of women education. The main reasons for their educational backwardness at the primary level is lack of motivation, non-availability of infrastructure facilities and separate schools around the respective locality. At the secondary level the main reasons of educational backwardness of Muslim women include the early marriage, parents’ illiteracy and the existing situation of school atmosphere.

Jahan (1998) found out that Muslim women in Uttar Pradesh are educationally backward as compared to the other communities. The main reason for educational backwardness of Muslims is abject poverty due to which children especially girls drop out after the first few classes. Girls are expected to look after their siblings while their mothers go to work. Child labour is much higher in Muslims as compared to other communities. Only a few good quality government schools are there in Muslim areas. The pupil teacher ratio is also high in these schools. This forces Muslims children to go to private schools, if they can afford, or else to drop out. Muslim women also faced the problems of social restriction which is imposed on them by the society in all walks of life, including education.

Begum (1999) in her study of Muslim women’s education in two villages of rural West Bengal highlighted various reasons for educational backwardness of Muslim women. The study pointed out the role of historical factor and argued that anti-British feeling among Muslims and their traditional conservatism prevented Muslim community from availing opportunities for modern education that were introduced by the British. Such aversion towards modern education has resulted in overall backwardness of Muslim community. The social atmosphere which is created by the overall backwardness of Muslim society is not at all favourable for the development of education among the Muslim women. Muslim women are mostly confined to home because Muslim families do not understand the functional necessities of formal education in the life of women. Observance of purdah and early marriage hinder Muslim women’s participation in educational institutions. The social criticism from neighbours and kins for sending girls to schools and colleges, lack of hostel facilities and separate educational institutions in the village or locality at interior area, involvement of women in domestic work create serious problems for Muslim women to concentrate on education. Less educated religious leaders misinterpret the Islamic prescriptions and develop the negative attitude towards
women education. Maktabs and Madarsa play insignificant roles in propagating real religious education to the women as they are confined to education of religious matters and neglect the modern subjects. Educational backwardness of the Muslim men and poor economic condition of the Muslim families perpetuates a conservative attitude towards Muslim women education.

Shashi (2003) in an attempt to analyse the level of political participation of Muslim women pointed out that, no doubt, social position of the Muslim women has changed with the process of modernisation and spread of education but the overall position is not very satisfactory. They are still among the most backward sections of the society and the main reason behind their backwardness is weak political, social and economic position of the Muslim community in the society.

Ghosh (2004) pointed out that one of the standard assumptions about Muslim women is that religion retards them from getting more equal access to education. The study found that more Muslim women are illiterate than Hindu which is essentially due to their low socio-economic status rather than religion. Across the survey, among all communities and caste groups, financial constraints and gender bias dominate over other factors in determining levels of education. Indeed, in those regions where Muslims are better off (as in the south and to a lesser extent in the west) Muslim women were found to have higher levels of education.

Two factors that were found to be more specific to the Muslim community to devalue education for girls are that Muslim men have very low educational attainments as the study found that a significant number of educated Muslim women had illiterate husbands. Such low-level of male education generates more pressures to impose ceilings on girls' education. In addition, the early age at marriage was also major inhibiting factor toward education of women. Early marriages have a number of other unfavourable implications because it is generally connected with high fertility which affects women's nutrition and health status, tends to decrease women's autonomy in the marital home and generate conditions of patriarchal subservience that get propagated gradually and in turn, decreases women’s’ self-esteem.

Chaturvedi (2004) argued that the educational condition of Muslim women in India is not satisfactory. They are suffering from higher rate of illiteracy and low rate
of school enrolment at all levels. At present Muslim community is educationally backward and as far as Muslim women education is concerned it seems that Quranic order and principles have been completely neglected. Majority of the Indian Muslim girls are confined within the four walls of the house and are taught to read the Quran. They receive primary education in maktabs, that offers education on religious matters and neglect the modern education. The study highlighted some of the reasons for educational backwardness of Muslim women in India. Among the major one include lack of separate educational institutions for girls, lack of awareness among the Muslim men regarding the value of women education for the upliftment of the whole Muslim society, the purdah system, early marriage, socio-cultural patterns and poor economic condition of the Muslim families which create serious problems in relation to their educational pursuit.

Singh (2004) in his study observed that women have been discriminated in many areas of social life. Their participation especially in socio-economic and political activities have been highly inconsistent to their number. He further states that the gender belief system has acted as a major obstacle to women’s participation in many important activities of social life. Customs, traditions and lack of educational facilities for them are the main causes for the educational backwardness of women.

Hasan and Menon (2004) examine the educational status of Muslim women in India and show that the first hurdle in the way of Muslim women is not being able to enter into the schooling system. Those who entered into schools were not able to continue their schooling. For economically disadvantaged groups, such as Muslims, education would be the most promising means of upward mobility. However, the prospects of girls from poor families continuing in schools is quite small in comparison to non-poor families who are almost certain to enter school with a good prospect of reaching middle and even higher secondary level. The noteworthy exception to this vicious cycle of poverty and low educational attainments is the south zone, where women belonging to low socio-economic classes have as good prospects of school continuation as girls from high socio-economic classes.

As expected, the north zone performs worse than others on most indicators of educational progress. This is particularly true of respondents in poor households, which means the prospects of rural and urban Muslim women from poor families in
the north ever entering schools is small, with even less chance that they would continue schooling beyond primary stage.

One cause of such gaps is that in many states, public spending on education is much below requirement. In the north, successive governments have given it a low priority in allocating funds. Even though Kerala is not a prosperous state, it is educationally ahead of other parts of the country, due to the availability and accessibility of schools, signifying that even a less prosperous state with appropriate policies and strong political will can overcome hurdles to women’s education. While Kerala is spending 6.3 percent of its gross domestic product on education and Tamil Nadu around 4.4 percent, Uttar Pradesh’s ratio is around 3.7 percent. Over 60 percent of teachers in Kerala and over 40 percent primary school teachers in the south zone are women, in contrast to 30 percent in Uttar Pradesh.

The study points out that there do exist a set of common problems that determine educational progress of women regardless of religion. More significantly, there are community specific problems like financial constraints, low standard of living, parental objection, and low returns on education that make education less attractive for Muslims. The MWS (Muslim Women Survey) findings demonstrate that the low socio-economic status of Muslims adversely affects women’s education and conversely a higher standard of living and husband’s education have the strongest positive effects on the highest grade completed by the respondents.

Specifically, low socio-economic status and financial constraints appear to be the most important factors in hampering access to Muslim women’s education, although this invariably constrains women more than men. Many girls’ children cannot go to school because their parents are too poor to afford the costs of schooling. That they drop out as early as the primary school level could indicate the seriousness of financial constraints; however, when they do continue studies for as long as they can, the chief obstacle is parental opposition. Financial constraints outweigh parental opposition as the principal obstacle to schooling because a high proportion of households lacks the financial means to send children to school and finds it even more difficult to support them through schooling. However, the burden of financial constraints clearly works more against girls’ schooling. Although girls perform a large
share of family labour, and therefore its benefits are seen to be negligible compared to the investment made.

Hasan and Menon (2005) conducted a study in five main cities of India i.e. Delhi, Aligarh, Calcutta, Hyderabad and Calicut and tried to identify and compare some critical elements that determine the educational status of Muslim women in India. The study clearly pointed out that educational status of Muslim women is very poor. 60 percent of Muslim women reported themselves to be uneducated and discussed many factors which they considered, have been responsible for their low level of education. They considered low level of income, widespread poverty, patriarchal ideology, social norms that inhibits girls’ education, gender discrimination, limited job opportunities, and lack of awareness regarding women education and slow upward mobility as constraints to Muslim women’s education. They argued that religious conservatism no more create problems on their way of education but it is because of the norms of early marriage which is widely prevalent in Muslim families, parents give more emphasis on sons’ education than daughters. Most of the girls take admission in the primary school but they drop out in the middle school because they are pressurised to get married at an early age. Thus, the educational status of Muslim women was found to be very low due to the combined effect of early marriage and late entry into schools.

