

# **Does Equality Spring from Schools? An Investigation of Assumptions of Equality Among Adolescents of Subaltern Groups**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In the present modern era, all societies across the globe are striving hard to establish and develop a feeling of equality among its citizens. In such efforts education has become a vital tool for formation of a just and equal society. Therefore, it is imperative that the notion of equality should spring from schools. In such premise, the present investigation has been designed to study the experiences of discrimination faced in the schools by adolescents of subaltern sections of the society to answer if equality springs from schools? A survey was conducted among 500 adolescents selected through random sampling technique to study their experiences and assumptions of equality. The findings of the study supports that subaltern students do experience discrimination in schools; different sub-groups experience low to moderate level of discriminations. However, their assumptions of equality were found to be ideal. It was also found that significant negative relation of experiences of discrimination and assumptions of equality exist in the schools. The study advocates minimizing experiences of discrimination by formation of discrimination free school environment so that the dream of establishing equality may spring from school.*

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## **Introduction**

Formation of an inclusive society is the primary agenda in all major policy initiatives taken at the national and international levels in the last so many decades. International Covenant on

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Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963), World Conference Against Racial Discrimination (2001), and Draft Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier-Free and Rights Based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia (2011) proclaim eradication of all forms of discrimination from the society. These policy initiatives have advocated that discrimination still exists in its subtle to blatant forms across the globe.

The present modern world has geared up a global movement with the help of all the stakeholders to form a just and equal society. Among all the stakeholders, role of education in this context is undeniable. Education is the basic platform to nurture right kind of knowledge skill and attitude among prospective citizens so that they may realise the vision of a just and inclusive society. The schools are expected to be the social agents and socialise its citizenries in such a way that they learn to live in harmony with each other. The schools should inculcate among students a sense of synergy and develop a feeling of unity and cooperation. But, somehow looking at the widespread evidences of suppression and exploitation of down trodden classes of society, it appears that schools somehow have failed in their efforts to achieve this stated goal. It has become a place where discrimination as perceived particularly by the vulnerable sections of the students.

Teachers' practices in the school have also been found discriminatory, Hanna and Linden (2009) evidenced that when marking exam papers, teachers give those answers assigned to be of lower caste students lower scores than similar answers that are assigned to be of higher caste students. Interestingly and contrary to previous literature that finds individual discriminate in favour of members of their own group, they find that discrimination against the lower castes is mainly driven by lower caste teachers, while teachers who belong to higher castes do not appear to discriminate at all.

As Indian school set up is so multicultural having different caste composition. The scope of caste based and other discrimination becomes so wide. In a comprehensive study conducted by NGO Navsarjan in 2009 in which the phenomena of discrimination was surveyed in context of dalit children focusing on girls, it was found that many SC children (20 to 50 per cent of sample) had complaints/grievances against their non-dalit teachers in the

school. Further, SC students (25 to 53 per cent) had also reported experiences of discrimination against other (non SC) students in the school.

Similarly, there are also views that Muslims do have the idea that they will be discriminated against and that there is no point in getting educated (Ghosh, 2014). It is further stated that Muslims think that the only option they have left is to get self-employed in small businesses (Mander, 2014).

Bodnar (1993) states that if the process of achieving school effectiveness is to continue, there is a critical need to examine school culture as the focal point for achieving school effectiveness. We must encourage the application of the concepts of culture to school improvement efforts. Schools will need to look within, in order to reveal the basic elements of their existing cultures before they attempt to emulate the characteristics of effective schools. When school personnel are aware of those assumptions which form their existing culture, they will have a better understanding as to how these assumptions influence members' performance and school activities.

