

There are shades of equality

The Kerala government's decision to reserve a higher proportion of scholarships for Muslims is justified

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On October 29, 2021, the Supreme Court issued notice on an appeal of the Kerala government against a High Court order directing it to award the scholarships by the proportion of minorities in the overall population of the State. Photo: Special Arrangement

Assume that in a classroom, a teacher is faced with students with differing command over the English language. There are three groups: some students are excellent, some require minimal guidance, and some others, a lot of attention. The teacher decides to give a special class of half an hour for the second group and a class for two hours for the third. Since the first group needs no additional support, they won't be given any. Is the teacher wrongfully discriminating among her students? