

# From school to work : Muslim youths' education and employment strategies in a community in Uttar Pradesh, India

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Humayun Kabir\*

March 2016

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India's Muslim community, which accounts for 14.4 percent of India's vast population and is thus the largest of all religious minorities, has been the subject of considerable development discourse as Muslims have the lowest level of educational attainment and standard of living among socio-religious groups in the country. This study addresses the meaning of education and career opportunities for Muslim youths in relation to their educational credentials and social position in the hierarchy of Muslim class and caste groups, with particular reference to a community in Uttar Pradesh. The author contends that the career opportunities, possibilities, and strategies of Muslim youths in Indian society depend on multiple factors: social hierarchy, opportunities to utilize economic resources, social networks, cultural capital, and the wider structural disparities within which the Muslims are situated and wherein they question the value of higher education in gaining them admission to socially recognized and established employment sectors.

**Keywords:** *Muslim General, Muslim OBC, Youth, Education, Employment, Social Inequality, Social Network*

**JEL classification:** I26

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# From School to Work: Muslim Youths' Education and Employment Strategies in a Community in Uttar Pradesh, India<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

India's Muslim community, which accounts for 14.4 percent of India's vast population and is thus the largest of all religious minorities, has been the subject of considerable development discourse as Muslims have the lowest level of educational attainment and standard of living among socio-religious groups in the country. This study addresses the meaning of education and career opportunities for Muslim youths in relation to their educational credentials and social position in the hierarchy of Muslim class and caste groups, with particular reference to a community in Uttar Pradesh. The author contends that the career opportunities, possibilities, and strategies of Muslim youths in Indian society depend on multiple factors: social hierarchy, opportunities to utilize economic resources, social networks, cultural capital, and the wider structural disparities within which the Muslims are situated and wherein they question the value of higher education in gaining them admission to socially recognized and established employment sectors.

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## 1 Introduction

India has been witnessing a twin paradox. On the one hand, rapid economic growth—over six percent GDP growth since the 1980s (IHD, 2014, p. 1)—has given the country a heightened status in the global economy. On the other hand, the benefits of economic development have not improved the quality of life for a vast number of socio-religious groups largely conditioned by structurally and historically defined exploitative contexts. Due to the persistent conditions of structural disparity and social inequality, this economic development boom cannot generate the desired social change and class mobility at an equal rate for all social classes, caste groups, and religious minorities. At the heart of this paradox, the Muslim community—which accounts for 14.4 percent of India’s vast population, making it the largest of all religious minorities in India—has been the subject of considerable development discourse, for it has the lowest levels of educational attainment when compared with major socio-religious groups in India and the lowest standard of living in the country (see Ghosh, 2013). Research indicates that Muslims, on average, spend 32.7 rupees per day, whereas Sikhs spend 55.3, Christians 51.4, and Hindus 37.5 rupees (Ghosh, 2013). Muslims’ heavy concentration in low-paying jobs—mostly self-employed, casual labor, and artisanal sectors—affects their low contribution to the country’s overall GDP growth. Their overall contribution to the country’s GDP, 11.2 percent, is lower than that of the Dalits and Adivasi (indigenous groups defined as Scheduled Tribes or ST), at 16.5 percent (*Times of India*, 2013). Despite various government measures aimed at transforming Muslims’ social and economic conditions, the plight of the largest religious minority community in India remains notably unchanged.

This study addresses the meaning of Muslim youths’ education and career opportunities in relation to their educational credentials and social position in the hierarchy of Muslim class and caste groups, with particular reference to a community in Uttar Pradesh. The author contends that the career opportunities, possibilities, and strategies of Muslim youths in Indian society depend on multiple factors: social hierarchy, opportunities to utilize economic resources, social networks, cultural capital, and the wider structural disparities in which the Muslims are situated and in which they perceive their social and political status. The study is based on several phases of fieldwork in Salai village of Hapur, a newly founded district located in western Uttar Pradesh, about 60 kilometers east of New Delhi, which was previously known as a sub-

district of the Ghaziabad district from 2012 to 2016. It uses both qualitative and quantitative analyses to delineate how the Muslim community's perceived notions about the benefits of education—shaped by everyday life practices, competition for social and economic mobility with other classes and caste groups, and exposure to the wider social context in Indian society—affect school participation and preferences as well as school-to-work transitions among Muslim youths.

The study is organized as follows. In section 2, the author locates the scholarly discourse and debate over Indian Muslims' socioeconomic backwardness in relation to wider social and political contexts in India. Before delineating the nature of the Muslim community that the author has examined, an overview of Muslim demographic distribution, education, and employment trends in India will be provided (sections 3 and 4). Then, in sections 5 and 6, a description of the social, economic, and cultural lives of the Muslim community in the research area shall be given. The author seeks to identify the factors that have profound, albeit not deterministic, impact in explaining why Muslim youths tend to have less aspiration toward higher education and greater focus on finding career opportunities both during and after secondary education, mainly within the defined spaces of Muslims' primary employment: self-employment, artisan work, and casual labor. The penultimate section considers the linkage between education and employment by analyzing several cases of Muslim youths from Salai. The conclusion summarizes the findings and suggests broader implications regarding the relationship between education and employment trends, taking into account existing structural and social inequalities and the impediments they pose to social changes among youths from underprivileged classes, castes, and religious minorities.

## **2 Social Change among Indian Muslims: Discourse and Debate**

The dearth of scholarship and robust empirical evidence on how social, political, and cultural forces interact in such a way as to restrict social change and sustain the status quo has compelled researchers to depend on tabulated numerical representations of the Muslim community in India. Widely held public perceptions often pinpoint religious and cultural conservatism as causal factors of the Muslim community's backwardness. However, recent scholarship and several government reports suggest that the interplay

of political, cultural, social, and economic forces continues to produce and reproduce the differences between Muslims and other social and religious communities (hereafter SRCs) in India (see GOI, 2006; Das, 2008), thereby challenging the broader public perception that tends to blame the Muslim community for its own poverty. *The Sachhar Committee Report*, a widely circulated and much-quoted study by a government commission, captures multifaceted factors associated with the political, cultural, and social problems that Muslims face in everyday life (GOI, 2006; Basant, 2007). Although many of these factors are also equally applicable to other backward SRCs, what distinguishes the Muslims from other groups is a political and cultural sense of alienation from mainstream Indian society. Historically defined political conditions, sensitivity to communalism in political campaigns and discourses, and the construction of Indian nationalism in close connection to the notions of “Hindu” land poses a serious political question to Muslims: “Can a Muslim be Indian?” (Pandey, 1999). In this political condition, “Muslims carry a double burden of being labeled as “anti-national” and as being “appeased” at the same time” (GOI, 2006, p. 11). Issues of insecurity and vulnerability push many Muslims to live in a particular location, and therefore Muslim “ghettoization” is markedly visible in housing, schooling, and jobs (GOI, 2006, p. 14; Basant, 2007, p. 828). Low representation in public and private regular employment sectors, collective alienation, perceptions of discrimination in government employment, lack of security, and suspicion of Muslims among state apparatuses and agencies tend to reproduce this process of ghettoization, causing Muslims to attach less importance to formal secular education and preventing them from translating their education into respectable and desirable jobs. Moreover, many Muslims find that making the effort to learn Urdu, a marker of their cultural and religious tradition, presents another limitation within the context of school textbooks and communities that use a different language (GOI, 2006, pp. 14–15; Basant, 2007, pp. 828–829).

Research evidence suggests that despite structural constraints, Muslims and other backward classes have responded to the processes of economic and social change in which education is a significant factor (Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery, 2004). In north India, and especially in Uttar Pradesh, not only educated Muslims but also other disadvantaged groups have failed to secure salaried employment and “respectable jobs,” which often refers to government jobs, and in this context, pursuing further education is not seen as leading to a position of economic security. Increasing educational participation and attainment creates social frustration among educated but still unemployed youths in the wake of unhealthy and unfair competition in the formal

employment sectors, which is closely linked to the rise of political activism among the historically defined lower social classes and occupational groups such as Dalits (Jeffrey et al., 2004; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery, 2008a; Jeffrey, 2010). Educational credentials cannot bring about a significant social change among the lower classes, including Muslims, and the exploitative relationship between the upper and lower classes remains structurally unchanged. Moreover, schooling continues to reproduce class and caste differences, and the youths in underprivileged social groups lack social networks and cultural capital despite their improved education, thereby inhibiting their ability to compete with upper-class and elite youths (see Jeffrey et al., 2004; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery, 2005). Compared to the Dalits, Muslims have a greater tendency to depend on local wage labor and artisanal work, which pay low salaries and have been less successful in obtaining educational credentials and securing regular salaried jobs (Jeffrey et al., 2005, p. 2090). Unlike Dalit youths, Muslim youths are less visible in wider Indian society when translating their social frustration into political activism. What distinguishes Muslims from Dalits is that, when pushed out from formal and regular jobs, they tend to form a “minority enclave labor market” characterized by self-employment, casual labor, and low-paying local artisanal work (Das, 2008). This pattern, resulting from lack of land ownership, higher educational credentials, social networks, and cultural capital, continues to reproduce ghettoization and the differences between Muslims and other social classes.

### **3 Muslims’ Demography in India: Myths and Reality**

The partitioning of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 had an enormous effect in reconfiguring the demographic distribution of its two major religious communities, Hindus and Muslims (Visaria, 1969). The Muslim population in India is spatially distributed across different regions and districts. They represent a majority in Lakshwadweep, Jammu, and Kashmir. Among India’s 30 states, there are six where the Muslim population is above the national average. In terms of raw numbers, Uttar Pradesh has the most Muslims, with more than 30 million; followed by West Bengal, with more than 20 million; Bihar, with more than 13 million; and Maharashtra, which has more than 10 million Muslim inhabitants (MoHRD, 2013, p. 3).

As shown in *Table 1*, the Muslim population in India was 47 million (more than 10 percent of the total population) in 1961 and rose to 138 million (more than 13



percent of the total) in 2001. On the other hand, the Hindus, the largest religious group, accounted for 83.5 percent of India’s total population in 1961, but their share fell to 80.5 percent in 2001 (GOI, 2006, pp. 28–29). The 2011 census placed India’s total population at 1.21 billion (COI, 2014), with Muslims representing 14.2 percent.

Table 1: Population Distribution of Muslim and Other Major Religious Groups in India, 1961–2001

Year	Religious Groups (Population in millions)							
	All	Hindu	Muslim	Christ.	Sikh	Buddhist	Jain	Other
1961	439.23	366.53	46.94	10.73	7.85	3.26	2.03	1.91
	(100)	(83.45)	(10.69)	(2.44)	(1.79)	(0.74)	(0.46)	(0.43)
1971	547.95	453.29	61.42	14.22	10.38	3.91	2.61	2.22
	(100)	(82.73)	(11.21)	(2.6)	(1.89)	(0.70)	(0.48)	(0.41)
1981	683.33	562.39	80.29	16.70	13.09	4.76	3.22	2.89
	(100)	(82.3)	(11.75)	(2.44)	(1.92)	(0.70)	(0.47)	(0.42)
1991	846.39	690.06	106.72	19.65	16.43	6.48	3.36	3.70
	(100)	(81.53)	(12.61)	(2.32)	(1.94)	(0.77)	(0.40)	(0.44)
2001	1028.61	827.58	138.19	24.08	19.22	7.96	4.23	7.37
	(100)	(80.46)	(13.43)	(2.34)	(1.87)	(0.77)	(0.41)	(0.72)
2011	1210.19	966.3	172.2	27.8	20.8	8.4	4.5	7.9
	(100)	(79.8)	(14.2)	(2.3)	(1.7)	(0.7)	(0.4)	(0.7)

*Note:* Figures in parentheses represent the percentage of the population.

*Sources:* GOI, 2006, p. 271; *The Hindu*, August 25, 2015.

The difference between Muslims and Hindus in terms of fertility and population growth rate tends to feed powerful perceptions about Muslims in India. First, Muslim religious conservatism is seen as explaining the community’s high population growth rate, since Muslims are widely perceived as not engaging in the use of contraception. Second, it is assumed that, due to their insecure minority status, the Muslims are deliberately seeking to increase their numerical strength over against the predominant Hindu majority. Contrary to such perceptions, however, studies show that many Muslims are willing to regulate their fertility, although the rate of family planning remains 10 percent lower than the national average (Basant, 2007, p. 829) and the overall Muslim population’s growth has been slowed by declining fertility trends. The

myth about Muslims’ out-of-control population growth relative to that of the Hindu majority is often perpetuated by Hindu nationalist discourse and propaganda (Jeffery and Jeffery, 2002). Micro-level research findings challenge this myth, which is based on “dangerous propaganda in the victimization of minority groups” and is often used to “justify demonizing Muslims” (Jeffery and Jeffery, 2002, p. 1816). The 2011 census shows that although the Muslim population is still growing faster than the Hindu population, its growth rate has slowed more sharply than the Hindu growth rate throughout the preceding decade, reducing the difference between the two communities (*The Hindu*, August 25, 2015). This decline in the growth rate can be attributed to the Muslim community’s increasing educational attainment and awareness of the burden of raising children in a competitive social world in India.

#### 4 Education among Indian Muslims

The Indian constitution guarantees “free and compulsory” education for all children aged six to 14. Despite such constitutional protection, inequities in education across various social, ethnic, and religious minority groups persist. Muslims’ educational attainment and performance are far behind the Hindu community and, in many cases, even lower than other disadvantaged social and minority groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). As shown in *Table 2*, Muslims have the lowest literacy rate among all major religious communities in India.

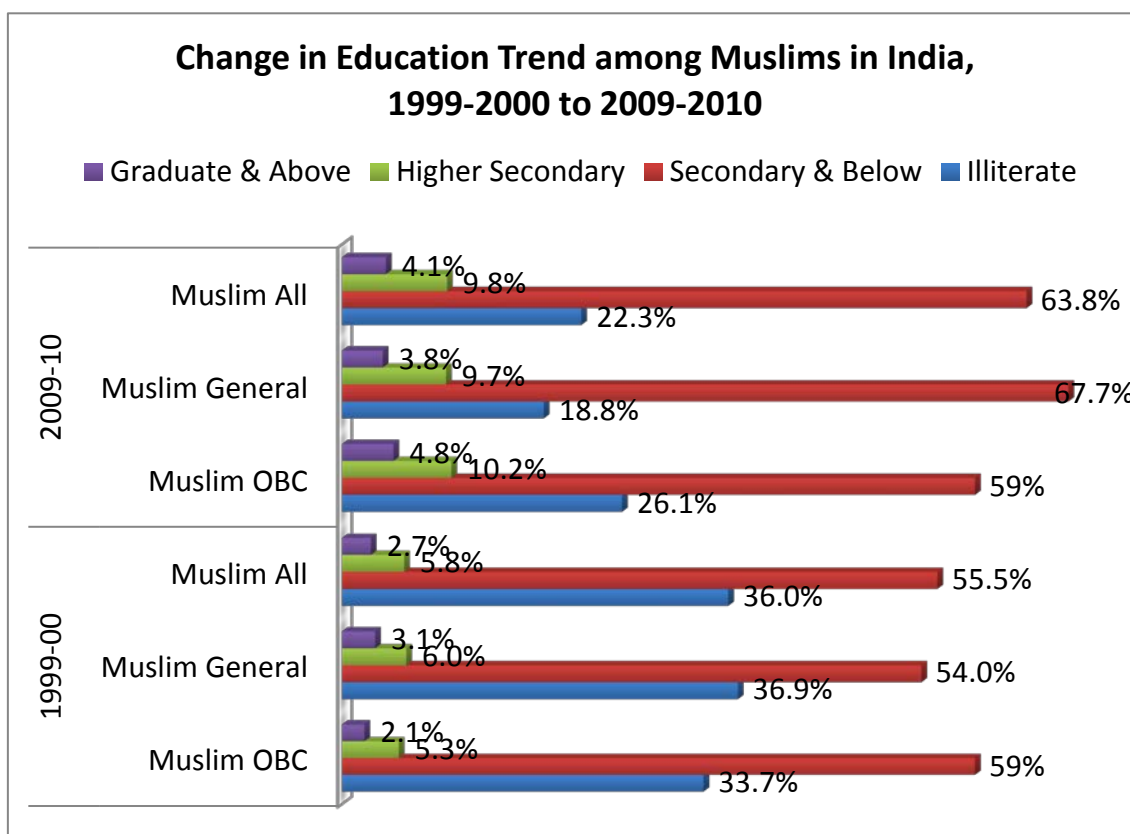
Table 2: Literacy Rate among Muslims and Other Major Religious Communities in India, 2001

Religious Groups	Literacy Rate		
	Male	Female	Total
Hindus	76.2	53.2	65.1
Muslims	67.6	50.1	59.1
Christians	84.4	76.2	80.3
Sikhs	75.2	63.1	69.4
Buddhists	83.1	61.7	72.7

Sources: MoHR (2013, p. 4); COI (2011, p. 3).

The government has reported that the mean year of educational attainment among Muslim children is the lowest of all socio-religious groups. According to a report, one-fourth of Muslim children in the 6–14 age group either never attended school or dropped out of school education (GOI 2006, p. 58). Among Muslims aged 17 and above, only 17 percent have attained matriculation, as opposed to the national average of 26 percent. Their educational participation gradually decreases at higher levels of education, and the gap between Muslims and other socio-religious groups increases. Only 50 percent of Muslim children who complete middle school are likely to continue into secondary school, while the national average is 62 percent. Seven percent of the Indian population aged 20 and above are secondary school graduates; for Muslims this proportion is just four percent (GOI, 2006, p. 58).

Figure 1: Change in Educational Attainment among Muslims (Age 17–29) and Other SRCs in India, 1999–2000 to 2009–2010



Source: Data used here is taken from Basant (2012, p. 12)

Despite having a lower level of educational attainment than other SRCs,

Muslims have exhibited increasing educational aspirations in recent years (*Figure 1*). In the school year 1999–2000, 36 percent of Muslims aged 17–29 were illiterate; that figure had dropped to 22.3 percent in 2009–2010. The Muslim participation in secondary education and below rose from 55.5 to 63.8 percent in that decade, while it increased from 5.8 to 9.8 percent in secondary education and from 2.7 to 4.1 percent at the postsecondary level during the same time period (Basant, 2012, p. 12) (*Table 3 in Annex and Figure 1*).

However, when compared with other SRCs, Muslim educational attainment still lags behind. For instance, in the same decade, Hindu upper castes' educational participation at the postsecondary level increased by more than seven percentage points (from 12 to 19.2 percent), that of Hindu OBCs by nearly five percentage points (from 3.6 to 8.5 percent), and that of Muslims by much less (from 2.7 to 4.1 percent) (*Table 3 in Annex*). This suggests that Muslims' aspiration to higher education is relatively stagnant. As noted earlier, many Muslims do not necessarily translate higher educational credentials into jobs, and the negative correlation between education and career opportunities continues to dominate the nature of Muslim education in India.