Studies reveal that discrimination is prevalent in our schools. Hanna and Linden (2009) in their study 'Measuring Discrimination in education' found that top performing females tend to lose most due to discrimination. Research (Paradies, 2006; Williams and Mohammed 2009; Williams, Neighbor and Jackson 2003) shows that racial discrimination pervades many aspects of human life and is also considered as a risk factor adversely affecting psychological functioning and mental health outcomes for adolescents. Discrimination is practiced in schools and society which influences mental and physical health, students' performance, and environment of the school. (Stone and Meekyung, 2005; Madried, 2010; Hatzenhuehler, Corbin, and Fromme, 2010; and Schwatitz, and Meyer, 2010). The other variables with which discrimination has been studied are Parental Educational Attainment (Sheylal, Valerie and Pati, 2010); Emotional Distress (Maccabe, 2009); Ethnic Identity (Mossakowski, 2003); Dropout Behaviour (Felice, 1981); Psychological Functioning (Sellers, Linder, Martin and Lewis, 2006), etc. The discrimination is suffered especially by subaltern groups. Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) highlighted that the resistance to schooling comes from students of the subordinate classes. The studies suggest that the subaltern classes who are the groups of peoples from subordinate classes that counters

hegemonic practices, movement resistance and struggle against social exclusion (Santos, 2002) suffer from discriminatory experiences within the school.

Thus, the discussion so far led to the fact that firstly, there is a need to ascertain the experiences of discrimination being faced by students particularly of subaltern groups? Secondly, what are the assumptions of equality among students of subaltern groups which may guide us to re-shape school culture focusing equality?

The review of studies mentioned above revealed that there is no study conducted to investigate the relationship between assumptions of equality in school and experiences of discrimination of subaltern sections of the school. Therefore, following research questions have been framed for empirical investigation.

### **Research Questions**

- What is the status of experiences of discrimination faced by adolescents of subaltern sections of the society (i.e., Girls, Religious Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes)?
- Do schools have positive perceptions towards assumptions of equality in the school?
- What is the relationship of experiences of discrimination with the assumptions of equality in the school?
- What is the impact of some independent variables on the perception of assumptions of equality in the school?

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Schools are the replicas of society; hence, discrimination which is present in the society comes into school and lead to discrimination to vulnerable sections of the students. This discrimination is experienced by students and is measurable. Schools have some assumptions which are the values that people take for granted in the school and which is responsible for proper functioning of the school. These assumptions can be perceived and measured.

### **Method**

#### ***Research Design***

In order to achieve the objective of the study descriptive survey method was employed. The population of the study was all the higher secondary adolescents studying in schools affiliated to UP and CBSE boards in the city of Varanasi.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

A sample consisting 500 adolescents belonging to subaltern classes of urban area of Varanasi was drawn following random cluster sampling technique. Varanasi City has eight administrative blocks; these eight administrative blocks are divided into 15 clusters according to their geographical locality comprising only the urban area of Varanasi. Further, 5 clusters were randomly selected from the clusters of school and all schools under each clusters were chosen as sample of the study. In this way 26 schools were obtained to draw out final sample of the study. Among these schools, 11 schools were of Board of High School and Intermediate Education, Uttar Pradesh and rest 15 schools were affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education. In the sample of the study senior secondary subaltern students i.e., girls, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and religious minority students were selected from different sections of the schools. In this way 500 subaltern students were included in the study. Among 500 subaltern students there were 387 girls, 89 scheduled caste, and 14 scheduled tribe's and 69 religious minority students.

### **Tools**

Two self made data gathering instruments i.e., Experiences of Discrimination Scale and Assumptions of Equality Scale were constructed. The experiences of discrimination scale had 29 items covering all type of curricular and co-curricular experiences adolescents have within the school. The Assumptions of equality scale consisted of 25 items in multidimensional perspective. The four dimensions of the scale were Free and Equal Communication, Provision for Special Measures to Society, Participation in Decision Making and Equal Approach to all Students. The items were kept taking several teaching learning aspects within and outside classroom. The reliability of the tool was established through split-half and test-retest method. In case of 'Assumption of equality scale' test retest reliability was 0.79 whereas split half reliability was 0.87; further, for 'Experiences of Discrimination Scale' it was 0.77 and 0.81 respectively. The content validity of the tool was established by the experts of education, sociology and psychology. In order to establish the internal consistency of the tool Cronbach Alpha was also calculated which was found to be 0.87 for 'Assumption of Equality Scale' and 0.79 for 'Experiences of Discrimination Scale'.

