Chapter-6

Perception and Experiences of Discrimination and the Mental Health

Previous chapter dealt with cross sectional correlations analysis wherein it is revealed that perception of discrimination is determined by socio-economic status of family and perception of discrimination is responsible for the appraisal of anxiety, stress and depression among the students pursuing higher education. These findings are very significant and crucial which have provided the rostrum to explore more on the dynamics, process, system, meanings, insights and intricacies of discrimination during higher education. Therefore, to serve the aforesaid purpose and to capture the essence of discrimination with affinity to mental health, the personal interviews of 35 students were conducted with the help of interview guide (Appendix-A). Interview guide contained questions related to feelings of subjugations, caste favouritism, personal experiences of discrimination, confrontation of caste laden comments, feelings of segregation and problems of English language which consequently have affected their mental peace and well being.

This chapter deals with detail information and analysis of discrimination. Thematic analysis of reported experiences is the crux; where intricacies of discrimination perceptions as well as experiences are analysed in details besides implications on mental health. For this purpose about 28 males and 7 female students were interviewed to ascertain their experiences and perception of discrimination during their education. Out of 35 students, 80 percent (28) are male and 20 percent (7) are female and caste-wise distribution is- 31.4 percent (11) belong to general category, 25.7 percent (9) are from OBC, 40 percent (14) are SC community and one is from ST community. These students belong to different courses and socio-economic background and they are from different parts of Uttar Pradesh.

The analysis of reported perceptions and experiences of discrimination is relevant. Therefore the linkage of dominant personality traits, effect of socio-cultural values, grounded realities of hoary traditional life style and impact of different socio-economic
status is assessed through discourse analysis to ascertain the mental health status, psychological upheaval with stress appraisal of students. These intricate relations are not possible through statistical analysis hence qualitative approach is adopted. Here it is intended to provide in-depth thematic analysis of discrimination and fill the gaps of quantitative findings so that clear picture of discrimination and mental health problems could be understood. Special emphasis is on the discriminatory behaviour shown by teachers, administrative staff and peer friends and its consequences on mental well being. It is true that experiences of discrimination may differ from individual to individual and from situation to situation. One can perceive a trivial thing to be discriminatory whereas others can ignore the intentional discrimination. In fact; discrimination of any kind has potential to induce some degree of mental pressure and emotional problems which subsequently are responsible for the heightened stress and mental upheaval, thus threatens to the overall mental well being of an individual.

6.1. SC Students: Perception and Experiences of Discrimination

At higher education, more likely it appears that SC students come across various discriminatory experiences and the same has been evidenced in the previous chapter where it is found that SC students have higher level of perception of discrimination than students of other castes. Some of the actual as well as observed experiences of discrimination are reproduced below which they have experienced while pursuing higher education. These experiences are the results of discriminatory behaviour shown by fellow students, teachers, administrative authority and staff or caused due to inevitable situations of educational and social settings.

The actual experiences of a few SC students are given below:

A SC student of M.Com has given a stronger view on prevalent caste based discrimination and its implications on mental health. He says:

During my school education I never felt any kind of caste based discrimination neither had any caste related inferior feelings. But when I took admission at the University in 2008 from then I started realizing that casteism is strongly prevalent here. Therefore, many times I came across that invariably first of all anyone will ask your name and if you just tell him your first name then he will ask for the full name. If that full name will not satisfy
his curiosity to know the caste then he will openly ask your caste-name and community affiliation. These are humiliating questions and create several doubts. Therefore asking of name itself is the process to know your caste and then formulation of negative attitudes. Everyone of this university is preoccupied with the caste issue. Anywhere you go, like coaching or renting room, the first question will be related to your caste. I also observed casteism feelings among the study circles of the students and in the approaches of student’s leader. First of all, they will search who are from their regions and then they will come to your caste. If you belong to a lower caste then they will pretend to be more sympathetic to you. This fake sympathy itself outcastes you and discards you. These behaviours are discriminatory and torturing psychologically.

Therefore, personal feelings of discrimination are detestable and abominable with full of disgust. Altogether, different experience has been shared by another SC student pursuing M.A. He reported:

Discriminatory practices are highly prevalent among the teachers of this university. I had come across many times these discriminatory behaviours of teachers. Once it happened in the Sanskrit class that “a Brahmin lady teacher said in the class that ‘see! How lower caste people are going upwardly and trying to compare with us’ she said this because she was not aware of my caste”. I did not oppose this; because I thought let her express. In the class, except me all were from upper caste and they were giggling and supporting madam on her comments passed intentionally to lower castes. I felt very bad but kept silent. Often it happens that by looking at the name/surname teachers assign the marks. Upper caste students get more marks whereas lower caste students do not. During my intermediate, out of thirty marks, SC students were given below twenty, OBC were given below twenty five and all the general category students were given above twenty seven or near thirty in the practical examination. Thus, there is systemic kind of discrimination. These practices of discriminations lower down morale and enthusiasm of the students.

The process of availing facilities like scholarship and financial aid are bound to be discriminatory in nature. The actual experiences of discriminations and its impact are reported by a SC student of B.Com course. He reported-

I experienced discriminatory behaviour when I was filling the scholarship form. The in-charge of welfare office was a lady. When I visited and interacted with her then she behaved very differently. Her attitude was altogether different for lower caste students. By her behaviour I realized that she does not like SC students and she also said “SC & ST students are coming to take scholarship only. These students are hardly concerned about studies”. Therefore, I realized that upper caste administrators have very discerned feelings
towards SC and ST students. They do not express their discrimination overtly but from sub-consciousness level they operate negatively. They usually become hostile with SC and ST students and will shout at you purposefully. They reprimand you and they will make you run here and there for petty documents. They are doing intentionally to create trouble during filling scholarship form. Once, one of the officers has thrown my scholarship form with anger and refused to sign on it. That behaviour was shocking and insulted me with lot of mental pressure. On that day I went to hostel, locked myself inside the room and cried for hours.

A SC student of M.Com course has reported in details the attitude of upper caste students towards lower caste students which he personally witnessed. He said:

I would like to narrate you one incident. If upper caste students are in group and talking, meanwhile if they want to say very bad things about the lower caste then before saying, they will confirm whether there is anyone who is from the lower caste. If nobody is there then they will use very sarcastic, insulting, derogatory and filthy words for the lower caste people. I had this experience. Once I was in a group and upper caste students wanted to pass very filthy and dirty comments. They confirmed whether anyone is from the lower caste and I replied in negation. Assuring the situation, one of them (upper caste) said that ‘ye neech hai neech hi rahenge kabhi bhi uper nahi uth sakte’ (they are low and will remain low. They will never come up). After listening this, I told them that I am from the lower caste. I did not tell you, because I wanted to listen to your comments. I also said, “if you want to improve them go and tell the same on their faces”.

The observed incidents of discrimination faced by SC students are given below with description of incidents and its implications.

The practice of untouchability among teachers is noticed by SC students pursuing M.A. course. He said:

There are few teachers (basically from upper castes) especially the old teachers have the notion of untouchability. They will not drink water which is touched by the lower caste students. This also happens that if they know that you are SC then they won’t ask you for serving anything edible or drinking water. These teachers will not tell you important information. So this reflects that they do have discriminatory behaviours with lower caste students.
Another SC student pursuing M.Sc. observed a real incident of discrimination and its repercussion where one student from SC background dropped out because of persistent discrimination. He said:

There was my friend during graduation time. He was SC; belonged to Chamar Caste. He had many problems in his studies and most of the students refused to share room with him in the hostel. Among these students, Brahmin students declared openly not to eat food with him. They also declared that they cannot take food with lower caste students. During first year, none of the students had friendship with that guy and he remained alone. He used to live alone, isolated, depressed and lonely in a single room of the hostel. Because of this, he left the course in second year. This happened because he took these incidents very seriously. These behavioural dynamics left painful impression in his heart. It is obvious that if one does not get proper social support and friendly environment then one cannot concentrate in studies. He could not complete his graduation because of discrimination and its vicious impact. No doubt, he was little poor in his studies but he would have completed his graduation if his friends and hostels inmates would have extended friendly social environment and proper social support. Thus I feel that discriminatory behaviours are very dangerous, induce inferior complexes and mental upheaval which hampers the creativity.