Indian Muslims' educational backwardness is often attributed to their preference for Islamic religious education or madrasas. It is widely believed that madrasa education contributes to the maintenance of Muslim culture and Islamic tradition and is less applicable to and effective for India's development paradigm. In many areas where mainstream schools are unavailable or have an insufficient capacity, madrasas founded by volunteer community initiatives are the only sources of schooling for many Muslim children. These institutions, often with philanthropic support from and close ties to the community, educate many children voluntarily, though such education cannot guarantee economic opportunity. In recent years, the government has started to engage with madrasas in an effort to strengthen their role in promoting overall educational attainment in India.

Unlike in other parts of South Asia, madrasas in India have been protected under "minority rights" as enshrined by *Article 30(1)* of the Constitution: "All minorities... shall have the right to establish and administer education institutions of their own." The Muslim leadership, and the clergy in particular, use this constitutional right to protect the madrasa system from state intervention. The state's initiatives for modernizing madrasas, though welcomed by many Muslims, have not been as successful as hoped. The religious leaders oppose madrasa reform, and their opposition is often endorsed by the Muslim community, which feels a sense of ownership of the madrasas since these

institutions are culturally, religiously, and linguistically more connected to their lives compared to mainstream schools, from which their culture and traditions are absent regarding both school curriculum and ethos.

Recent state reform schemes have not been forcibly imposed; rather, they encourage voluntary participation by madrasas to include general curriculum subjects, become affiliated with an education board or institute, and have teachers for non-religious subjects so that their schools can be deemed equivalent to mainstream schools. In 2009, the government created a “Central Madrasa Education Board,” although it still exists only on paper and not in reality. The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) was founded in 2004 to issue minority status certificates to educational institutions, including madrasas. Once a madrasa receives this certificate, it would be protected as a minority institution and would be eligible to receive certain government benefits. To further attract madrasas to incorporate mainstream education, the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the central government introduced the Scheme for Providing Quality Education in madrasas. Under this project, eligible madrasas are provided with general subject teachers and these teachers’ salaries, as well as with funding for libraries, computer labs, and building construction. During this research, the author found that many schools and small-scale madrasas that had become affiliated with the state madrasa education board were receiving the central government’s financial benefits, whereas the more established, traditional madrasas are unwilling to receive these incentives. To qualify for this support, each madrasa must complete a series of bureaucratic tasks, and in many cases, the benefits do not reach the madrasa on a regular basis.

Table 4: Number of Madrasas and Enrollment of Muslim Children in India, 2011–2012

Type of Madrasas	Number of Madrasas	Enrollment		
		Boys	Girls	Total
Recognized	5,797	951,267	1,034,725	1,985,992
Unrecognized	2,392	259,616	229,942	489,558
Total	8,189	1,210,883	1,264,667	2,475,550

*Source: MoHRD (2013, p. 17)*

According to the District Information System for Education, nearly 2.5 million Muslim children were enrolled in more than 8,000 madrasas in the country from 2011–

2012 (*Table 4*). It is widely perceived that Muslims are inclined to prefer madrasa education, but such claims lack empirical evidence. A government report in 2006 reported that only three percent of school-going Muslim children attended madrasas (GOI, 2006, p. 77). Another recent report suggests that the number of Muslim children enrolled in madrasas constitutes 9.7 percent of all enrolled Muslim children (MoHRD, 2013, p. 17).

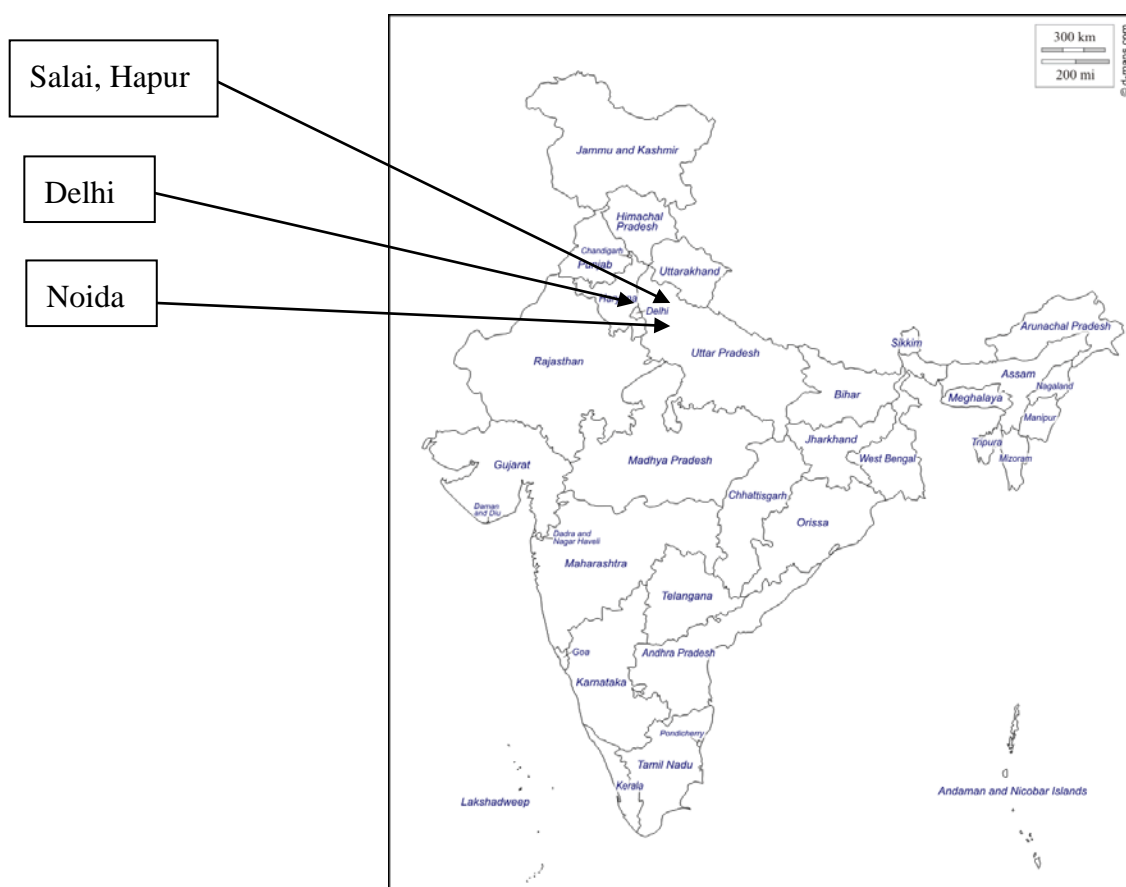
## **5 Class, Economy, and Social Inequality in Salai, Uttar Pradesh**

This research was conducted in a Muslim-dominated village in the Hapur district of Uttar Pradesh. Hapur, a sub-district of Ghaziabad as enumerated in the 2011 census, was made a separate district administration in 2011 by Mayawati, then the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. The city is located in western Uttar Pradesh, 60 km east of New Delhi (*figure 2*). According to the 2011 Census Report, the entire city population is more than 2.6 million, and the average literacy rate is 74.03 percent, almost identical to the national literacy rate (74.04 percent). The gender disparity in literacy rates is also comparable to national data. The male literacy rate in Hapur, as in India overall, is higher than 80 percent, whereas the female literacy rate is 66.59 percent, slightly higher than the national average of 65.46 percent (COI, 2015a, 2015b). The population of Hapur is composed of various SRCs, and the concentration of Muslim population is relatively higher in the city, at 32.12 percent, while the majority Hindus represents 66.27 percent (COI, 2015b). The city is on a highway between Delhi and Lucknow, the capital of the state of Uttar Pradesh. The city is also connected to Noida, an abbreviated name for the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority, a planned city of the National Capital Region of India (*figure 2*).

Salai is one of the 331 inhabited villages of the district and is roughly seven km away from Hapur city. The villagers frequently commute to the city using light horse-drawn carriages, locally known as *buggi*, or a *jugaad*, a vehicle crafted locally combining a wooden frame and agricultural water pump engine. Salai is divided into eight *mohalla* or clusters of households, and usually in each *mohalla*, Muslims of the same occupational group live together. In the village, Muslims are predominant in number, with a few Hindu families, mostly SC, also living there. The village had a population of 8,131 from 1,304 families as of the 2011 census. Of these, 87 or 1.07 percent families were enumerated as SC, and no ST families were identified. Data on

OBC families have not yet been released. The literacy rate in the village was 63.73 percent, much lower than the national average. A high gender disparity in education is also present, as the female literacy rate (51.81 percent) is 23 percent lower than that for males (75.01 percent). The literacy rate in the village is lower than the average for Uttar Pradesh (67.68 percent). Among the village population, 1,859 people (all but 119 of them male) were identified as employed; among these, 92.63 percent were main workers—i.e., those who had been engaged in gainful employment for at least six months. Of the main workers, 441 were cultivators and 352 were agricultural laborers (COI, 2015c).

Figure 2: The Research Area, Salai Village, Hapur, Uttar Pradesh



Source: *d-maps.com*

URL: [http://www.d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=24855&lang=en](http://www.d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=24855&lang=en)

The Muslims in Salai village are socially stratified into a complicated system of hierarchy characterized by the practice of endogamy, occupational specialization on a

largely hereditary basis and status-based social relationships. The social structure has essential similarities to the Hindu caste structure but is not identical with regard to the notion of ritual purity and impurity, which forms the basis of Hindu caste hierarchy. The Muslim caste system, known as *biradari* (from the Persian term for brotherhood), is widely observed in Salai. The Muslim families with Tyagi and Rajput surnames define themselves as Chowdhury and are at the top of the hierarchy of the village's *biradari* system. The Chowdhury *biradari* contains cultivators and landowners, although only a few families own land in the village. According to the categorization of SRCs in India, Chowdhury families fall into the "Muslim General" group and are not entitled to any privileges under India's affirmative action policy, such as reservation policy.

In the *biradari* system in Salai, several other groups are distinguishable by their hereditary occupation, these include: Ansari/Jhulaha (hereditary occupation: clothes weaving or tailoring); Dhobi (clothes washer); Teli/Malik (oil producer/maker); Saqqa-Bhisti (water provider); Nai (hair cutter); Saifi/Lohar (carpentry, ironsmithing); and Fakir/Alvi/Mian (ascetic beggar). The family names reflect the hereditary occupational group and social position, and many of the family titles used by the Muslims are also shared among Hindus. It is believed that the Muslim families who share the same family title with Hindus converted to Islam from Hinduism at some point. Unlike the Muslim Chowdhury, all of these families fall into the category of "Muslim OBC," although there are also certain hierarchical differences within these OBC Muslim families. On the other hand, despite the dominant presence of Muslims, a handful of Hindu families living in the village are from the Parjapati and Balmiki, two sub-caste groups of Dalits. The Panchayet, the village administrative system, is always headed by a Muslim (known as Pradhan), and the representation from the Hindu community remains nominal, consistent with their minimal presence in the village.

Although the Muslim community in Salai village is stratified according to historically defined hereditary occupational specializations, not all the families continue to uphold their historical occupation. For instance, among the Chowdhury households, few are land tenants who depend on the farming economy; most of these families engage in various kinds of non-farming employment, including casual labor. Similarly, most of the Muslim OBC families' occupations are dispersed, not limited to their hereditary specialization, except for some families from the Nai and Dorji caste groups. The distribution of occupations relative to the Muslims' caste statuses is varied and often overlapping across the Muslim families within the village. Despite their higher status in the Muslims' *biradari* system, youths and adults in many Chowdhury families



engage in manual and casual labor alongside the youths and parents of OBC families.

However, farming activities are largely handled by few Chowdhury families due to their ownership of cultivable lands, and members of other groups usually work as daily wage laborers in the farmlands, especially during the harvest and cultivation seasons. At the same time, landless Chowdhury families may also depend on such seasonal agricultural labor for employment. To avoid the fragmentation of land ownership, many prefer to keep the family undivided, and if the family has multiple wage-earning members, some may engage in farming while others carry out various other kinds of income-generating activities.

Table 5: Distribution of Households (HH) by Land Ownership and Social Category in Salai, Uttar Pradesh

HH No.	Landless	< 5 Bigha	5–10 Bigha	10–20 Bigha	20–30 Bigha	Over 30 Bigha
<i>Muslim General</i>						
36	10	7	5	5	4	5
100%	28%	19%	14%	14%	11%	14%
<i>Muslim OBC</i>						
34	34	0	0	0	0	0
100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<i>All Muslims</i>						
70	44	7	5	5	4	5
100%	63%	10%	7%	7%	6%	7%

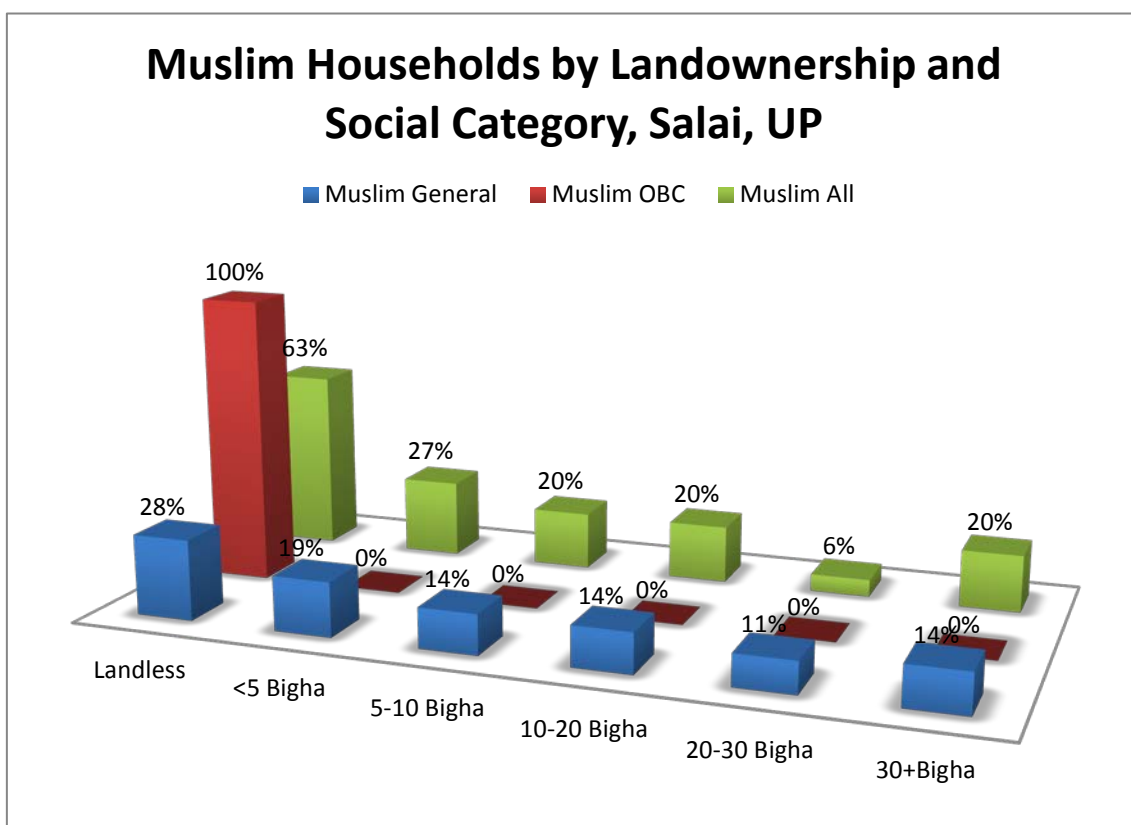
Note: 1 Bigha = 0.637 acres

Source: Field surveys 2012–2013, 2014–2015

Of the 70 households surveyed—36 Muslim General (i.e. those Chowdhury families who use Tyagi and Rajput as their family names) and 34 Muslim OBC families—63 percent are landless and another 10 percent have less than five Bigha of land (one Bigha = 0.637 acres). Only 13 percent families have land ownership of 20 Bigha or more (see *Figure 3* and *Table 5*). The unequal social status, power, and prestige of the Chowdhury families are closely associated to land ownership, though a considerable number of Chowdhury families do not own any farmland. Of the Muslim

General households, 28 percent are landless and another 19 percent have less than five Bigha of farmland. The landlord Chowdhury families, those who have 20 Bigha or more, represent 25 percent of the population, indicating that most of the Muslim General households cannot depend on their farm-based earnings. Inequality in terms of land ownership is visible not only between Muslim General and Muslim OBC households but also among the Muslim General households. On the other hand, among the Muslim OBC households surveyed, none own any land (*Figure 3, Table 5*).

Figure 3: Distribution of Muslim Households by Land Ownership and Social Category, Salai, Uttar Pradesh



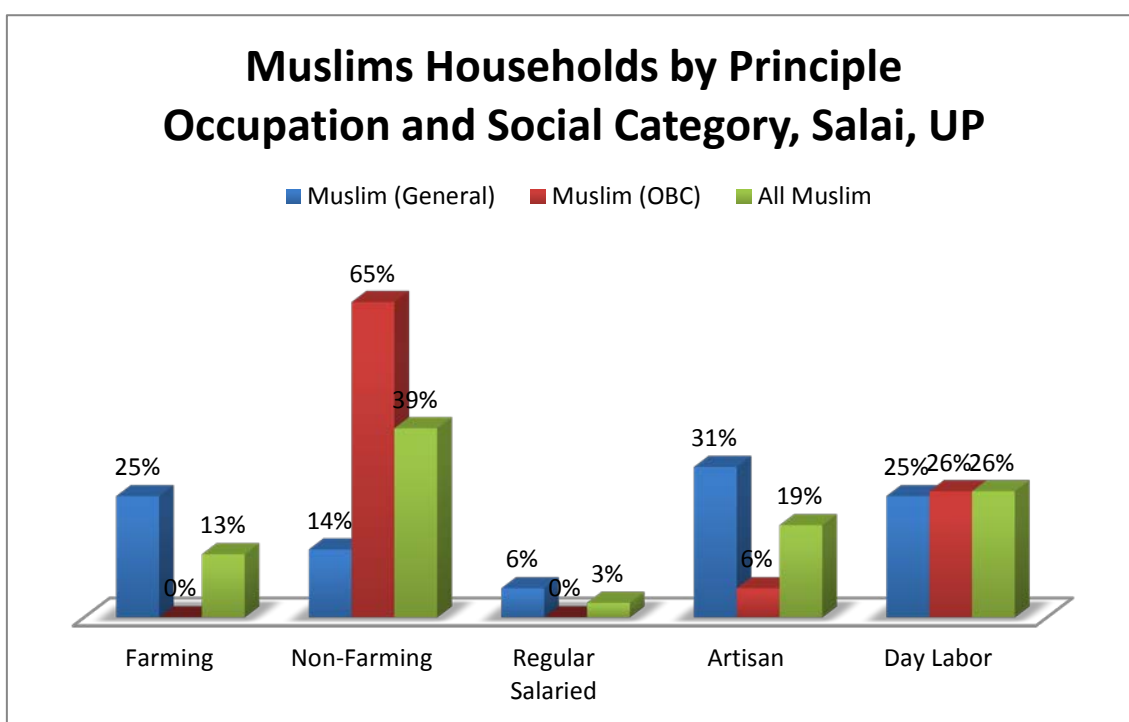
Sources: Field surveys 2012–2013, 2014–2015

These households depend both on agriculture labors on the farmlands of the Chowdhury families, as well as on self-employed and casual labor in other sectors. A wide variety of income-generating activities, mostly in unorganized and informal sectors is noticeable among those who engage in non-farming employment sectors including: daily wage laborers, construction workers, electricians, mechanics, tailors, cloth vendors, buffalo-milk sellers and traders, masons, handicraft makers, small traders,

drivers, and hair cutters, among others.

The distribution of the households by principal occupation resembles the hierarchical difference between Muslim General and Muslim OBC families. As shown in *Figure 4*, 65 percent of Muslim OBC families have a non-farming principal occupation, including self-employed people but excluding day laborers and artisans, whereas 39 percent of Muslim General families depend on this source of employment.

Figure 4: Distribution of Muslim Households by Principal Occupation and Social Category, Salai, Uttar Pradesh



Sources: Field surveys 2012–2013, 2014–2015

The difference in occupational trends between these two social groups is correlated with several other factors such as economy and education. This is also reflected in terms of the number of households with regular salaried jobs. None of the Muslim OBC households identify regular salaried jobs as their principal occupation, whereas six percent of Muslim General households have salaried jobs, though work in the private sector. The overall representation of Muslims in regular salaried jobs is negligible, at three percent. Muslim General families also have a greater percentage of workers in artisanal occupations than the Muslim OBC families, whose limited access to economic and social networks, particularly beyond the village, constrains their

opportunity for training in artisan work (see *Figure 4*).

The educational aspirations, employment directions, physical mobility, social networks, and cultural capital of many Muslim youths are impacted by the caste hierarchy and land ownership issues. The cumulative effect of all these factors is the reproduction of differences between Muslim General and Muslim OBC families in everyday life, and this social and economic inequality persistently impedes the transformations of the lives of the Muslim OBCs. These forces are also applicable to the Muslim General households, who have a higher social status in the caste hierarchy but face economic constraints similar to those of the Muslim OBCs.

In addition to the agricultural economy, handcrafted *moti* (plastic pearl or bead) jewelry products are an important source of cash income for both landowning and landless families in the village. More than one-third of the families in the village, either directly or indirectly, experience economic benefits from this handicraft work. However, some Chowdhury families have a monopoly on this sector and many other families, especially the landless, depend on the wages from the labor supplied to them by the handicraft producers known as *karigors* (makers) from Chowdhury families. Rois Ahmad Chowdhury was credited with introducing this work into the village 17 years ago. Previously, he supplied buffalo milk from the village to the city, collecting it from the villagers and delivering it to residents and milk sellers in Delhi. One day he found that a family to whom he used to supply milk was involved in crafting *moti* jewelry. He was given some materials to make certain types of *moti* jewelry, and he began to take on this laborious work as a means of earning extra cash. Gradually, his work orders increased, forcing him to depend on others for help. He supplied the materials to different families, whom he paid when they completed their products. Now Rois Ahmad is one of the leading *karigors* of *moti* jewelry in the village.

In accordance with India's economic globalization, *moti* jewelry is in increasing demand in several European and American countries, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates. The *moti* jewelry sellers, mostly in Delhi and Noida, hunt for global buyers, and once they have received orders for certain products, they ask some local suppliers to deliver the products within a certain period of time. Suppliers usually collect the raw materials and provide them to the *karigors* in the village. Then the *karigors* distribute the raw materials to several families, especially targeting the female members of the family, and ask them to craft the products in a given number of days. Once the products are ready, the families bring them to the *karigors*, who check them for quality before packaging and supplying them to the people from whom the orders had been received.

The suppliers then confirm that the finishing and quality of the work conforms to the standards requested, before presenting the jewelry to the sellers, who handle the orders from foreign buyers. Usually, the sellers pay the suppliers after they receive payments from the foreign buyers, the suppliers then pay the *karigors*, and finally the *karigors* pay the families in the village.

Following Rois Ahmad, Mustafa Tyagi, a landlord of the Chowdhury family, was also credited with bringing *moti* jewelry business into the village. When working as a tailor about 15 years ago in Delhi, Mustafa came to know some *moti* jewelry suppliers there. He found that engaging with the jewelry supply business would be more promising economically than his tailoring job. He returned to Salai with orders he had received from the suppliers in Delhi. Over time, he was able to expand his *moti* craftmaking work in the village. According to Mustafa, his jewelry products are crafted by nearly 300 families in Salai, and the wages of the family members who perform this work total 500,000 rupees annually. Now there are at least 20 jewelry producer families, mostly from the Chowdhury group, in the village who receive orders of various amounts from the suppliers and merchants of Delhi.

This access to income through jewelry crafting has transformed the relationship between education and employment in many ways. First, the income helps many families to send their children to fee-based community schools and colleges, although this phenomenon is somewhat gender-based. Second, it does not challenge the cultural construction of women in relation to their domestic world; that is, a gendered workspace is reproduced in which females in a household—those attending school regularly or irregularly as well as dropouts—engage in *moti* crafting work at home in addition to their daily household chores. Muslim girls do not need to leave their home, let alone their community, for this work. The boundary of work and home is consistent with the boundary of womanhood as culturally and religiously defined among Muslim communities in Salai.

## **6 Changes in Educational Attainments and Schooling Types in Salai**

Educational opportunities inside the village have contributed to increasing educational attainment among the Muslims in Salai. In the late 1990s, the government established one primary school and one junior secondary high school in the village. Moreover, some villagers established two other secondary schools several years previously. The newly

established schools increased the Salai children’s opportunity to receive an education within their village up to the secondary level or grade 10.

Table 6: Educational Institutions in Salai Village by Year of Founding, Type, Level, and Number of Students

Educational Institutions	Founded	Type	Level	Students
Primary School Salai	1997	Govt.	Primary	161
Purbo Madhyamik School	1998	Govt.	Jr. Secondary (Grade 8)	85
Madrasa Jadid Higher Secondary School	2007	Registered as madrasa	Secondary (Grade 10)	433
Madrasa Jamia Arabia Babul Islam	1932	Registered*	Primary and Islamic education	1118
Maulana Abul Kalama Azad School	2009	Registered as madrasa	Secondary (Grade 10)	440

*Note:* \*Registered in Basic Sikhsa Adhikary (BSA, Basic Education Department) in 1935.

*Source:* Field surveys 2012–2013, 2014–2015

As shown in *Table 6*, there was only one educational institution—Madrasa Jamia Arabia Babul Islam, founded locally in 1932—in the village until the late 1990s. The lack of schooling opportunities in many Muslim villages is one of the significant causes of Muslims’ inferior educational attainment. This fact is supported by a government report that found that the student-teacher ratio in Muslim localities to be higher than in other areas and that Muslim communities have relatively few schools beyond the primary level (GOI, 2006, p. 16).

For more than six decades, from the early 1930s to the late 1990s, the Muslim community in Salai had to depend solely on Madrasa Jamia Babul Islam (hereafter MJBI) not just to learn Urdu and Arabic in order to maintain and preserve their religious and cultural distinctiveness, but also for basic general and non-religious courses. Like many other madrasas at both the lower and higher educational levels, the MJBI follows the tradition of Daur Uloom Deoband, a famous private madrasa founded in 1866 in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh during the British colonial period and now the model for a leading school of thought concerning madrasa education in South Asia. The MJBI has

four sections of schooling: the pre-primary level for three years, primary for five years, a section for memorizing the Quran, and a section for advanced Islamic studies for girls. The number of students studying at MJB I is higher than at other educational institutions because many children maintain a double shift for their schooling; they attend the pre-primary section of the madrasa for basic Islamic lessons in the early morning before go to formal schools in the village. The number of students in the Quran memorizing section, known as the *Hifz* course, is 80. The primary section focuses on basic Islamic lessons, Urdu, Arabic reading ability, Hindi, and some non-religious lessons such as arithmetic. The advanced Islamic studies section for girls, known as *Jameyatul Taherat* (*Jamia* means university; *taherat* comes from *tahera*, meaning “pure” and “chaste”; and *aurat* means women) was introduced in 2006. This section of the madrasa provides education for female dropouts and those who awaiting marriage. Of the 36 students in this section, many dropped out during or before reaching the secondary level; spending several hours a day on Islamic lessons enhances their marriage prospects. Being the oldest and first educational institution in the village, MJAB has a significant influence on educational trends among Muslims in Salai. However, that influence has been reduced due to the availability of government schools and a hybrid madrasa-school, which shall be discussed later.

Table 7: Distribution of Children (age 5–14) by Level of Educational Attainment and Social Category

Total Children	Not Attend School	Primary School	Primary Madrasa	Middle School	Secondary School	Dropout
<i>Muslim General</i>						
87	10	33	32	10	2	2
100%	11.49%	37.93%	36.78%	11.49%	2.30%	2.30%
<i>Muslim OBC</i>						
93	7	40	32	14	0	5
100%	7.53%	43.01%	34.41%	15.05%	0%	5.38%
<i>All Muslim Youths</i>						
180	17	73	64	24	2	7
100%	9.44%	40.56%	35.56%	13.33%	1.11%	3.89%

Source: Field surveys 2012–2013, 2014–2015

The caste hierarchy and access to economic resources such as land ownership affects the differences in educational attainment between Muslim General and Muslim OBC families in the village. Among the children of Muslim OBC families age 5–14, the dropout rate is three percent higher than for the Muslim General families, although, ironically, 11.49 percent of Muslim General children have never attended school, compared to 7.53 percent in Muslim OBC families. The data from both social categories indicate that Muslim children tend to participate in primary and secondary education; however, a difference in the type of schooling is observed since a considerable number of Muslim children (more than 35 percent) participate in madrasas at the primary level. The overall attendance and participation of Muslim children at the primary and secondary levels give evidence that they are inclined to attend school at least up to the secondary level (see *Table 7*).

Table 8: Distribution of Youths (age 15–29) by Level of Educational Attainment and Social Category

Total Youths	Illiterate*	Primary School	Primary Madrasa	Middle School	Secondary School	Postsecondary
<i>Muslim General</i>						
119	20	6	16	17	47	13
100%	16.80	5.04%	13.45%	14.29%	39.50%	10.92%
<i>Muslim OBC</i>						
77	27	7	15	14	11	3
100%	35.06%	9.09%	19.48%	18.18%	14.29%	3.9%
<i>All Muslim Youths</i>						
196	47	13	31	31	58	16
100%	23.98%	6.63%	15.82%	15.82%	29.59%	8.16%

*Note:* \*Among the youths in this category, a few can read the Quran only.

*Source:* Field surveys 2012–2013, 2014–2015

In contrast, the difference in educational attainment by social category is more visible in later years. As shown in *Table 8*, more than 35 percent of Muslim OBC youths aged 15–29 are illiterate, twice the 16.8 percentage of Muslim General youths. The disparities of social hierarchy, economic opportunity, social networks, and cultural capital increase at the upper levels of education. The youths of Muslim OBC families



lag far behind in terms of aspirations and motivation to pursue higher education. Of the OBC youths, only 14.29 percent aspire to continue their study at the secondary school level, whereas 39.5 percent of Muslim General youths pursue their education at least until the secondary level. On the other hand, participation by Muslim OBC youths in post-secondary education is seven percent lower than that of Muslim General youths. However, the overall aspirations of Muslims for postsecondary education remain quite low, at only about 16 percent (see *Table 8*). These lesser aspirations for postsecondary education create a structural constraint for many Muslim youths, compelling them to become associated with certain informal, unorganized and self-employed sectors, creating a form of “minority enclave labor markets” (Das, 2008).

Despite the generally lower level of schooling among the Muslims, two major educational and social changes in Salai village were observed: first, resistance to the traditional system of madrasa education by a group of Muslims, mostly from Chowdhury families, who aimed to combine the educational content of madrasa and secular schools in order to accommodate both modern and Islamic educational needs; and second, the fact that greater educational opportunities inside the village were increasing school attendance among Muslim girls, who were not encouraged to cross the boundary of their community out of fear for their safety and social honor.

### **6.1 Distancing from Religious Schools and the Low-Fee Hybrid Madrasa-School**

A reform initiative in education is evident in the Salai village. This initiative is tending to support change away from exclusively religious education for Muslims. The power of MJBI, the traditional madrasa in the village, and its education system were undermined when a group of Muslims split off from the madrasa management committee and founded Maulana Abul Kalam Azad School in 2009 so that they could teach more secular subjects. The school is a kind of entrepreneurial effort led by a Chowdhury family, and many believe that it has turned into a profit-making institution since the school charges tuition. Although this institution is called a school, its founders claim that it is a “modern madrasa,” because it includes both the general subject curriculum of secular schools and the religious curriculum of madrasas. Moreover, it has been recognized as a secondary madrasa by the Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Board in Lucknow. Being affiliated with the madrasa board, it was able to gain recognition as a minority educational institution and receive state incentives, such as teachers for non-religious, general subject courses. However, the religious clerics of MJBI oppose this kind of schooling, especially the practice of co-education and the combined curriculum

system. Similarly, Madrasa Jadid Higher Secondary School is also a hybrid educational institution, as its name suggests, that has incorporated both madrasa and secular education. This hybrid type of private educational institution, despite its tuition fees, attracts those parents who want their children to receive both a general and a religious education. These institutions are inclusive in nature because they accept non-Muslim students and teachers. Compared to the traditional madrasa students, children studying in this hybrid madrasa-school can move into mainstream public educational institutions with less difficulty because their education is recognized and they have more training in general subject courses. Participation in these fee-based (at a cost of 50 to 250 rupees, depending on the level of education) community schools indicates that Muslim school attendance is strongly correlated with the breadth of available schooling opportunities in the village (see *Table 8*).

## **6.2 An Increasing Trend toward Girls' Education**

Scholars have found that gender-based fear of the public is one of the most important factors restricting Muslim girls' access to higher education outside their community. For many Muslim girls, the boundaries of home and community delimit the only "safe space" able to protect them from the risks of physical or sexual abuse and assault on both their cultural and religious identity (GOI, 2006, p. 13). Since the space outside the neighborhood is perceived as unfriendly and unsafe for girls, the discourse of social honor, ratified in certain cultural norms and religious traditions, continues to have a negative effect on Muslim girls' ability to pursue schooling outside their own community. Furthermore, girls are viewed as less important economic agents in terms of their contribution to family welfare. This norm prevails across all religious groups in rural India. In this context, education opportunities for Muslim girls depend largely on the school facilities available to them in their own community.

As discussed earlier, the madrasa was the only educational institution in Salai until the late 1990s. Since attending school outside the village was, and remains a rare phenomenon, the Muslim girls had to depend on the madrasa as their source of education, which was mostly of a primary educational level. The establishment of hybrid madrasa-schools inside the village expanded the opportunity for girls to attend school at least through grade 10, whereas previously they were limited to junior secondary school (through grade eight). After graduation from the village schools, daughters of some Muslim families enrolled in higher secondary public schools and colleges in the Hapur city area, but usually not as regular students. To avoid having to

commute from the village to the city, many of them are admitted as “private students,” meaning that they can show up to take the course exam without having attended classes on a regular basis. This enrollment on paper without actually attending courses offers a flexible educational option for Muslim girls whose families do not want them to leave their community regularly due to safety, cultural, and religious concerns. They can continue to do household chores and fulfill other domestic roles with their mothers, and if they are sufficiently prepared, can appear at the public examination of the college course in which they listed as students.

## **7 Linkages of Education and Employment: Muslim Youths’ Strategies**

Multiple factors, including the caste hierarchy, economic resources, extended kinship relations through *biradari* system, and exposure and connections to the wider social world beyond their community, impact the means by which Muslim youths of Salai village link (or fail to link) their educational credentials to career opportunities. Family economic burdens create heavy responsibilities for many of these youths at an early age. Many families are large—the 70 surveyed households had an average of nearly eight family members—and the resulting economic demands limit youths’ ability to pursue higher education and push them into seeking income-generating activities at earlier stages of their lives. Generally, the village families have not been reached by the government’s family planning program and are unaware of the economic benefits of contraception and birth control. Ironically, for the Muslim parents that interviewed by the author, having more children translates into greater economic security because the more children, especially boys, these parents had, the more earnings they can expect to generate in the future. But when they have a large number of children, parents cannot provide unlimited education opportunities to all their children, and in a majority of these cases, the girls are less privileged when being permitted to pursue higher education. The gender disparity in education, therefore, begins in the family, as girls are not seen as economic agents who can contribute to the family’s welfare. This factor is inextricably associated with the economic burden that parents must bear in the form of providing a dowry for their daughters’ marriages. The provision of a dowry is not just a gendered custom, but a matter of social prestige for every family; it is widely practiced across various Muslim occupational and Hindu caste groups. Although school attendance by Muslim girls has increased due to the availability of several educational institutions in

the village, the girls are seldom encouraged to continue their studies beyond what is available in the village. For some families, the presence of the young women at home does increase family income, because the girls can engage in jewelry making.

The negative perceptions of education as a career-enhancing factor result partly from the reservation system and partly from the uncertain job market in an unequal social context characterized by unbalanced competition, as reflected in the following assertions offered in one interview during fieldwork:

“The reservation system should exist only in education, not in the employment sector. The Muslim population here in our village is predominant, but they are economically impoverished. When the Muslims continue their education, they need to engage in some kind of work at the same time. Because of this double burden, they cannot progress properly in their studies. In our society, the SCs, who are given a 22 percent reservation quota, have a better life than us. They get benefits in education. For example, their students with lower grades can get admitted into good educational institutions. Our marks are higher than theirs, but we cannot get admitted into these institutions. We are treated as in the general category. They get benefits in jobs also. For example, we need grades of 80 percent to get a job; they can get the same job with only 60 percent. There are a few OBCs such as Teli, Nai, etc. in our village. They represent the backward Muslims. OBCs get a 27 percent quota, but they are so diverse that you cannot count them... For example, if there is a recruitment announcement for 100 positions, we actually compete for 30. Of the 100 positions, 49 are reserved (22 for SCs and STs and 27 for OBCs). Of the remaining 51 positions, some are reserved for women and some are for departmental officials. Therefore, nearly 70 seats are reserved, and we compete as general candidates for only the remaining 30 positions.”<sup>2</sup>

This sort of contention is expressed mostly by the Chowdhury occupational groups, who represent the predominant population of the village. Other Muslim groups such as Teli, Nai, Saqqa, Fakir, etc. fall into the OBC category, which represents 40.7 percent of the total Muslim population in India (Khanam, 2013, p. 7); these groups cannot usually take advantage of the benefits of the reservation system because typically

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<sup>2</sup> Recorded interview with Naushad Chowdhury, December 31, 2014, Salai, Hapur.

their children drop out of school during, or even before, reaching the secondary education level, and begin doing paid work to help with their family's economic needs.

Even those who were pursuing post-secondary education feel greater uncertainty about their job futures. The quality of education that they receive, mostly from inexpensive government institutions, cannot equip them to compete with the graduates of private English-medium schools. The higher social classes always prefer to send their children to English-medium schools because of their superior educational quality:

“The children of rich families go to Delhi Public School. They do not send their children to government school. The students coming here are mostly from poor families. Children of government officials, doctors, engineers, and even Pradhan do not come to government schools. So there is no social equality. If there were equality, the higher-class people would have sent their children to government schools, but they do not. I have not seen children from Pradhan's family coming to this school for many years.”<sup>3</sup>

After secondary education, students wishing to continue their studies must enroll at an educational institution in the city. As a regular student, commuting from village to city for educational purposes requires money. Since these families generally have a large number of children, not all of them pursue education beyond the village. Some continue as regular students and others as private students. As noted above, the status of private student gives Muslim youths the chance to engage in other income-generating activities, since they do not need to attend the college on a regular basis. During my fieldwork, the author found that a considerable number of Muslim youths pursued education as private students after completing grade 12. Private student status is the beginning of becoming disconnected from education, however, since the students spend most of their time on activities other than studying.

### **7.1 The Gendered Boundary of Education and Work**

*Mahol* (also spelled as *mahal*, literally meaning “place of residence”), is term used by the villagers to refer to the outer world and wider society; one seen as unsafe for Muslim girls. The defined and permitted boundary for Muslim girls, for either education or work, is the inner world, the home and the community. After completing the

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Maulana Abdul Jalil, teacher, Purbo Madhyamik School, Salai.

education available to them in the village, Muslim girls need to go elsewhere if they want to partake in further study. But in many cases, their families are not willing to send them outside the village for fear of *bodnami* (disrepute or dishonor). To them, sending grown-up Muslim girls to study in the city is risky in two senses. First, the girls would have the opportunity to mingle with boys, adapt certain nontraditional lifestyles, and participate in illicit relationships and affairs that would undermine their cultural tradition and the parents' authority over them; second, they could be subjected to sexual and other forms of abuse in a vulnerable social context in which the safety of girls of all classes and communities is still a serious concern. The "danger of disrepute" has been a powerful discourse in defining the boundary of education for Muslim girls in rural India (Jeffery et al., 2005, p. 110).

The notion of disrepute is intricately correlated with the economic condition of the Muslim families. As discussed earlier, Muslim families tend to have a relatively high number of children, creating huge economic pressure to meet their family's daily needs. In this context, they cannot place great importance on their girls' education. After attaining a certain level of schooling, many Muslim girls have found that home-based *moti* handicraft work gives them the opportunity to earn money rather than attending college in the city. Very few families had daughters pursuing postsecondary education by commuting to the city on a regular basis. Instead, most of them were admitted to government colleges as private students, allowing them to generate income at home through *moti* jewelry making and thereby contribute to the household economy. During my fieldwork, the astir encountered several Muslim girls who were making *moti* jewelry products even though they had acquired postsecondary degrees. Despite their higher level of educational credentials, their working space is defined in association with the Muslim notion of home. Pursuing a career outside home and the village community is perceived as uncommon. Higher education and career aspirations, particularly outside the community space, may have a negative influence on a young woman's marriage prospects. The gendered boundary of education and work, therefore, largely explains the lack of expansion of young Muslim females' career opportunities.

## **7.2 Study and Work Strategies**

Within this study, several cases of Muslim youths who needed to undertake the double burden of earning income while pursuing their education were examined. In addition to studying, these youths were also involved in family farming or in various non-farming jobs, ranging from selling buffalo milk to small-scale trading and business activities in

the village and neighboring localities.

Naushad, a 24-year-old Muslim from a Chowdhury family with six siblings, recently completed his M.A. as a private student. His family's farmlands could not meet their economic needs, so he had to engage in other income-generating activities as well. His father, whom he helps on the farm, also makes and trades sanitary toilet materials to generate additional income. During his M.A. studies, Naushad developed a small-scale textbook trading business in Salai and the neighboring villages. Since he was not a regular M.A. student, he could spend time on this business, which he operated from June to September. He could manage the amount of money needed for the business from various sources including the "Committee"<sup>4</sup>, informal savings, and a rotating credit system among a group of members in the village. He buys textbooks, of the nursery level to grade eight, from wholesale markets in the city of Meerut. He then holds the books in a small storage room and solicits orders from schools and bookshops. Naushad can earn 10–20 percent profit from his sales. He returns the remaining books to the wholesale seller in Meerut city. He can earn 100,000 rupees each year from the textbook business, helping to cover his own tuition and exam fees and also support his family. Currently, he is looking for a government job, though he is not confident about his chances since as a general candidate he is not eligible for the reservation system. Because of this uncertainty, he alternatively planned to develop his textbook business further if he could not secure any other job. Naushad said that although his business functioned for only three months, he can remain engaged in it all year if he expanded his business to other states.

Like Naushad, many Muslim youths engage in income-generating work while also pursuing education. They work in city jobs such as at call centers in Noida, and many discontinue their education when their jobs turn into a profession, although some return to school after working for a period of time. For instance, Kamrar Alam, a 20-year-old Muslim from a Chowdhury family with 10 siblings, left school after grade 12 when his father became sick. His family could not depend on the earnings from their farmlands for subsistence. The father had been earning additional income through a handicraft business and so, when he was unable to work due to sickness, Kamrar

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<sup>4</sup> The "Committee," a kind of cooperative system of saving and borrowing money built upon understanding, social relations, and trust among a group of members, is a common practice in rural India. In Salai, many youths and small-scale businessmen participated in such a group. The members select the head of the group and deposit a certain amount of money on a particular date each month. Money from these deposits is given as loans to members in need. The committee is thus the organization handling the flow of money.

abandoned his plans to study hotel management. His elder brother, who had been admitted to a bachelor's degree program in business administration at a college in Meerut city, was also compelled to discontinue his education. Kamrar gradually took over the responsibility for his father's handicraft work and had been managing it for three years when the author first met him. Kamrar subsequently stopped working for the handicraft business due to the irregular payments received from suppliers, but his elder brother took over the responsibility of the business. Later, he and one of his friends established a clothing shop in the city but suffered financial losses. Recently Kamrar has resumed his educational career, and is planning to take the higher secondary public exam in biology, which would help him to pursue employment in the pharmaceutical sector. If he is successful on the biology exam, he plans to get a bachelor's degree in Pharmacy (known as a B. Pharma) from a private college in Ghaziabad district, although the cost is very high at 100,000 rupees per year. If he could get a B. Pharma degree, Kamrar would apply for employment at medical and pharmaceutical companies. Alternatively, since B. Pharma degree holders are eligible for pharmaceutical licenses for two medical stores, he could establish medical stores or rent the licenses to others for use in their own stores.

### **7.3 *Biradari* Networks and Internship Strategy**

In their search for career opportunities, many Muslim youths, after completing their secondary education, use their kinship and social networks to find a practical internship in the technical and mechanical employment sectors. Internships are an informal way to acquire technical skills in the construction, electrical, and mechanical sectors. For this type of job, the youths need to move outside their locality and spend months or years learning the trade. Once they have been trained by their *ustad* or "master", they can obtain salaried jobs within their specialized, mostly unorganized, employment sectors through informal networks. Opportunities for such work are limited in Hapur city, a small district town, but ample in Noida, a growing city adjacent to Delhi with huge construction work and considerable urban facilities, including offices of large companies and residences of elite businessmen and white-collar employees. Many Muslim youths who have acquired some skills in construction, technical, and mechanical careers have found Noida to be a good place for employment opportunities and small-scale business ventures. The following cases illustrate their typical career paths, which they may begin to pursue after or before completing their secondary education through internships and by utilizing kinship relations and social networks,



mostly within the *biradari* system.

Nadeem Ahmad left school at age 16. He completed grade eight at the junior high school in Salai village but could pursue further studies because his family wanted him to get some kind of paying job. Through his family connection with a person in the village, who had a battery repair and sales shop in Hapur city, he started to work at the shop as an intern, staying there for two years. During the internship, he received a small amount of pocket money, paid on an irregular basis, but no regular salary from his master, the shop owner. After two years, once he had acquired the necessary skills, he began receiving a salary of 4,000 rupees per month. Later, he decided to leave this job in Hapur and move to Noida. To him, Noida is a big city with better career opportunities. First, he went to one of his relatives in Noida, who introduced him to electric generator repair business for work. Nadeem worked as an intern there for seven months. During his internship, he again did not earn much money, but he had no difficulty because he stayed with his parental uncle, who was living in a rented room. The uncle covered all his necessary costs, including food. Later, he started to work in a battery shop owned by another paternal uncle in Noida. After one year he moved on to a different shop, owned by yet another uncle, where he could earn 7,000 rupees a month. After working for five years in the shop, he was then able to establish his own business, which he did. He frequently returns to his village and provides economic support to his family.