## Results and Discussion

As per the objectives of the study statistical analysis was done and hypotheses were tested. Findings are presented below according to sequence of objectives.

Status of experiences of discrimination among girls, religious minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Students.

The mean score for the experiences of discrimination of girls was 37.11. A mean higher than 30 suggests that the adolescents experienced discrimination above average. Thus, it was found that girls experienced discrimination at above average level in their schools. Similarly, the mean score for the sample of religious minority (34.37) was also at the same level. The mean score for the sample of SC adolescents was 26.98 which showed that SC adolescents experienced low level of discrimination in their schools. The mean score for the sample of ST adolescents was 20 which showed that ST Adolescents experienced discrimination at low level in their schools. The mean of girls was highest among all the subaltern groups.

**Table 1**

	<b>Average of Subaltern Classes</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Religious Minorities</b>	<b>Scheduled Castes</b>	<b>Scheduled Tribes</b>
Mean	33.86	37.11	34.37	26.98	20.14
Median	36	39	37	27	22
Mode	40	40	37	10	6
SD	1.51	1.38	1.55	1.44	1.34
Maximum	81	81	57	51	38
Minimum	4	5	8	4	6
Range	77	76	49	47	32

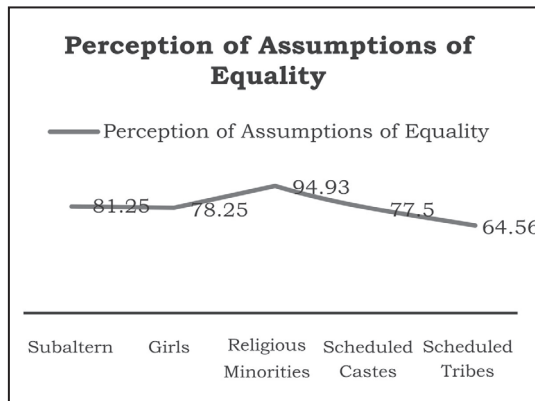
## Perception of Assumptions of Equality

Table 2 and Figure 1 reveal that perception of different subaltern groups towards the assumptions of equality in schools. In present study the assumptions of equality means how subaltern group perceive discrimination free environment in the school or if they

perceive equal and just behavioural practices in their schools. Mean values of subaltern girls, religious minority, SC and ST are 78.25, 94.93, 77.50 and 64.56 respectively; it means that these adolescents perceive equality in their school at average level. Among the subaltern groups ST students have perceived assumption of equality most negatively whereas religious minorities have perceived relatively in better way. The finding implies reform in school culture components so that all students may perceive a healthy environment within the school.

**Table 2**

Subaltern Groups Students	Perception (Mean Score) of Assumptions of Equality
Subaltern	81.25
Girls	78.25
Religious Minorities	94.93
Scheduled Castes	77.50
Scheduled Tribes	64.56



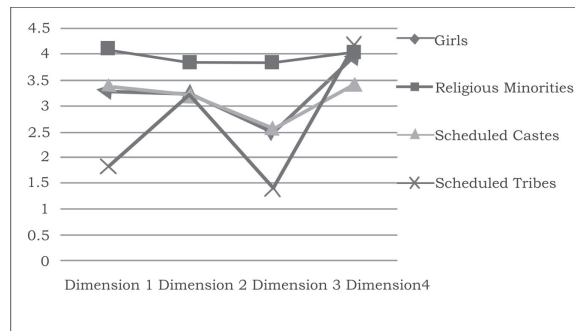
**Figure 1: Average rating on each dimension of equality by subalterns**

Table 3 reveals the rating of all the subaltern group adolescents on all the four dimensions measuring assumptions of equality in the school. All groups have rated the items positively but ST students have given poor ratings to Dimension 1 and 3. It suggests that there is some degree of fear among them to speak anything before

the authorities. Further, efforts on the part of teachers and other school personnel are also lacking to ensure their participation in decisions regarding students in the schools.

**Table 3**

Sample	Dimension-1 Free and Equal Communications	Dimension-2 Provision for Special Measures	Dimension-3 Participation in Decision Making	Dimension-4 Equal Approach to All Students
Girls	3.28	3.25	2.49	3.94
Religious Minorities	4.09	3.84	3.85	4.03
Scheduled Castes	3.42	3.21	2.6	3.44
Scheduled Tribes	1.84	3.21	1.42	4.21



**Figure 2: Dimension wise analysis regarding assumptions of equality dimension wise analysis of adolescent girls on assumptions of equality**

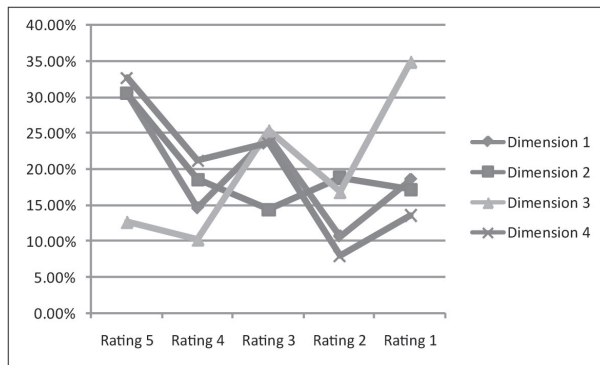
Table 4 shows the pattern of rating (ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 is poor assumption of equality and 5 means ideal assumption of equality depicting discrimination free school environment) in per cent by girl students on each dimension of the tool. It reveals that a large part of the sample rated 1 to all items. Most of the girls have given good rating but on Dimension 3 the trend was opposite. Girls rated this dimension more negatively. This dimension was related with participation in decision making related to students' issues. It reveals that girl adolescents feel lack of participation in decision making process. However, the overall scenario depicts



that a substantial portion of adolescents girls have poor perception regarding assumptions of equality in the schools.

**Table 4**

Rating Score	Dimension-1 Free and Equal Communication	Dimension-2 Provision for Special Measures	Dimension-3 Participation in Decision Making	Dimension-4 Equal Approach to All Students
Rating 5	30.48%	30.48%	12.68%	32.68%
Rating 4	14.63%	18.53%	10.24%	21.21%
Rating 3	24.63%	14.39%	25.36%	23.65%
Rating 2	10.73%	18.78%	16.82%	8.04%
Rating 1	18.55%	17.18%	34.87%	13.65%

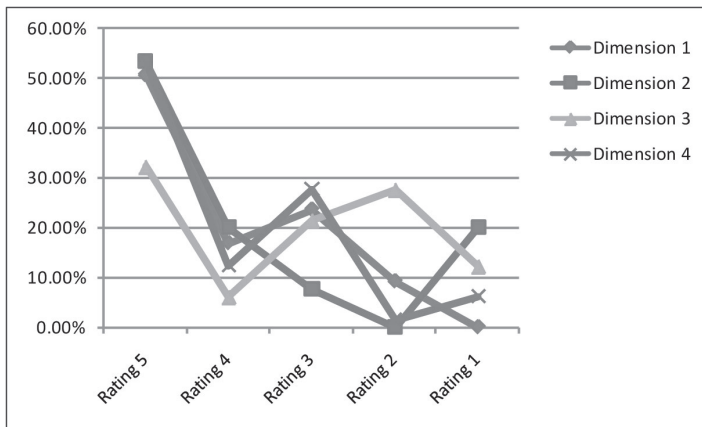


**Figure 3: Dimension wise analysis of adolescent from religious minority on assumptions of equality**

The Table 5 depicts that adolescents belonging to religious minority were more positive on all dimensions of assumptions of equality. Almost all agreed to an extent on dimension one as no students rated zero on any item of this dimension. This shows that religious minority does not feel any kind of communication gap within the school. The scenario among religious minority is particularly healthy that all dimensions have been rated at higher level by religious minority. Although, in context of participatory decision making, religious minority too feel that their participation in decision making is relatively less.