Rekha (2006) studied Muslim women and girls education in three slum areas of Hyderabad and revealed that most of the Muslim women reported themselves to be illiterate. The enrolment rate for the Muslim girl was high at the primary level, but as they moved towards higher education their number started decreasing. Many of the girls drop out due to marriage and low value placed on the girl’s education. Some of the factors that were found to play an important role in decision making regarding girl’s education were low standard of living, shortage of educated marriage partner and early marriages. It was also observed that socialisation of the girls in the family and cultural norms place girl’s education at a greater risk than that of boys. Therefore, girls are at disadvantage in comparison to boys not only with regards to their chances of school entry and retention but in the kind of academic environments provided by the home as well. Schools are rooted in the larger social structure characterised by hierarchical gender relations and ideologies that devalue the position of women.
Ministry of Women and Child Development (2007) in an analytical study of education of Muslim women and girls in India found that the most common factors for high non-enrolment rate, high drop outs, and low achievement among Muslims girls are lack of female teachers, poverty, observance of purdah, absence of separate schools for girls, early marriage, opposition to secular education for girls and conservative attitudes. These factors are responsible for low educational achievement of Muslim women in India.

Mukhopadhyay (2008), in his study which was conducted in Maldha Districts of West Bengal shows that the status of women in society is inferior to men’s status. Women are discriminated within the families as well as in society. Society gives more importance to male education than female. Laws of patriarchal society, marriage, domestic violence, spousal relationships, dowry system, sexual harassment, property laws and less respect for women are some of the important factors significantly related to low status of women. They face several economic constraints as well as parental negligence in their childhood which retards them from getting education. Many uneducated and poor villagers do not give much importance to the girl’s education. Early marriage too, creates problems in the way of women education.

Shakeel (2010) tried to examine the status of Muslim Women in Pune City and found that the status of Muslim women is changing and they are getting empowered as a result of modern education. Majority of the Muslims are in favour of girls’ education and consider education as a tool of raising their status in the society. The institution of purdah has no depressing impact on their thinking and outlook as far as educational attainment is concerned. Parents are willing to send their daughters to co-educational institutions. He argued that no doubt several changes are taking place in the socio-economic and educational status of Muslim women but the fact is that the rate of change is very slow because of a number of constraints and problems that they face during the process of their educational attainment. Some major problems which he highlighted are economic backwardness, illiteracy, ignorance about various policies and schemes of financial assistance for women and weaker sections of the society.

Hussain (2010) identified four major causes for the educational backwardness of Muslim women. The major causes that the study found is poor economic status of
the family which comes in the way of Muslim women in achieving education especially job oriented higher education. Due to the poor economic condition of the family a large number of Muslim girls could not meet their educational and occupational aspirations. The second problem is programmatic in the sense that respondent feel that the lack of government commitment in providing adequate infrastructure facilities such as building with a boundary wall, drinking water and toilet facilities, hostel and libraries etc., lack of government initiative in opening up job oriented courses in government colleges and institutes, absence of lady teachers in the school and lack of availability of school within walking distance closer to the place of living. Social and cultural obstacles to Muslim women education have also been highlighted by the study. Parents’ attitude towards their daughters’ education especially in co-educational institutions, observance of purdah, marriage of a daughter as a priority for the parents were found to obstruct Muslim women’s educational aspirations. The study also found that the feeling of insecurity and prevailing discrimination against the community arising out of communal riots are the major problems in the way of Muslim women’s education.

Suri’s (2010) study found literacy rate of women in Jammu and Kashmir has remained very low as compared to men. The gap between men and women is more than the national average in 18 out of 22 districts of the state. Likewise, the gap between rural and urban literacy is 22.1percent. She also highlighted some of the problems which women face while acquiring education. According to her, the mountainous topography of the state is the major hindrance in achieving the desired educational goals. Lack of school within reachable areas, lack of infrastructure, weather vagaries and lack of employment opportunities are also, important factors that work as impediments in their educational pursuit.