Again the grievances of discrimination have been shared by the SC student of M.Com. course He reported:

I would like to mention one incident that in my hostel till now, all our wardens were upper caste but the current warden is SC. So the upper caste students of this hostel do not follow his instructions and most of the time they just neglect his authority. These students once revolted against the warden and protested openly the decision which he took for improvement of hostel facilities. These students always used to make comment on his caste and it has happened many times for which I am witness. They used to say “ye toh niche caste ka hai pata nahi kahan se aa gaya hai. Esko kuchh aata jata nahi hai aur hostel facilities ke bare me kuchh pata nahi hai. Yahi sab kahate the” (Oh my god! from where’s this lower caste warden came. He does not know anything about hostel facilities and management etc.) After hearing these kinds of derogatory comments, I felt very bad about that sir and thought that if upper caste students degrade a teacher and warden then students are easy escape goats for them to discriminate and pass slurs.

Therefore, above discussed incidents of actual and observed discrimination give insights which reflect bitter experiences of caste based discrimination. It is noticed that caste
based discrimination is indirect, direct, ambiguous and ambivalent. It is often determined by the latent conscious beliefs or hidden urges of the personality.

6.2. OBC Students: Perception and Experiences of Discrimination

In the social hierarchy, OBCs are considered socially higher than SCs but lower than general (upper castes) in terms of socio-economic status and educational level in the society. Unlike the SC students, OBC students are also vulnerable to discrimination in higher education due to their caste-status as well as socio-economic status. It has been established that OBC students face significantly more discrimination than that of general category students and there is no significant difference between SC and OBC students on the perception of discrimination. Besides these affiliations, the economic and educational status of family determines the experiences of discrimination (Stuber et al. 2003). Therefore, actual and observed experiences of discrimination among OBC students are analysed here.

The actual experiences of discrimination among OBC students are given below along with descriptions of incidents and involved emotional feelings to those situations.

An OBC student pursuing B.A. has reported his personal experiences of discrimination in the class. He said:

I feel discriminated because whenever I ask something in the class, other students mainly from upper castes and well off families intentionally laugh at me. They think I am asking stupid questions. Most of the time, purposefully they hoot at me for asking such a trivial thing. These behaviours of other students have created a stable fear in my mind. I tried to overcome this fear but efforts are in vain. This is further increasing and putting me into high risk of breakdown. This fear is recurring frequently. Hence, these fears are haunting me a lot and prevent me to satisfy my hunches in the class. Because of these fears, now I have obsessive thoughts, several worries, anxieties and depression with dismal courage to speak in the class.

A M.Sc. Student of OBC community reported his experiences of discrimination shown by teachers. He said:

It is often observed that during interaction with upper caste teachers, their language as well as their body language, are arrogant with their derogatory remarks and mixed with rebuking conversation which demoralise me often. These things degrade my dignity and
distort my identity. By talking in abusive language, they just want to maintain their status quo; as if they are dominant. I feel bad and discouraged whenever I come across such types of inducements. In the class unconsciously teachers used to pass comments, caste-laden jokes and other derogatory remarks on lower caste students which are very bad and this becomes worst when they do not hesitate to do in front of others.

Some of the relevant observed experiences of discrimination among OBC students are as follows: It is revealed that Brahmin teachers support Brahmin students. An OBC student of M.Sc. reported that:

In caste favouritism issue, I would like to cite one example of such incident that happened last year in my hostel. There was a new student who came to this hostel and was allotted a room on the ground floor whereas there was another SC student who was very needy because of his health problems and wanted to take that room. He requested and pleaded to the hostel warden several times but hostel warden intentionally declined his requests. Even deliberately, hostel warden allotted a room to him on the second floor in other hostel. This happened because the student was from lower caste and poor socio-economic background. It was intentional caste favouritism because the first student was Brahmin and the warden was also Brahmin. Even to think of this incident, I get upset. Since then, I came to the conclusion that caste favouritism works at every pedestal in this institution which affects lower caste students a lot.

A student from OBC community and pursuing B.Sc. course reported:

I believe that some of the students believe in practicing untouchability. Mainly upper caste students keep in their minds that one is from lower caste and avoid intentionally ones proximity. In case of dining together the upper caste students ensure that they will leave the hall before the arrival of the lower caste students with whom they have untouchability feelings. These practices are discriminatory and provoking enmity among students. When I witnessed these feelings I personally felt irritated, subjugated and segregated with the company of upper caste students. These practices are making lower castes students including me, more vulnerable to adapt and feel mentally insecure with several psychological problems while living in the hostels.

From the reported incidents and situations of discrimination, it appears that students of OBC category are also discarded in the class, denied to academic opportunities, face caste based partiality and confront discriminatory attitudes of teachers, students and administrative staffs. These experiences of discrimination are quite similar with the experiences of SC students who are more likely to be discriminated by caste. However
there are latent dynamics between the castes to discriminate the lower castes and further hierarchy exists within the caste which demarcates intra-caste discrimination. Upper in the hierarchy are more prone to discriminate to those who are lower in the hierarchy. Therefore, in this regard, it is also observed that OBC students also discriminate SC students regardless of their experiences of discrimination from upper caste students. At higher education, the intensity of discrimination differs for OBC and SC whereas the probabilities of experiences are almost equal. Substantially, the caste emerged as the prominent factors for the discrimination and subsequently socio-economic and educational status of family emerged as secondary factors to determine the experiences as well as the perceptions of discrimination.

6.3. General Category Students: Views and Observations

The students of general category (upper caste) do not have actual experiences of discrimination especially because of their caste. However number of dissatisfactory remarks are made on reservation policies and felt discarded because of these provisions. They have also observed some of the discriminatory practices targeted against students of lower castes. Their observed experiences are relevant to reproduce here so that analysis of these experiences could be performed.

The actual views of experiences of discrimination are given below with reported incidents, where general category students find it discriminatory. The dynamics of discriminatory behaviours of authority persons is reported by a general category student of B.Sc. He told:

Once, I went to the Registrar’s office for some work. He asked ‘What is my name’ then I told him ‘AAAA Kumar Pandey’ then after the officer replied politely ‘oh you are Pandey ji. O.K. today time is over you just come tomorrow and your work will be done’. In my place if it would have been some lower caste students, the tone of officer would have been discarding and disrespectful. These are the very subtle things which matters a lot. I thought if my title would have not been Pandey, definitely he would have delayed my work. His tone of expression would have been different, harsh and insulting. Because

* The real name is not provided here in order to protect personal identity and assure the confidentiality of respondent.
being Pandey he addressed the issue very politely. So belonging to upper caste is a privilege in the university.

A girl student of general category pursuing B.A. course also reported that the reservation itself is bad thing. She said:

In any exam usually upper castes students are supposed to put extra efforts than that of lower caste students. But when the result comes out then it happens that lower castes students get selected and upper caste students are not. Why does this happen? I feel very bad that we do the same hard work as it is done by lower caste students. Then, why we are not selected? Even though we score more than them? Because of government provisions, we are denied to be selected whereas they are selected instead of scoring lesser marks. I feel very bad in such kinds of systematic partiality.

Another girl student of B.A. course from general category has expressed her concern. She said:

I feel bad that because of reservation lower caste students get chance to be admitted though they got lower rank than us. For example (general wale ka 80 % aata hai to University mein admission nahi milta hai wani per SC/ST ko 60% aur 55% per aaram se admission milta hai. Iski wajah se mujhe bahut bura lagta hai ki hum unse jyada mehnat karte hai phir bhi unko admission mil jata hai reservation ki wajah se.) A general candidate would be denied to admission although she/he scored 80% whereas at the same time, an SC/ST candidate gets chance to admission only on scoring 60% or 55% of marks. This makes me feel bad that because of reservation they get admission though we pursued harder than them. I had witnessed the same problems in the NET (National Eligibility Test for Lectureship) exam also; where my friend is suffering from this reservation thing and unable to qualify it. In my opinion reservation must be abolished. There is also fees difference just because of caste/categories. I have heard that category students are studying here on the basis of zero fees whereas we are supposed to pay the good amount of fees for the same course.

The observed discriminatory practices are given below: Coming to the cities for pursuing higher education is full of insecurity and inferiority for the students of poor and lower family background. It is reported by a girl student of B.A. course belonging to General category:

I have friends who came from rural background, often they feel inferior among us when we start talking in English. It so happens that people usually make comments behind their
back that they are rustic by nature. (yeh hamesha hota hai ki log unko peeth pichhe kahte hai ki woh to ganwar hai). But all these things get settled down slowly in due course of time.