**Table 5**

Rating Score	Dimension-1 Free and Equal Communication	Dimension-2 Provision for Special Measures	Dimension-3 Participation in Decision Making	Dimension-4 Equal Approach to All Students
Rating 5	50.76%	53.30%	32.30%	53.30%
Rating 4	16.92%	20.00%	6.15%	12.30%
Rating 3	23.67%	7.69%	21.53%	27.69%
Rating 2	9.23%	0.00%	27.69%	1.53%
Rating 1	0.00%	20.00%	12.30%	6.15%

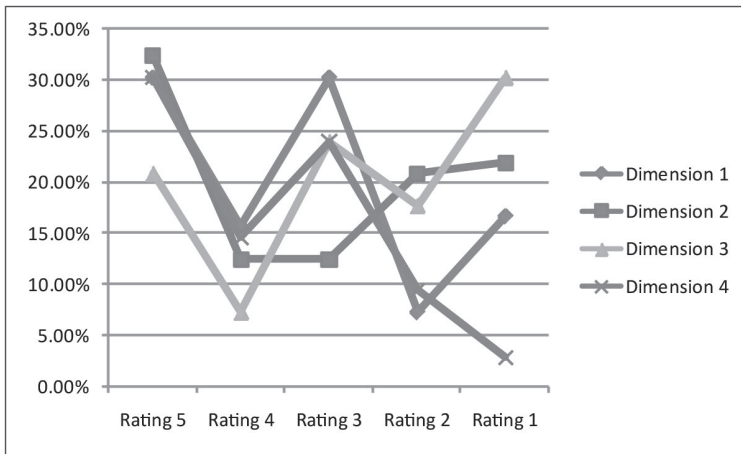


**Figure 4: Dimension wise analysis of adolescents from scheduled castes on assumptions of equality**

Table 6 indicates that responses of SC adolescents towards assumptions of equality were distributed evenly across all dimensions. As it has been observed in reference of Uttar Pradesh that SC students are availing good number of Government initiatives for education and employment therefore their assumptions are relatively higher. In case of SC adolescents too, the dimension of participatory decision making was rated negatively in comparison to other dimensions of the scale.

**Table 6**

Rating Score	Dimension-1 Free and Equal Communication	Dimension-2 Provision for Special Measures	Dimension-3 Participation in Decision Making	Dimension-4 Equal Approach to All Students
Rating 5	30.20%	32.29%	20.83%	30.20%
Rating 4	15.62%	12.50%	7.29%	14.58%
Rating 3	30.20%	12.50%	23.95%	23.95%
Rating 2	7.29%	20.85%	17.70%	9.37%
Rating 1	16.66%	21.87%	30.20%	2.87%