Bhatt (2011) in his study mentions that there is an improvement in the educational status of Muslim women in Jammu and Kashmir but remains a wide gap between male-female literacy rates. The enrolment of Muslim girls is found to be low in comparison to the enrolment of boys at all levels of education. Although women have equal rights in the constitution, the gender disparity in number of institutions, enrolment, teachers and teachers-student ratio still persists. The study also highlighted that religious orthodoxy, pressure of conservative feudalistic society, and patriarchal prejudices are the causes of educational backwardness of Muslim women in the state.
Waseem (2012) tried to find out the socio-economic and educational status of Muslim women in rural Aligarh. The study highlighted that educational backwardness of Muslim women is closely linked to the socio-economic and political backwardness. The study found that most of the respondents are in favour of equal right in education. Still, for both son and daughter, a significant percentage of them gave much importance to son’s education in comparison to that of their daughters’. Only a few gave more importance to daughter’s education than that of theirs son because of their belief that an educated daughter gets married in a good family and is capable of handling her family very easily.

His study shows that, though, women enjoy the power to take decision in the family and they are also conscious about family welfare but still they have to depend on husband in most of the cases because of their inaccessibility to finance. Further, though, most of the respondents are in favour of equal rights for both men and women in society but in actual practice women were not enjoying freedom to exercise their franchise independently. They were not allowed to voice their opinion in regards to daily household expenditure, child health care. Freedom of movement away from home without husband’s permission is also not allowed. Most of the Muslim women work in their own agricultural fields and spend most of their time in household chores. Their opinions and suggestions are not taken into consideration even regarding some serious family matters and they are mostly confined to indoor activities.

Johan and Shinde (2012) highlight various economic, cultural and social reasons for educational backwardness of Muslim women. The study indicated that though women, in general, are the most vulnerable section of Indian society due to its patriarchal nature Muslim women suffer more because of the patriarchal nature of Islam and are not given enough freedom to go outside of the house and hardly have access to higher education, even the primary level education is not easily accessible to them. They give much emphasis on Quranic education which is given at home to the girls. He also found that problems such as unfavourable attitudes and behaviour towards girls, lack of infrastructural facilities like drinking water, toilet, and proper arrangement for sitting are responsible for their educational backwardness.
Nazmul, (2012) examined the educational status of Muslims community in the West Bengal and found them to be the most backward section of the society standing at bottom position in the educational field when compared to the general population of West Bengal. The study found that the population growth of Muslim community is slightly higher than that of the general population. It was observed that lesser the percentage of Muslims in a district, higher is their literacy level. Whereas, the district in which the Muslim concentration is high, their literacy rate is low except Darjeeling district. So the concentration of Muslims in one place prevents them from getting education as the government discriminate against those areas where the Muslims are concentrated. He further states that the relative backwardness of the Muslim community particularly Muslim women has been a product of comparatively high fertility rates among the Muslim population in the state.

Ananya’s (2013) study seeks to observe the level of gender disparity in India. The study pointed out that there is a great disparity between literacy rates of women in various states of India. The main reasons for such disparity in education are basically strong preference for sons and, subsequently, growing inattention for the girl child. Daughters are considered as permanent members of their in-laws’ house. They are socialised and trained to perform the roles of wives, mothers and daughters-in-law in their future life. It results in low enrolment rates of girls in schools, low retention rates and high dropout rates. The study also highlighted that the establishment of schools in faraway places, absence of female teachers in schools are some important decelerating factors for most orthodox families for not letting their girls in educational institutions. Society’s Customs and traditions along with family norms are some other key factors that lower down the education of women.

Ruchi (2013) shows wide gender disparity in the education of both male and female in Jammu and Kashmir State. This wide disparity is due to the poverty, lack of female teachers, lack of infrastructure facilities, early marriage and parental illiteracy especially of mothers which has always been an obstacle in the spread of women education.