A student of general category pursuing B.Com course expressed his view on observed discrimination and intimidation by the group of students. He said:

Lower caste students are submissive, poorly groomed and lenient. They do not dare to communicate to the officers for their work and if somebody will come and intimidate them, they will remain silent. They often bear humiliation without any retaliation. It is because of their backwardness, low level of confidence, poor social network and weakness to oppose. Recently one incident took place in the hostel- “During the cricket match one of the guys who happened to be simple and studious, was not playing but caught the ball. Then out of anger the other guy, in order to show his power, abused him and slapped him. The simple guy remained quite knowing that if he will react then he will be beaten up more. The other guy did this behaviour because he was well connected with student leaders.” There are so many budding student leaders who show their power and dominance over poor and simple students especially to those who come from the rural and poor background. They knew that these students are submissive and will not react. I felt very bad to see this incident and on that day I was about to react but later I thought, I should not react because they will beat me also because they are in group.

From such views and observations, it seems that upper caste students do experience discrimination but different than what is experienced by the students of SC and OBC. Contextually, their experiences of discrimination are derived from provisions of constitutional remedies intended to improve socio-economic status of disadvantaged group. Substance and intensity of discrimination among these students is different than that of SC and OBC where the institution of caste plays a substantial and crucial role.

6.4. Nuances and Dynamics of Experienced Discrimination: An analysis

In the statistical analysis in chapter-5, significant differences are found between 'SC and general' as well as 'OBC and general' and no significant differences are revealed between 'SC and OBC' students on the perception of discrimination, stress, anxiety and depression appraisal. However, the qualitative data in the form of reported narratives provides strong disparities and significant differences on the perception and experiences of discrimination among the students of SC, OBC and general categories. By witnessing the reported
experiences of SCs and their nuances of experienced discriminations are in greater extent different than that of the nuances of OBCs and general students. There are also concrete observable significant differences on the nuances of experienced discrimination of 'OBC and general' category students which are predominantly mediated by the socio-economic status of family, rural habitat, poor awareness and lower educational background of the family. The nuances of experienced discrimination also differ region-wise with the dominance of particular caste and the particular region.

From the field work observations and many a times during interactions with students of different categories, it is noticed that the OBC students are more prone to discriminate SC students than the general category students. One of the OBC students reported that he does not feel that there is dominance of upper caste students rather he accepted that general and SC category students are under the dominance of OBC. In some of the instances, it is noticed that SC and general category students are fast friend, share several things including academic and social denominations however no one from OBC category reported such bonding and neither it is observed. During conversations it also did not notice that OBC have strong affiliation with SC or general category students. This provides insights that OBC students are highly prone to discriminate SC and also general category students. This is the category which plays dual role in discrimination- first to be discriminated by upper caste (general category) and another, being a potential group to be used as the potential mean for social discrimination towards the SC (lower castes).

The phenomena of reverse discrimination is also noticed because some of the OBC students sniff the discriminatory practices and dominating behaviours of SC students because they are empowered by the legal and constitutional protections. These special provisions for their social and educational development are exercised fully and therefore these provisions are the basis of perceived discrimination. In addition, having conversation with SC students, it emerged that their collective consciences is changing and their people are coming forward educationally, economically, politically and socially which gives them pride to be fearless, emancipated, bold, equitable and smart. This boldness of potential social development and their courage to encounter social challenges sends strong stimulus for reverse discrimination as well as in some situations the
experiences of discrimination among the students of OBC and general category. This kind of discrimination is strong enough to make one inferior in front of others.

As U.P. was the field of the study so in some region; specifically in Bundelkhand and Ruhilkhand region it is observed that some castes of OBC category are dominant in that region and they are more accustomed group of people to discriminate SC as well as general category in the society and particularly in higher educational institutions. However, region-wise contrast occurs in the practice of discrimination and it is observed in another setting of research. In Lucknow and Varanasi, the other area of research, put forth completely different scene of discrimination and dominance of castes. Here it is noticed that in Lucknow the dominance of Brahmins (especially Shukla, Mishra, Pandey and Tiwari) is highly prevalent whereas in Varanasi the dominance of Bhumihar is highly prevalent and their dominance is the probable threat of discrimination, in general in society and in particular in higher education. Thus region-wise differences in caste based discrimination occur but the fact remains universal that castes; which are upper in the social hierarchical structure are more prone to discriminate to those who are lower in social hierarchical structure. Socio-political situations of U.P. and for that matter the socio-political situation of specific region also determine the dominance of caste groups and thereby the practice of discrimination.

Thus from the analysis it emerged that there is discrimination among SC, OBC and general students during higher education. However the OBC oscillate between these two extreme categories and many times plays mediating role to discriminate SC and general. It is well established fact that SC are discriminated by general but from this discussion it is emerged that there are higher chances of discrimination shown by OBCs to the SCs in the society and particularly in higher education. Also the phenomenon of reverse discrimination is emerged as a unique finding and this phenomenon has potential to shape different perspective of caste based discrimination in the new realm of debate. In this manner, this analysis works as compliment and negation to the quantitative findings where it is revealed that there is no significant difference between ‘SC and OBC’ on the perception discrimination and mental health related problems during higher education.
6.5. *English language: The source of discrimination*

English language has emerged as all pervading source of experienced as well as perceived discrimination despite of caste affiliation. English language problem is pervasive which is reported by almost all students except those who were educated from convent schools.

From reported opinions of students, it has emerged that language problems make them discriminated and lag behind to those who are convent educated. Because of English they face problems during conversations, interactions, writing exams, debates and during practical viva-voce. This problem creates hesitation, lowliness and uncertainties. They agreed that English educated are well advanced in writing skills. However, in contrast, the articulations of Hindi educated are poor than that of convent educated, when they are suppose to express in English. It is common fallacy that writing exams in English fetch more marks than that of Hindi. It is obvious that because of English language problem, lower caste students feel low in the class, inferior to others in the university and deprived in the studies. Therefore, English language is the great barrier for students of lower socio-economic status to pursue higher education properly. Some of the reported experiences are worthy to be mentioned here.

An OBC student of B.Com course reported that:

There was a teacher who always used to teach in English. So because of being poor in English, I hardly wanted to go to his class. One day I gathered my courage and tried to attend his class but on that day he spoke only in English. I could not understand even single word out of it. This shattered my morale completely. Also in turn, it made me frightened for future and killed my remaining enthusiasm to attend the class. After that I am very fearful to attend that class just because of English language.

Further, it is revealed that difficulty in English language lowers down performance than that is expected. This difficulty is responsible for poor marks, poor articulation and poor academic performance. Difficulty in English promotes negative self-beliefs, poor enthusiasm, and lower passion and leads to lag behind other students. In addition, it creates greater problems among lower castes students during communication, writing of examination, writings of assignments and writings of practical reports. Poor performance
caused due to difficulty in English makes clear segregation between students of vernacular and convent (English) educated.

So the whole discussion suggests that poor performance in the higher education is mediated by English language. Therefore the problem of English language is instrumental in creating demarcation and segregation within the students of higher education. These demarcations are discriminatory in nature and are probable threats to mental health.