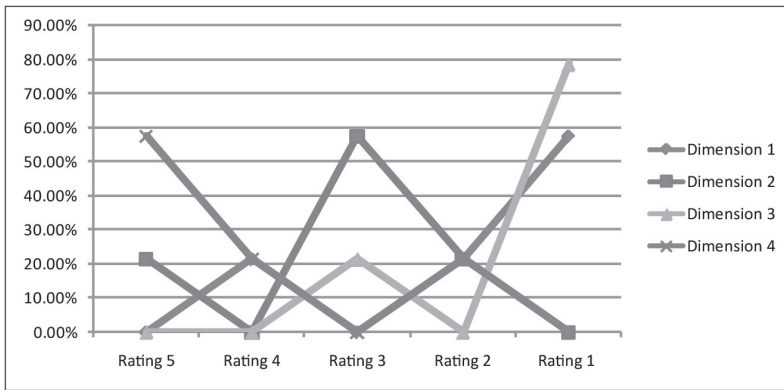


**Figure 5: Dimension wise analysis of adolescents from scheduled tribes on assumptions of equality**

Table 7 reveals that, out of fourteen ST students, eight students gave 1 (poor) rating to dimension one and 11 out of fourteen students assigned rating 1 (poor) to dimension three. It indicates that ST adolescents are most hesitant among the other subaltern groups that they feel they cannot speak up before any authority in the school. The response of the ST adolescents also indicates that they have assumption that authority doesn't make effort to ensure their participation in any decision related to them.

**Table 7**

Rating Score	Dimension-1 Free and Equal Communication	Dimension-2 Provision for Special Measures	Dimension-3 Participation in Decision Making	Dimension-4 Equal Approach to All Students
Rating 5	0.00%	21.42%	0.00%	57.48%
Rating 4	21.42%	0.00%	0.00%	21.42%
Rating 3	0.00%	57.48%	21.42%	0.00%
Rating 2	21.42%	21.42%	0.00%	21.42%
Rating 1	57.48%	0.00%	78.57%	0.00%



**Figure 6: Subaltern adolescents experiences of discrimination in relation to the assumptions of equality in the school**

At the next step of data analysis the correlation coefficients of experiences of discrimination among adolescents with their assumptions of equality was calculated. It was found that all the correlations were negative and in case of religious minority (-0.248), Scheduled castes (-0.433) and scheduled tribes (-0.539) the correlation coefficients were significant at 0.05 level. It was also observed that there was no significant relationship between experiences of discrimination of girls with the assumptions of equality in the school (-0.016). On the other hand, religious minorities, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes experiences of discrimination were significant and negatively related with the assumptions of equality in the school. The findings suggest that the assumption of equality among subaltern groups is inversely related with their experiences of discrimination. It implies that to strengthen the notion of equality in the school there is need to

minimise experiences of discrimination in adolescents particularly the subalterns.

**Impact of Stream on Assumptions of Equality in the School**

***Analysis of variance in Perception of Assumptions of Equality According to Stream of Study***

The analysis of variance revealed that the F value obtained was 0.43 which was not significant at 0.05 level. It indicates that there was no significant difference between different stream students' perception of assumptions of equality. Since, the focus of the study is experiences of discrimination within the school and their assumptions of equality which is universal with every student. According to stream experiences of may be of different nature but all students do feel discrimination in various school activities, hence, nullifying the effect of stream of study.

**Impact of Medium of Instruction on Assumptions of Equality in the School**

***Difference in Perception of Assumptions of Equality According to Medium of Instruction***

The data analysis revealed that the means scores of Hindi medium (80) and English medium (89.37) do not differ significantly (t value-0.00) at 0.05 level of significance. It means that both Hindi and English medium school perceive assumptions of equality in similar manner. It may be due to the reason that assumptions which are the core element of culture, is grasped from the society. As all the schools were situated in the same social setting similar assumptions of the school is possible. In addition, the rationale regarding stream of study also applies in case of effect of medium of instruction.

**Impact of Type of School (i.e., Co. Ed., Boys, Girls School) on Assumptions of Equality in the School**

**Table 8**

**Difference in perception of assumptions of equality in the school according to independent variables (i.e., Type of school, school board)**

School	N	M	SD	t-values
Co. Ed.	150	84.81	25.20	2.37
Boys	277	98.06	21.82	

Co.Ed.	150	84.81	25.20	0.001
Girls	73	75.68	26.34	
Boys	277	98.06	21.82	5.63
Girls	73	75.68	26.34	
UP	405	79.75	26.95	0.00
CBSE	95	91.87	23.80	
Government	369	82.81	26.33	0.00
Private	131	78.43	27.96	

Table 8 indicates t-values among students from co.ed., boys and girls schools. It shows that there is a significant impact of type of school on the perception of equality in the schools. Students from boys' school perceived assumptions more positively as compared to the students from co.ed. and girls' school. Students from girls' school were most negative towards their assumptions of equality. It is quite evident that girls do face different gender stereotyped behaviour in their school having more experiences of discrimination as compared to boys. The social setting which is again rooted in gender segregation of girls must have added effect among girls for their poor perception of equality.

Further, the t-value obtained to study effect of school board is not significant at 0.05 level. It means students of both the boards perceived their school assumptions in the same manner. The curricular and co-curricular activities organised in the school are quite similar following uniform teaching learning pattern. They may differ in extent and nature according to board but behavioural exposure to students is quite in similar scale. This must have contributed towards absence of effect of school administrative board.

Lastly, the t-value (0.00) obtained for difference between private and government was also found not significant at 0.05 level. It means that both government and private school adolescents perceive assumptions of equality in similar manner. This result may be due to the fact that schools are the replicas of society and the core assumptions of society gradually creep into the schools and hence, it is same in schools irrespective of the fact that it is owned by public or private management.

### **Conclusion**

The study suggests that all the subaltern sections of the students are experiencing low to above average level of experiences of

discrimination. Although, discrimination in smallest amount is also bad and unacceptable, still the health of the schools of the sample considered to be of average level. The study also indicates that there is a negative significant relationship among the assumptions of equality in the schools with the experiences of discrimination of subaltern groups. The findings call for sensitisation of all educational stakeholders to think upon reforming school environment. There is need to bring awareness about the issue of equality particularly among teachers that they should extend just and equal treatment towards all students. It was also found that most of the independent variables (i.e., subject stream, types of school, medium of instruction) in school taken in the study do not have any impact on the perception of assumptions of equality. Although, a little difference in the perception of assumption was seen in co-ed., boys and girls school. It indicates that the perception of assumption of equality is similar in all the schools, which is moderately positive. However, it also indicates about the universality of the phenomena that it is prevalent in totality unaffected by any variable, thus, demands early remediation.

It can be concluded from the study that schools are working on the assumptions of equality but still there is much work needed to bring more changes in the assumptions so that adolescents particularly of subaltern class may feel positive in the school developing a healthy social and just outlook.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the findings of the study following suggestions are given for bringing refinement in school education policies and practices at larger level:

- Experiences of discrimination can have detrimental effect on adolescents physical and psychological well being. Individuals nurtured under such environment may develop a negative and unhealthy attitude towards society. Therefore, there is need to strengthen school culture to orient it towards practice of discrimination free activities and policies.
- In present study, experiences of discrimination are found to be significantly related to the assumptions of equality. The findings have deep implication for school personnel. Development of an individual; with healthy mind and heart is the key for ensuring adolescents positive social outlook. If students in the school

would feel discrimination, it is not good for our democratic social fabric. Hence, urgent remediation is needed to provide healthy experience to our prospective citizens so that the age old democratic way of living may be strengthened.

- As there is similar perception of assumptions of equality according to all independent variable. The finding suggests the need of orientation of all the schools towards development of discrimination free school culture. The Right to Free and Compulsory Elementary Education Act (2009) also envisaged schools to remain equal in their teaching learning environment. Hence, there is need to launch rigorous in service programs for all school personnel to aware them about notion of equality in the school.
- Among all, the subaltern groups girls were found to have most experiences of discrimination and their assumptions of equality in schools were also found poorest. There have been constant policy and practice initiatives to invigorate girl's education in the country but somehow, there is still need to change the gendered mindset of the people. Such reasons not only provide negative experience to girls but it also becomes a cause of their drop out. Therefore, there is need of special orientation of schools towards discrimination free practices against girls.

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