Intekhab (2013) seeks to examine the status of Muslim women in Indian society through various reports and census data. He observed in his study that the situation of Muslim women is very pathetic in, almost, every aspect of development.
They are the most marginalized, secluded, deprived and backward section of the society. Their backwardness is largely due to cultural milieu which perpetuates the elements of orthodoxy and traditionboundness among the Muslims retarding the emergence of social transformation and change among them.

Nasrin’s (2013) study largely based on Census data, reports of newspapers, magazines and scholarly articles demonstrated the status of Muslim women in India from past to present and argued that the condition of Muslim women has changed significantly with their increasing participation in all walks of life. Their status in society has been improving day by day. They are coming out of their purdah and are partaking in greater tasks in national reconstruction. But the literacy rate of the Muslim women in India is still very low because of their low economic status, lack of honest leadership in the community, non-availability of easily accessible schools, lack of resources in the available schools, more dropout rate and lack of interest in education.

Swati (2013) argues that, though, female literacy rate is increasing day by day and the gap between male and female literacy is narrowing down yet the gender disparity still persists in India. She further states that this difference in the male and female literacy rate varies from region to region and state to state. In urban areas women literacy is higher as compared to rural areas and in few states like Kerala women literacy rate is higher as compared to Bihar. So, such disparity can be explained in terms of regional variations.

Jitendra (2013) has shown that in spite of certain outstanding examples of individual achievements, women in India still constitute a large body of underprivileged citizens. The women literacy rate is lagging behind male literacy rate and dropout rate is also found to be comparatively higher in case of women. He also highlighted that due to the dependence of women on men they play a subordinate role in the society which lowers down the scope of their educational advancement. Other factors that work against women education include sexual harassment, inadequate facilities, conflicting societal role expectations, and lack of political willpower to implement the inclusive educational programme for women.

Gurcharn (2013) in his study shows that, although, educational status of women in Jammu and Kashmir has been improving decade after decade enrolment in
Gul (2014) in his study shows that women in the state of Jammu and Kashmir are educationally very backward when compared to the women at national level. The level of education among women is low both in rural and urban areas, but in the rural areas the level of education is very low. He shows some of the factors which hinder women education in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Prominent among these problems are poverty, child marriage, custom and cultural practices, lack of hostel facilities, engagement of girl child in domestic chores and other agricultural activities.

The following studies, though far off and variations in emphasis brings to fore the fact that Muslim women lag behind their women counterpart belonging to other religious communities in terms of their educational achievement. What is even more distressing is the fact that there is a wide gender disparity within the Muslim community itself. For, the studies show that their educational status is not comparable to that of Muslim men.

However, it needs to be pointed out that the educational status of Muslim women in India is not uniform. It differs from one region to another. And within a region it differs from one social group to another. Like-wise factors affecting achievement or non-achievement in the field of education are not universal. It plays out differently with variation in region and social groups.

A better insight and comprehension of the issue of education among Muslim women in India, therefore, requires that in-depth studies be undertaken at local level. For it is the local environment both physical as well as socio-cultural that provide individuals with a context to act. It was precisely for these reasons that the present study entitled “Problems and Prospects of Muslim Women education: A Sociological Study of Poonch district in Jammu and Kashmir” was undertaken at a micro level.
with a view to understand the problems and prospects of Muslim women education. Knowledge gained through such local studies can be collected later on to arrive at broader generalisation.

**The present study is divided into six chapters:**

First chapter presents an introduction to the study. At the outset importance of education has been discussed followed by on account of status of women and women’s education in Islam and review of literature. Second chapter deals with conceptual framework and methodology. Third chapter portrays the development of education in Jammu and Kashmir and Poonch district with special reference to education of Muslim women and their educational backwardness. Fourth chapter presents the socio-economic and educational characteristics of the respondents. Fifth chapter presents the analytical part of the study and highlights the educational problems and prospects of Muslim women in the study area by analysing the data collected through the present study. Chapter six presents the conclusions and suggestions.