6.6. The Comparisons of Experiences

Course Decision- Reaching up to higher education and pursuing desired course is the milestone for students of disadvantaged and poor family background. Higher education is the means for upward social mobility for development of disadvantaged communities. However, the tough competition at admission level prevents several students to be admitted into the course due to limited availability of seats in a particular course; although they are competent and eligible for that course. Therefore it is pertinent to know the reasons, strategies and decision taken for studying the particular course. From the reported information, it appears that the students from general category made their own decision to pursue particular course. However, SC and OBC students’ decisions were influenced by the suggestions of significant person. That significant person was among the family members, close blood relatives, friends or teachers. Mostly decisions were based on the market value of particular course. Process of decision to choose particular course was rigorous and everyone analysed the pros and cons of course before taking it. Yet interesting pattern is seen behind decision making and observed that lower caste students are not aware of the courses and they took admission without analysing proper pros and cons and often they were influenced by peers. In many cases the economic constraints of family made them choose the course in which they were not interested—such as pursing general courses instead of professional and technical courses. Fear of paying high fees usually changed decisions not to pursue particular course. Most of SCs and OBCs students have cases where; even financial problems of family, lack of awareness, lack of opportunity and lack of proper guidance seem to be responsible for preventing student to pursue desired courses.
The personal experiences of OBC student pursuing M.Sc. are worth mentioning here. He reported that he was not interested to do M.Sc. in Physics but the circumstances of that particular period and stumbling financial condition of family forced him pursue unwanted course in place of technical course (M. Tech.). He reported:

I never thought of doing M. Sc. and there was no plan to do M. Sc. in Physics. I was inclined to take engineering course but because of financial problem at that time, I could not do that. In my family the main source of income has been a small garments shop which is run by my father. But at that time, unfortunately it happened that the adjoining land of market place was sold illegally by the town development authority where the shop was located and the land was purchased by a local mafia. Thus, the mafia occupied our shop forcefully into his property and produced legal documents. He demanded to pay hefty amount of money for the shop which was owned by my father or vacate it soon. Therefore, the problem was either my father vacate the shop or re-purchases the same shop by paying heavy cost. The cost was around twenty lakh Rupee and the shop was in the main market. Valuing the locality of shop and its future market value, my father paid that amount as the first priority. After that my father was very week financially and targeted to repay the loan as soon as possible. Hence at that time, due to financial constraints, I could not join B. Tech. However, on the basis of AIEEE (All India Engineering Entrance Exams) merit, I was offered admission at NIT (National Institute of Technology) but there was also heavy amount of fees to be paid. So finally I dropped the idea and I came to B.Sc. course.

After completion of B.Sc., I wanted to do M.Sc. in Mathematics but when I saw the syllabus, it was intended to teach only the theories of mathematics. I have no interest in theories and rote learning, so I decided not to take admission in M.Sc. Mathematics. Therefore ultimately came to M.Sc. Physics course which I never thought of doing in my life.

Thus, from the above narrations it is revealed that the choice behind pursuing particular course may be out of compulsion or ignorance or lack of awareness. They opted courses without enthusiasm, motivation and interest. Lack of motivation and compulsion of doing particular course put extra mental pressure on them which deteriorate their performance and achievements. Such compulsions are seen more among the students of lower castes. Hence, these students are more vulnerable for the psycho-social problems which in turn impede the overall performance and increase the denial behaviour with hopelessness and helplessness. The feelings of hopelessness and helplessness are the predictors of
procrastination, lethargy, fatigue, monotony and withdrawal from social and academic life. Therefore pursuing undesirable course is directly linked with the socio-psychological problems whereas proper selection of desired course determines the overall satisfaction among students pursuing higher education.

**Gaps in Education:** It is found that students from rural and poor family background have gaps in their educational path mainly due to personal, familial, social, financial and institutional problems besides lack of proper guidance. Financial difficulties emerged to be major reasons. Ill health of family members, poor performance in the previous class and failure to be admitted into desired course are prominent reasons for gaps in education. Further from the data it is revealed that students from poor socio-economic background and from lower castes are more vulnerable to be retained at higher education and have higher chances to drop out.

The experiences of SC student of M.A. course are worth mentioning here which led him to drop out from the course. He reported the real rivalry between two teachers which caused one year gap in his educational career. He said:

Yes. I have one year gap because I left the B.Sc. course in between. Actually, it happened because in the college there were two teachers. One was Thakur and other was Yadav. Both were teaching physics and both were running private coaching classes. So usually they used to force students to join their coaching classes. Therefore both of them have pressurized me to attend their private coaching classes exclusively. Their fees were high and as per my financial capability, I could not have afforded one. Anyhow, I took coaching run by the Yadav teacher. Having noticed this, Thakur teacher became hostile and developed negative attitude towards me. He intentionally started ignoring, humiliating and degrading me in the class openly. These insults and derogatory remarks at me became his routine. One day he scolded me with abusive language (gali) badly in the practical class. In order to avoid this psychological torture, I left the Course in the middle. So after one year gap, I joined B.A. at this University.

Thus, the gaps in education are painful, shocking and resulting into inferiority, confusions and poor morale among students. Gaps in education also occur because of discriminatory practices by the teachers, fellow students and other relevant persons of educational institutions.
In the study, it is found that the students from poor family background are not open and have lots of shortcomings with several limitations in their behaviour. They remain hesitant, poorly competent and it appears they are generally dominated by others (upper castes). Mainly lower caste students look like as if something is making them uncomfortable. Mostly they are discriminated because of their so called rustic mannerism, low standard and orthodox or poor living style. It is emerged from the reported experiences that migration from rural to urban is shocking which is further augmented by the difficulty in English language. The cultural shocks demand extra amount of energy to cope with. Most of the times; financial constraints limit their capabilities to utilise the available resources to develop their personality and social etiquettes. All these issues further make them lag behind which in turn affects their overall academic performance. Moreover, these problems are responsible for their isolation, loneliness and inferiority complexes. It is commonly accepted that because of their submissive nature, less smartness and easygoing attitudes, they lag behind and become the target for discrimination, deprivation, suppression and humiliation. Therefore it is found to be necessary to develop certain qualities with them so that they could sustain into the highly competitive environment of higher education. Therefore, status of family background is directly linked to the experiences of discrimination and it is proved that discrimination has powerful adverse effect on emotional well being and poor mental health (Dion, Dion & Pak 1992, Thompson 1996) among students pursuing higher education.

Higher education is generally dominated by the students coming from well off middle class families from the upper castes. Therefore it is attempted to capture the feelings of dominance perceived or experienced by the students. From the conducted interview findings it is inferred that dominance poses bigger threat to the students who are coming from poor, rural and less or no educated family background. This is widely prevalent and has direct impact on well being of students. It functions by lowering down their confidence, self-efficacies, self respect, and develop distorted self concept with lower achievement in the academics. Dominance may lead to open and targeted discrimination therefore the feelings of dominance not only make one suppressed but also compels one to compromise with the situation and adjust with the lower status of well being.
Lower caste students reported that they feel bad when they are supposed to speak in front of larger gatherings and this leads them to the feelings of dizziness, palpitation, nervousness and trembling of limbs and quivering of voices. It is also found that in the initial days during higher education, they remained less confident, hesitant, incompetent, de-motivated, anxious, worried and less ambitious to achieve excellence although in the due course of time they learn overcome and adjust but not in full extent. They accepted that they were lagging behind other students during the initial days of higher education. Hence these feelings provide the scope for appraisal of more discrimination and thus lowering down the overall mental health. Therefore personal experiences and frequent incidents of discrimination have spiral and vicious deleterious impact on the mental health.

Teachers are the backbone of any nation because a great responsibility of imparting knowledge and skills laid on them and often they play role models for students for their values, ideologies and thoughts which affect larger society. This section provides the insights into the discrimination shown by the teachers at higher education level in the context of social hierarchy. From the information collected, it is revealed that teachers show discrimination towards lower caste students by asking difficult questions, making offensive remarks to the status of caste, intentional ignorance in the class, sarcastically answering their questions and by making caste laden remarks. This is clearly visible during interactions in the class, in the examination, process of sharing of notes and in providing any opportunity. More likely this kind of discriminatory behaviour is shown by teachers of upper caste and it operates in latent and subtle forms. By their behaviour, either consciously or unconsciously, it detects their discarding attitude, disrespect, distinctions on mind; discern feelings and mocking behaviour towards lower caste students.

From the reported incidents it is generally found that high level officials in higher education have negative feelings towards poor and lower castes students and these are more likely shown by officials from the upper castes. These behaviours are easily identified by their peculiar style of talking and accent of expressions. Above all, their due support is extended only to those who are from upper caste. Intentionally they will avoid lower caste students and delay their work. Often, lower castes students are accused for
being late in submitting official documents for their social welfare benefits even though that is because of their impediment. Their habitual caste laden comments are devastating. Therefore discrimination by authority persons is responsible for the poor mental health among these students. Similarly the staff members are found to be more prone to show discriminatory behaviour based on caste. It is observed that they are reluctant to do their work and often absent from the office. They are highly arrogant and equipped with sharpen caste laden comments. They are habituated with troubling students unnecessary; and making them run here and there for the petty official requirements. Once they will come to know the caste, intentionally they will delay the work and make you pressurized by making you run from pillar to post.

In general, it is true that comments based on the caste are bad. Caste laden comments develop terrible feelings, humiliation, shame and disrespect among those who are being commented. These comments are hunting in nature which in turn develop inferior complex, poor concentration in the study, withdrawn from social activities, denial from pleasure activities, and distort self identity. Usually, these types of incidents happen in the classrooms, during the petty fights between the students of two different communities. It is also noticed that the caste laden comments are passed towards lower caste students and because of these comments they feel discarded, isolated, depressed, humiliated, injured and ignored in the educational settings. It is accepted that the reasons behind these types of comments are legacy, status quo, dominance and show off being from upper socio-economic background.

An OBC student studying in M.A. reported usual comments based on caste. He expressed:

Yes. Caste laden comments often occur. Even in the class it happens frequently because some of the anti-party students pass comments on you. Those who are not able to retaliate, they will just listen and bear this mental torture. The comments are usually based on caste and suppose if someone is SC then they will call him “Aye Chamaara” (demeaning comments on traditional occupation). Also they say “Saale awakat hai nahi kya kar loge?” “Kahan se aa gaye ho saale gawanar” “reservation ka fayada leke aa gaye ho, khud mein toh dum hai nahi” (Beast you don’t have guts. you cannot do anything” “from where you came the rusty”. “It is because of reservation, that you are here otherwise you do not have
potential to come here” and all those. Therefore these comments are crushing the confidence and mounting psychological pressure on the lower caste students.

Another SC student of M.Com reported that;

If upper caste student knows that you are SC then they will comment on the Mayawatiji* by saying that “aare bhaiya mayawati ki sarkar hai to in logo ka raj hai. Iss sarkar mein ein logo ko badhawa diya gaya hai. Enke liye sab kuchh uplabdh hai. Ye log raja ho gaye hai aajkal, aur bahut sari batein” (Good brother! Because of Mayawati’s government they are in full power. This government promoted these guys too much. Everything is available for them within their reach. Now they have become advance).

Common comments are like “Dekho Dehati Ja raha hai.” “Dekho kaise kapda pahana hua hai, poora bail nazar aa raha hai” “sidhe kheto se university me kaise aa jate hai” (“See the rusty is going.” “See! His funny dress looks like an ox in this dress.” “How do they come to the university directly from the agricultural fields!”?) and several other derogatory things. Because of superiority feelings upper castes people make comments.

While talking with students, it is reported that there are discriminatory practices on availing opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Selection for the procurement of that opportunity is highly influenced by the socio-economic conditions of students instead of aptitude and potential requirement for that activity. However students from upper social backgrounds are intentionally promoted supported and encouraged to participate in the extra-curricular activities whereas certain other students mainly from lower social background are denied. It is also found that the reasons behind not taking part are the financial problems of the family, lack of awareness, lack of proper guidance and poor social networking. Also poor availability of required resources like membership fees, dresses, time and inclination for activities are the major factors for lack of opportunity in extra-curricular activities. Thus, lack of opportunity which mediates through belonging to particular caste and socio-economic background, obviously induces feelings of discrimination and deprivation. These feelings have negative impact on the holistic personality development. Further, it appears that students of lower castes and

* Mayawati is an Indian politician. She belongs to SC. She served four terms as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh as head of the Bahujan Samaj Party, which focuses on a platform of social change to improve the welfare of the dalit and disadvantaged communities.
belonging to poor-socio-economic background are less confident, hesitant, not equipped with desired skills, have less motivation and have persistent lack of inspiration that is why they do not participate actively. It is also a fact that from the beginning they hardly promoted and receive positive support from family which prevent them till higher education. These students struggle to get settled academically and professionally that is why, for them these activities are secondary and show little interest in these activities.

Efforts were made also to explore into the issue of caste based discrimination in hostels where the student spend most of their time. It is revealed that the respondents from particular region and cultural background provide immense strength to form a group which sometimes surpasses the boundaries of caste and socio-economic status of family. These groups are much solemnised, powerful and strong that bondage among the members is very strong which in turn pose probable threat to the other students during higher education. Such type of groupism often occurs in the hostels among the hostel inmates. Groupism creates discrimination feelings and fear among students of lower socio-economic background. Feelings of groupism draw the boundaries among the hostel inmates and thereby start segregation and subjugation. Thus, from the discussion, it is proved that in the hostels usually there is dominance of those students who are coming from the same regions and similar socio-cultural background. Such type of affiliation provides psychological strength. Their affiliation turns into formation of group which becomes the symbol of threats for other students. Groupism is responsible for inducing fear and to be silent and to be subjugated. So, one can say that groupism leads to discrimination.

Hostels are the places where students from every walk of life come into contact. It is a unique confluence of rich and poor, smarts and submissive, poignant and pious, good and bad, rural and urban and from elite family background to poor family background. Thus, the differences on the status of living standard would cause to perceive discrimination. Therefore, it was felt relevant to analyse the situation in the given context

It is revealed that disparities in the status cause inferior and superior feelings and most often causes contention. It was observed that unnecessary comparison of status brings the feelings of deprivation and suspicion between groups of students. Interesting pattern has
been noticed that majority of upper caste students expressed satisfaction, contended and appropriately comfortable with their standard. However, lower castes students adjust with minimum things with the budget of their fellowship or stipend.

Higher education promises to provide holistic knowledge of the subject. Syllabus in the higher education is vast for students to cover it within stipulated period of time. Extra efforts are required to comprehend its essence with the help of course material. However the job becomes easy if teachers are taking classes regularly and providing notes to the students which are complete, clear, conspicuous, concrete and comprehensive in nature. Therefore notes are important and central concern in higher education system. From the discourse analysis it is revealed that getting important notes is the prime concern of every student. By hooks or crooks everyone wants to procure notes. Therefore there exists the politics of sharing important notes and this process contributes to the perceptions and experiences of discrimination. It is found that networking and cohesiveness among the students are detrimental and instrumental in the procurement of important notes. It is also found that students mainly of upper caste do not want to share notes because they have insecurity feelings that other might perform well. The regional connections, group cohesiveness, mutual understanding and personal behaviour help to procure important notes.

Availing notes without difficulty shows that one is highly connected with other students and has proper social support system. It is seen from the discourse that lower castes students have many difficulties to obtain notes which signifies their poor social support system while pursuing higher education. However, it is proved that social support is negatively correlated with discrimination and poor mental health (Lee & Ahn 2011). Which means stronger social support protects from discrimination and mental health problems. Lack of social support means lack of connectedness, lack of moral support and further demarcation, isolation and segregation. Therefore, in the process of sharing notes, discrimination does exist which reminds the feelings of seclusion, separation, dejection and rejection from the groups. These feelings reflect that one may get lots of psychological disruptions because of prevalent discrimination in sharing of notes and then consequently dips into poor mental health.
To assure the equal representation of all communities in higher education, the government of India has provided the reservations for SC and OBC in admissions for the inclusive development. In addition, there are several scholarships, free-ships, and fellowships made available for the students of socially and economically deprived classes / communities such as Government of India Scholarship for SC and ST, Social Welfare Scholarship for OBC (non creamy-layer) and other economically poor students, free hostel facility for SC students and Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for SC and ST students for pursuing doctoral degrees and other social welfare scholarships for minority students in order to facilitate their sustainability so that they can complete their higher education and equipped themselves to stand independently in the society. These facilities are provided to enhance the social and economic status of deprived communities, who have been out of main stream of the society. Higher education ensures upward social and economical mobility. Therefore, these facilities of governments are intended for the social development. However these facilities itself become the causes for perceptions of discrimination for those who are not the beneficiaries. It is revealed from the discourse that students from upper social background are against reservation policies and other facilities intended to uplift the lower caste students. Frequently they debate for abolition of reservations and vouch for merit based admission system. They perceived discrimination out of the welfare schemes which are meant for lower castes. They feel jealous with students who avail these facilities. Therefore it is to be noted that reservation is instrumental for perception of discrimination and deprivation by the upper caste students. Welfare schemes are playing dual role- for the beneficiaries it invites derogatory comments and for the non beneficiaries it brings the deprivation feelings and thus feels discriminated. Therefore these affirmative policies are the predictor of discrimination which imbalance the harmony among the students. These imbalances create survival threats to the lower castes students and threatening their well being.