Chowdhury Zeshan, who was 22 years old when the author spoke with him, had established an air conditioner repair shop in Noida three years earlier. He left high school at age 14 and worked as an intern in a tailor shop in Salai. After he had been there for nearly one year, his cousin brought him to Noida and introduced him to a boutique tailor shop where he could earn 6,000 rupees a month. Later, he moved to another tailoring business and worked there for one and a half years. Although a skilled tailor, he was interested in repairing air conditioners, an occupation that he had found to be in demand amidst Noida's increasingly urbanized lifestyle. Thus, he started to work as an intern at an air conditioner repair shop, finally establishing his own shop. To start such a shop, he explained, required a tool box, a bike, oxygen materials, and rented business space. There are four interns working in his shop and one *karigor* (a mechanic or maker). The business's peak season lasts from March–August, India's summer season. During this time, his shop receives many repair orders; during the winter, he and his staff repair geyser machines. Washing machine and refrigerator repairs continue all year. During the peak season, he can earn 400,000 to 500,000 rupees which enable him to contribute support for his family. Now he is planning to establish another shop in Noida.

#### **7.4 Disparity Within: Muslim Youths, Social Networks, and Cultural Capital**

There are identifiable differences in employment patterns between the two social categories of Muslim youths, namely the Muslim General and the Muslim OBCs. As discussed above, most of the youths who engage in self-employment or other employment sectors beyond the village community come from the Muslim General families. Why are the Muslim OBC youths less represented in employment outside the village? This pattern may be interconnected with the greater connectivity skills of the Muslim youths from Chowdhury families, some of whom are privileged in terms of land ownership and higher social status when compared to the landless Muslim OBC families. This connectivity, expressed through the youths' cultural interactions and lifestyle strategies, provides them with an extra advantage in acquiring exposure to the wider social world, particularly urban life; youths of Muslim OBC families often lack this feature, reflecting a clear difference in social networks and cultural capital. Bourdieu (1974, 1977) contended that the reproduction of social status and hierarchy was not merely dependent on educational credentials, but also on the mastery of social networks and certain cultural capital (see also Sullivan, 2002). The youths of Chowdhury landowner families illustrate Bourdieu's claim. With their secondary and sometimes postsecondary educational attainment, they are able to connect themselves to the wider social world beyond their community, whereas the social world of many youths from landless families is limited to their community, or else to Hapur city, if they are unsupported by kinship groups from other areas.

The superior cultural capital of youths from Muslim General families, particularly the landlord families, is manifested and articulated in several visible lifestyle aspects. Wearing jeans and other urban and Western-style attire and riding motorbikes, these "educated youths" hang out with their friends and often spend time outside the village. Their wider physical mobility is often translated into economic activities when coming up with certain ideas such as joint venture or partnership businesses, resuming their studies with a defined specialized or technical career goal in mind. In contrast, the OBC youths, constrained by multiple factors including family economic burdens, are usually compelled to take on casual labor and other low-paying non-farming jobs, regardless of their level of educational attainment. During the fieldwork conducted in Noida, the author observed that the Chowdhury youths dominated the small-scale businesses and mechanical- or technical-related shops, where OBC youths' ownership or participation was virtually nonexistent. However, youths of

economically impoverished families from both the Muslim General and OBC classes are found in Noida, where they perform low-paying manual labor roles.

Table 9: Distribution of Youths (Age 15–29) by Schooling, Employment, and Social Category, Salai, Uttar Pradesh

Total Youths	Studying	Working	Type of Work		
			Farming	Non-Farming	Regular Jobs
<i>Muslim General</i>					
119	61	58	8	50	0
100%	51.26%	48.74%	13.79%	86.21%	0%
<i>Muslim OBC</i>					
77	10	67	0	67	0
100%	12.99%	87.01%	0%	100%	0%
<i>All Muslims</i>					
196	71	125	8	117	0
100%	36.22%	63.78%	6.4%	93.6%	0%

Sources: Field surveys 2012–2013, 2014–2015

As shown in *Table 9*, the differences between Muslim General and OBC youths are clearly visible, resulting from the disparity in economic resources and from the gap in social networking and cultural capital. The percentage of OBC youths aged 15–29 who are involved primarily in work rather than studying, is very high, at 87 percent, whereas the ratio of workers to students among the Muslim General youths is very similar, at 49–51 percent. The far higher percentage of working youths among the OBC families indicates these families’ greater economic burdens. These burdens affect the youths’ social connectivity and physical mobility, whereas the General youths are relatively privileged in this regard. When one looks at specific types of employment, one finds that most of the self-employed youths come from landowning families. Though both groups predominantly work in non-farming jobs, the nature of these jobs can vary considerably in prestige, power, and status, consistent with the youths’ position within the Muslim social classes and caste group hierarchy.

## 8 Conclusions

I shall close by briefly considering the wider relevance of this paper. The ethnographic empirical evidence presented here challenges three widely held popular and scholarly viewpoints, at different levels and degrees, among various stakeholders both inside and outside Indian society: (a) that Muslims are unwilling to adapt to the changes in India's neoliberal education and development paradigms, primarily due to their religious and social conservatism; (b) that they tend to prefer madrasas (Islamic religious schools) rather than modern secular and national schools, as both a sign of resistance to the modern development paradigm as well as a means of differentiating and constructing themselves as a distinct cultural and religious group over and against the Hindu majority; and (c) that Muslims in India are a predominantly homogeneous group whose status quo can be described in a way that subsumes class and other social differences.

First, the study reveals that community-initiated and reform-oriented schooling trends are accommodating modern secular forms of educational content, though not entirely ignoring culturally and religiously informed content, indicating that Muslims aspire to cope with and adapt to modern educational changes. Second, the Muslim community, even in the case of such a peripheral village like Salai, tends distance itself from the more traditional and orthodox system of Islamic education, suggesting that processes of social change are occurring despite the influence, power, and authority of the traditional Islamic religious schools. This distancing process has probably been pushed forward by India's growing economic globalization and development paradigm, to which Muslims cannot be considered unresponsive. However, in this process of distancing from traditional forms of Islamic schooling, a new community-based, low-fee, private schooling system has emerged as a form of educational entrepreneurship. On one hand, this new system increases the overall access to schools provided to Muslim children, but on the other hand, it also creates a group of rural elites, albeit a numerically small one; those who own and manage this entrepreneurial activity within the Muslim community. Third, with regard to social change, Muslims cannot be perceived as a homogeneous group, as evidenced by the cases that presented herein, for there are considerable differences within the Muslim community, particularly between the Muslim General and OBC categories.

Finally, it has been shown that, despite for the changes in schooling options and increasing participation in education, some patterns of educational behaviors and

employment trends are markedly visible among Muslim youths. Many Muslim youths experience a situation of bewilderment both during and after their secondary education. Their transition period from school to work is frequently characterized by career uncertainties, as they increasingly feel that a certain degree of formal education is necessary but may not guarantee employment in regular salaried and other “respectable jobs.” They see themselves as the victims in an unbalanced comparison of educational and personal credentials between those groups who are socially, economically, and culturally privileged and those who are not. This difficulty leads a large number of Muslim youths withdrawing from secondary school, causing many of them, particularly those from the OBC group, to end up as casual workers. Therefore, despite certain changes in educational attainment and credentials, Muslims’ employment in India continues to be concentrated within particular unorganized and informal sectors, leading to their underrepresentation in regular white-collar and governmental jobs.

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**ANNEX**

Table 3: Distribution of Youth Population (age 17–29) by Educational Attainment for Each Socio-Religious Community in the Years 1999–2000 and 2009–2010

<b>1999–2000</b>	<b>Hindu UC</b>	<b>Hindu OBC</b>	<b>Hindu SC</b>	<b>Hindu ST</b>	<b>Muslim OBC</b>	<b>Muslim General</b>	<b>Muslim All</b>	<b>Other Minorities</b>	<b>All</b>
Illiterate	13.4%	33.7%	42.9%	53.1%	33.7%	36.9%	36.0%	18.8%	30.9%
Secondary and Below	58.7%	54.7%	49.5%	39.6%	59%	54.0%	55.5%	58.7%	54%
Higher Secondary	15.9%	8.0%	5.3%	5.8%	5.3%	6.0%	5.8%	14.6%	9.5%
Postsecondary	12%	3.6%	2.3%	1.5%	2.1%	3.1%	2.7%	8%	5.5%
All	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>2009–2010</b>									
Illiterate	5.7%	16.2%	24.7%	30.1%	26.1%	18.8%	22.3%	8.8%	17.1%
Secondary and Below	51.2%	59.3%	60.8%	58%	59%	67.7%	63.8%	56.2%	58.2%
Higher Secondary	24%	16.1%	10%	8.6%	10.2%	9.7%	9.8%	22.1%	15.5%
Postsecondary	19.2%	8.5%	4.5%	3.3%	4.8%	3.8%	4.1%	13%	9.2%
All	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Note: UC refers to Upper Caste, OBC to Other Backward Classes, SC to Scheduled Castes, ST to Scheduled Tribes*  
*Source: Observer Research Foundation, India Datalabs (cf. Basant, 2012, p. 12)*