It was observed that structurally each university has students support system body as an independent office of either ‘student affair’ or ‘student welfare’ office with a dean acting as the highest authority and full responsibility vested in that office to implement all the rules to protect and preserve the welfare of students. In practice, these offices are only concerned with providing and facilitating the scholarship processes, allotment of hostels
and to some extent taking care of social and emotional needs of students. However, contrast to the functioning of these offices, from the narratives of students, not even a single instance was found when students approached these offices or the authorities in the time of emotional and psychological upheaval. Instead, it was found that the authorities of these offices were highly prejudiced towards socially backward students and so were the supporting staffs. They were seen to be arrogant, socially biased with negative attitude and having peculiar orthodox behaviour towards these students which in turn induce fear and apprehension among the students even to seek their help at the time of utmost need. Therefore, it is revealed that there is a body of support system but its functioning is highly contaminated by the discern and subtle stereotyped behaviours of the people which in turn preventing students to utilize those resources to overcome their problems during their studies. These hindrances and intentional deprivation of resources further induce mistrust, disbelief among them and damage their personality by confirming the fact that higher education system is dominated by those who subjugated them and their ancestors.

Being associated with caste identity provides the sense of security. Therefore identifying to particular caste, community and religion gives social strength, moral support and brotherhood for the further enhancement of solidarity. This affiliation constructs stronger bondage between the members of one community and inculcates feelings of identity as a whole. This identity strengthens social support and protect from probable threats of any kinds which will be incurring socio-psychological problems. If the person is backed up with the social support system of their own community people with whom one shares the identity, a sense of security is ensured. Therefore it is explored that how identity does protect from threats of discrimination. It is revealed that most often lower castes students form their own group which protects them from external threats and prevent unnecessary stress appraisal. By sharing and expressing bad feelings to each other, they address their grievances in the group only. It is accepted in consensus that they feel good, connected and associated when they are with students of their own community. They have faith and trust in their own community students because they feel that their community students share emotional and personal problems more openly with one and another. The caste identity provides stronger sense of security because they have almost equal socio-
economic status and intellectual status along with cultural and traditional similarities. Therefore caste based identity proves safety armour to lower caste students which protect them from discriminations and prevent consequential mental upheaval with positive strength for coping and survival.

The hierarchy of caste is decided according to the degree of purity and pollution. It plays a very crucial role in maintaining the required distance between different castes. Notion of purity and pollution is integrally linked with the institution of untouchability. It is an overt and manifested form of caste discrimination. Practicing untouchability based on caste is a criminal offence. However there are numbers of incidents in our society where practice of untouchability with the connotation of purity and pollution is overtly seen. In this context, the observations of SC student pursuing M.Com are worth reporting here. He said:

I feel that subtle kind of ‘maintaining purity and avoiding pollution’ is prevalent among upper caste students (mostly Brahmin) which govern from the sub-consciousness level. Like “In our hostel mess, once in a week they serve special food. On that day they serve both veg. and non-veg. There is already separate seating plan for those who are vegetarian and those who are non-vegetarian. Even after this separation, Brahmin and upper caste students will come and they will enquire whether their food is separated than that of other students? They will demand for freshly cleaned plates which has been dish washed in their presence. They often used to make comments that ‘what the rubbish food you cooked today’. Particularly on that day, they will take their plates and go outside. They will not even prefer to sit with lower caste students who are taking vegetarian food.” So these kinds of behaviours remind us the feelings of purity and pollution consciousness integrated by the untouchability institution.

While talking with students it is revealed that nowadays notion of purity and pollution is latent and subtle which operate through the mind-set of students. Many upper caste students bring their own plates and glasses to have food in the mess (dining hall) to avoid pollution and maintain purity from the lower caste students. Common incidents of untouchability are not dining together, discarding the water which is touched by lower caste students, intentionally avoiding the edible served by the lower castes and avoiding company of lower caste students in the hostels. Moreover it is also revealed that the food habits of lower castes students and their unfamiliarity with cutlery are ridiculed. Thus,
practice of untouchability is responsible for the feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, and disrespect and in-human treatment among the students of lower castes.

The above discussion provides insights into the dynamics of discrimination prevalent in higher educational institutions which reflect the bitter experiences of caste based discrimination. It is found that caste based discrimination is prevalent in latent as well as manifest forms. It is often determined by the latent conscious beliefs or hidden urges of the personality. The discriminatory behaviours shown by upper castes are often augmented with reinforcement of cultural and traditional social learning which make them to subjugate, suppress, intimidate and oppress the lower castes. However lower castes perceive that education is a system which is controlled by the upper castes and in turn makes them more vulnerable to be the victims of discrimination. Due to discrimination, lower caste students project emotionless behaviour, fearfulness and aloofness into their personality. Discrimination also damages pride, develops poor self confidence and fragile social competence (Reddy & Chandrasekhar 1998). Therefore caste based discrimination seems to be responsible for poor mental health among the students who belong to lower castes and poor background.

As discussed in chater-5, heightened level of discrimination appraisal lead to the heightened level of anxiety and depression appraisal. Basing the argument on that point, it is noted that students also shared their grievances along with descriptions of discrimination appraisal which shows that it has impact on their mental well being. Some of them have reported that because of discrimination appraisal they cried out in the hostel when they were alone, withdrew themselves from the social meetings and gatherings, started avoiding to spend time with family and friends, have recurring thoughts of unforgettable situation of discriminations, absurd and taunting ideas of discrimination perceptions, humiliation in front of others, embarrassment with the friends, losing sense of control from the personality, thoughts of being lower and useless in the society, felt as if one is the burden for the family and in the educational institutions and have millions of tormenting thoughts as to why people behave in this manner.

Most of them have reported that because of discrimination they felt irritation, frustration, restlessness, acute headache, nostalgia, tensions and frequent tiredness with incessant
drowsiness. They also accepted that because of discrimination they lost concentration from the study, developed inferior feelings, mounting doubts, numbers of confusions, extreme self doubts, depletion in the encouragements, sharp decline in enthusiasm, permanent nervousness, high level of anxiety, extreme level of stress problems and lethargic sense of depression. In addition some students also said that they feel aloofness, isolation, apathy, angry outburst, irregularity in their daily activities and bigger threat to life sustaining activities, distorted sense of self, depressed attitude towards the life and doubt on the credibility of life. Hence it is proved again that discrimination in the higher education is injurious to the students for their proper development and mental well being. In addition it was also found from the conversations with students that they adopted various coping mechanism to cater out the effect of discrimination and its implication on stress and mental health problems during higher education (Noh et al. 1999) According to their report, most of the respondents adopt indirect or palliative coping strategies. The coping strategies adopted by respondents are having positive attitude towards the social problem, having positive thoughts by diverting absurd thoughts from mind, thinking try to do best in next time, believing in God and accepting God as our master he will take care of us, having faith in God, listening music, self-entertaining by watching movie on T.V. or going to theatre for movie, sharing problems with family members and friends, talking with mother, father and other significant family member. These are the individual attempts to cope with the stress and mental health related problems.

6.7. Discussion

This analysis is an attempt to understand how the students from different castes and different socio-economic background at higher education level perceive and experience discrimination and its relationship with mental upheaval or reported psychological problems as the consequences of discrimination. It is quite phenomenon that social scientist have documented numerous researches providing insights on economic and educational disparities between castes in India. Access to a reasonable quality of education is far from universal and differs from caste to caste. These disparities and differences of caste are clearly seen in higher education and become impeding factors for educational attainments. These differences also contribute significantly to the
discrimination and related mental health problems as it is evidenced in the quantitative analysis of the reported experiences of discrimination during higher education. Here it appears that lower caste students come in with on an average, weaker academic background and are heavily penalized for this in the educational settings. This is a consequence of the fact that SC/OBC students have access to inferior educational institutions/courses than the rest of the students. These are the contextual social disparities which are integral part of their life and leaving them into the situation to be discriminated.

Perceived health poses considerable predictive validity thereby providing fresh insights into how the health declines over the life course (Farmer & Ferrao 1997). Certain variables particularly age, residence, education, symptoms of perceived discrimination, appraisal of discrimination, income and education level of family, and the type of educational institution of study may have significant intervening effect upon perceived discrimination and thereby its consequential effect on the mental health of students. Perception of discrimination also varies from one section of community to another and from one educational institution to another educational institution. Hence the linkage of perceived discrimination and its implications are analysed.

Without proper guidance and awareness, the lower caste students often end up pursuing course which have lower market values. After completion of such courses, the probabilities of unemployment are higher. Becoming unemployed, sends a negative message to the other students of the same caste group, not to pursue higher education instead attempt to procure any lower jobs and settle in life as soon as possible. Thus, overall occupational mobility is thwarted, which determines the social mobility. However the proper guidance for career prospects in advance, among the privileged castes groups, harness with skills and protect from mounting pressures of academics. Thus ensures occupational stability and emotional security.

An investigation carried out by Chakravarty & Somanathan (2008) on status of jobs opportunity among SC students at IIM. The study attempts to bring out the reality of reservation policy in elite educational institution and its inadequacy to provide better job opportunities. Therefore, emphasis is given to equalize school level opportunities because
reservations at higher education level are insufficient to equalize career outcomes even for the minority of SC/ST students who can benefit from them. In the same line our narrations indicate the needs for quality education at primary and secondary level which will reduce the probability of discrimination during higher education which arises from language and other academic requirements. Interestingly, reservation policies do not address these fundamental problems and neither they are capable to cater these problems. Therefore equitable quality education at primary level may contribute to stand with the prevalent discrimination in higher education.

After centuries of sanctioned exclusion due to caste hierarchy, reservation provides an invaluable opportunity for youngsters from excluded and disadvantaged communities to enter the hallowed portal of higher learning (Sukumar 2008). But the negative attribution about the capabilities of lower castes students has been inflicted continuously by the upper caste students as well as teachers. It is a reality that prejudices of the privileged continue to shape campus life forcing many such students to be alienated while pursuing higher education. By providing uncomfortable and unfriendly environment, the upper caste students protect their dominance while leaving lower caste students to realise down upon their status as they confront in larger society at large.

Amartya Sen (2000, p.13) has argued that being excluded from social relations limits one’s life opportunities, thus producing not only capability deprivation but also diverse capability failures. While analysing narrations of lower castes students, the fear of dominance by upper castes students has emerged as the potential threats among them and indicated that unity formation takes place without unseen bondages of caste so that persistent discrimination towards lower caste should be maintain. These unconscious identity cohesiveness and discriminatory intentions directed towards one important aspects of caste based exclusion; is that it seems to unite the perpetrators and at the same time it isolates the victims. These situations, however, produce exclusion by collectively expropriating public space and refusing to share social opportunities with others. Therefore, experiences of exclusion in personal life are other significant factors of discrimination. Thus continuous discrimination in public space reminds of lower caste
students, their low status in the society and deprived background in the society, no matter how much they have moved in the academic ladder.

It is true that the first generation learners from the marginalised and poor socio-economic background and communities must not only come to terms with an alien curriculum but they must also battle entrenched pedagogical prejudices. Similar to these experiences, it is also observed by other researchers that lower caste students in general and the dalits (SC) as well as other reserved category students in particular; in a higher educational institution feel humiliated every day socially as well as psychologically. These problems are discriminatory in nature and capable enough to induce negative feelings, often resulting into mood disturbances and at times chronic mental health problems. The daily experiences of social discrimination add huge and uniquely negative dimensions to the lives of victims specifically the ‘quota students’. These students feel intimidated by the myriad activities of campus life that are structured in such a way that make them feel like ‘inferior outsider’ (Sukumar 2008).

While talking with students of SC communities and OBC communities, it appeared that in the process of getting admission and gathering information regarding fees structure, courses, hostel facilities etc. Both the ‘students union’ and the authorities displayed a lackadaisical attitude. They often confronted unwelcoming attitudes from administrative authorities as well as from administrative staffs whenever they paid visit to them for official related works. Many students were discarded, rebuked and ignored and intentionally made them run from pillar to post and these students were given conditional admissions at times promising ultimatum regarding their educational progress. In contrast to this none but few upper caste students reported lackadaisical attitudes of staff members otherwise for them everything is accessible easily. This comparison provides the unique partiality of academic ambience of educational institutes which favours one segments of students and discards other segments of students. Therefore, overall academic ambience of institution intervenes with the differential experiences of discrimination determined by the caste one belongs to.

From the above discussion, it is generally emerges that students from lower and poor family background are taken especially humiliating forms by the other students of
dominant communities (upper castes and from well to do families). It is a universal practice that lower caste students are often ridiculed based on the ‘name of caste’ colour or complexion, habits and language etc. Even the body language and mannerism of faculty and students of general category seems threatening to lower caste students. Lower caste students have reported that the authorities, in general, remain oblivion of these practices and incidents and if some cases are brought to their attention, either they postpone them or usually show reluctance to take strong action against offenders. In some cases of discriminatory practices or discriminatory behaviour, the authorities issued casual notice demanding to stop indulging into misbehaviour with lower caste students without thoroughly probing the case. This reluctance of protective bodies creates distrust among the students and prevents them approaching these legal bodies when they are in acute need.

For lower caste students even the commonplace interaction of day to day becomes a constant challenge. Since they do no posses the means to dress well and cannot speak in a polished tongue, lower caste students are neglected on social occasions such as birthday parties, cultural festivals, and welcome or farewell parties. Even if they attend such occasions, these students huddle in the corner and at the same time the other students ignore their presence. These situations are often accompanied with embarrassment because very few students pay regards to their presence otherwise they remain isolated and unattended.

The social status of an individual has two dimensions, firstly, the status one receives from one’s own personal characteristics and secondly, the status which one receives from the group one belongs to. In other words, the social status of an individual is influenced by not only one’s individual properties but also the social group to which one belongs. In the course of discussion with the students, some of lower castes students pointed out that they do not like to disclose their caste or caste identity because if they do, the outlook of the other students would change. Consequently they would look down upon them as inferior. On the other hand, most of the upper caste students appear to take pride on disclosing their caste and feel honoured to be attached with caste identity. These students
accepted that their Brahminical surnames facilitate their official works and get acceptance in general in the academic environment.

Lower caste students also pointed out that upper caste students constantly want to know the caste by unfair means such as peeping secretly on your documents in your absence, giving bribes to clerk to know the caste and spying you whether you are going to apply for Post Metrics GOI scholarship (Government of India scholarship) etc; if you tried to hide your caste. They do it so that they would maintain their status quo. Therefore to avoid rejection of other castes students, specifically students of scheduled castes have to maintain their caste identity hidden. It was also gathered from the discussion with lower caste students that those who felt that in public sphere the question of caste did not arise, in their private lives it mattered a lot. If a student belongs to lower caste despite his better educational attainment and academic performance, the upper caste student will hesitate to mix with her/him freely. They keep little away even though they do not do explicitly. For these reasons many of lower castes students feel reluctant to reveal their caste identity in educational settings.

Lack of money is a permanent source of anxiety among lower caste students which prevent them to behave or live like other students. They have constant fear to accompany someone for cup of coffee or a film show because they have to reciprocate tomorrow which is beyond their means of affordability. These apprehensions naturally limit their social interactions with the wider students’ community and leave them alone.

There is very little sharing of study materials. Apart from routine interactions, all social and academic gatherings are very exclusive. Inevitably, such attitudes also enter into personal relationships and create conscious or unconscious feelings of superiority or impunity on one side and inferiority or helplessness on the other side.

The lack of adequate English language skill is the biggest challenge being faced by the students of lower castes and underprivileged background. Teaching in English further marginalises lower castes students and becomes a silent reason among these students to sit on the last benches of class without participating in the classroom discussions. This language problem also gets reflected in exams performance and leads to biased marking.
Although gradually confidence level increases but some of the students find it unable to cope with and opt out in between. This happens more in the natural sciences and other professional courses which are dominated by the elites.

Thus, it appears that lower caste students rarely share a room with upper caste students. Even if this happens, the lower caste students are excluded from conversations and generally made to feel inferior. In the hostels, upper caste students find out something provoking to ridicule lower caste students and made comments like ‘they have no need to study since reservation entitles them to free food, accommodation and entertainment’.

In general, it appears that students of lower caste have increased risk of academic failure because of poor family background in completing higher education and other community related factors. Prominent factors are congenital defects, social skills deficits, impoverished family, insensitive and inconsistent parenting, peers rejection, lack of social support and low motivation and expectations (Fortin & Bigras 1997, Myers & Taylor 1999). As mentioned earlier, the poor students of lower castes are likely to suffer from inferiority complex, as they usually compare their social status with that of the well to do students of their community as well as the students of upper castes.

Teachers’ expectations from socio-economically poor and lower caste students are somewhat different from other students and this differentiation is another challenge for students to handle with. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) in their famous experimental study have established that positive expectations of teacher for academic growth among students of poor and socio-economically background has positive influence on the academic performance of students and equipped them with confidence to work hard in academics for pursuance of excellence. Another aspect of this study also suggests that less or negative expectations of teachers have debilitating impact on their academic performance which is compatible with the reported experiences of students from lower castes. However in contrast to the above findings, the reported experiences of lower caste students suggest that teachers are not supportive and have negative attitudes towards their educational capabilities. These findings are highly compatible with the researches in Indian context which have revealed that teachers do not hold positive opinion about lower caste students and do not expect them to do well in the examination (Lal & Nahar,
Similar to these findings from narrated experiences and perception of discrimination, other investigation (Sharma & Tripathi 1988) observed that teachers usually maintain low expectations from lower caste students by attributing their failure to dispositional factor such as lack of ability, efforts, intelligence, hard work and so on and success to situational factors like chance and easiness of the task supported by constitutional remedies for facilitation of their higher education. In turn, these attributions about their performance are internalised by the lower caste students, who tend to blame themselves for their failure (Sharma & Tripathi 1988) and thus fall into a trap of making self-defeating attributions and poor self confidence.

It is not always true that lower performance is associated with children who come from socio-economically impoverished background (Dalal 2012). However, there are psychological probes which evidenced that many children from poor background display propensity to develop innate strength and protective skills that help them deal with unpredictable and adverse life conditions (Mishra & Tripathi 1980, Richardson 2002, Funk 1992). Incessant disadvantaged and social deprivation, however, do not make them inferior rather strengthen their resilience to protect from probable threats and make them to focus more on their strengths than weakness. Unfavourable life circumstances equipped them with problem solving strategies and resourcefulness by developing social competence, autonomy and sense of personal control (Cappuzzi & Gross 2000) however the probabilities of these personality dynamics are very rare and very few; those are exceptionally bright, can fit into these situations otherwise many falls into the trap of psychological burdens.

The students from poverty background, at times perform better than the other students of higher education. Therefore poverty becomes the motivating force to achieve excellence and get succeeded in the fields wherever they are engaged with. During conversation with students of lower caste, it seems that they took their background factors as a challenge and developed capabilities to deal with adverse circumstances of higher education. In this context, it is to be noted that of the interviewed students, around 45 percent (4) OBC students and 50 percent (7) SC students despite their perception of discrimination, have fewer mental health related problems which signifies deprivation as motivating force.
behind their sustainability at higher education. Thus the relationship between discrimination and mental health related problems is very thin at times; its boundaries are porous to infer some relevant associations.

At the same time, not all students of lower caste come from poor and disadvantaged background that fall in a trap of discrimination perception or victims of discriminatory practices. It is obvious in our narrated experiences that students of better economic and highly educated family background manifested little sign of discrimination perception and related mental health problems, although they belong to lower castes. So the discourse of caste and class is unresolved in context of Indian society and it is hard to dissect the affiliation of discrimination solemnly to caste or class. However the reported experiences and perceptions of discrimination signify in greater extent towards the affiliation with caste than to class. Hence the issue of discrimination and impact of related mental health problems permeate through the boundaries of caste and class discourse. Beyond the discussion of caste and class, some of the milestones of famous personalities are there who negated these juxtaposing positions and set extraordinary examples for humanities to be ideal on after coming from abject and disadvantaged family background yet accomplished remarkable success in their life. There are life stories of great people like B.R. Ambedkar, Abraham Lincoln and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar to name a few.

Many poor students display inner strength and hardiness to withstand debilitating outcomes. They are often found to be ‘invulnerable’ ‘stress resilient’ hardy and adapt successfully to overcome adverse life circumstances. Moreover there are the personal dispositions which protect students from the consequences of difficult and frustrating life conditions. Many such attributes are good cognitive functioning, positive temperament, high sociability, close peer friendship, internal locus of control, sense of self efficacy, high expectation for self, positive construal of negative life events, engagement in benevolent activities, close relationship with parents, effective parenting, access to consistent and warm care giving, presence of positive adult role model and positive association with peer students and teachers (Doll & Lyon 1998). These personality
attributes are antidotes of discrimination appraisal and catalyst to positive mental health and well being among students.

Another set of researcher in international context as well some few in Indian contexts have evidenced that there are probable chances at higher educational institutions that the students of upper caste are exposed to uncontrollable failure. In such cases, Wortman and Brehm (1975) asserted that lack of control sometimes results in learned helplessness but quite often causes reactance manifested in terms of negligence and a sense of injustice. This happens when people blame others for their failure or when they feel that reward which they deserved was unjustly denied to them. In this line, in the discourse of discrimination experiences and perception, it appears that upper caste students have anguish towards the reservation policies. According to them these policies are dysfunctional and creating disparities and differentness between the students. These polices prevent meritorious students and promote undeserving students. According to them reservations on higher education is an instrument of unfair treatment and thus they feel discriminated in terms of partial opportunity and sense of injustice.

There are certain incidents where discrimination was so intense that it causes gaps in educational career. However, pursuing gapless education from primary to higher level is a good achievement and usually keeps one’s spirit encouraged, motivated and striving for higher achievement in future. On the other hand breaks and gaps in the study destroy productive years and creates self doubts, feelings of guilt and de-motivation. Gaps in education make oneself lagging behind others from overall development of social and academic arena. In addition, it also lowers down morale for continuation with lots of confusion and doubts in mind. Gap itself is the symbol of failure in the eyes of other students. Gap in education is always attached with stigma to be slow learner and poor performer in academics. These stigmatized notations always haunt and demoralise to restart. No doubts, gaps in the education make one’s progress stagnant. Therefore altogether these feelings incur mental stress among the students because their progresses are thwarted. As it is found while discussing with students that five students from SC and three students from OBC category have gaps in education because of family problems and discrimination they faced at higher education. Three students from general category
also reported gaps in education but that gap occurred because they took one year for preparation of competitive exams. Hence, gap in education because of discrimination adds further perception of discrimination and consequently creating several inferiority complexes, surmounting confusions, least confidence and unstable courage. Therefore gaps in education are responsible for further discrimination perception and consequently poor mental well being of students.

Methodologically, the projection of a person’s social image can be made through the process of self-evaluation (Zitterberg & Lorenz 1969). A good majority of the respondents perceive their low caste status as the barriers of their advancements. Therefore to conclude, lower caste students from disadvantaged socio-economic family background, not so often but in a greater extent suffer a negative cycle of failure and disinterest whereby failure increases disengagement and disaffection and foster additional failure. On the other hand upper caste students from privileged and well off socio-economic background utilise resource for further development and receive positive regards and incontestable support to realise their potential fully. These support and moral uprising strengthen their courage and confidence to foster additional success in life. Researches show that in comparison to pessimistic students, optimistic students are more likely to engage in hopeful activities and later success in career as well as in life (Yates 2004). These findings are compatible with the reported experiences of students where it is revealed that upper caste students have positive and optimistic future concern whereas the reported experiences of lower caste students, suggest the pessimistic future concern because they perceive education system control and being dominated by elite people.

The above discussion reveals the process and dynamics of discrimination which have greater impact on the well being of students. It is also clearly brought out that caste, as a social institution, is responsible for prejudiced behaviour and thus manifestation in terms of discrimination. Therefore, discrimination and deprivation on the basis of caste in any form cannot be taken as religious or as national value in any democratic society. Unfortunately our socialising agencies (including education) are influenced by the western culture of materialism and individualism and tend to ignore the gross socio-cultural realities. The issues of castes, exploitation, suppression and discrimination
sidelined day by day. The problem lies with the educated ones and therefore it is necessary to educate the educated. It is must for all of us to de-caste ourselves consciously. It is obvious that the eradication of caste is a distant reality, despite the indication to the contrary. As long as caste perform the functions of a welfare state in India and provides for the common bonds of kinship ties, political groups and alliances it can be assured of continued existence in modern India. Its vicious impact in the forms of discrimination will be persisting for creating psychological havoc among the lower caste people.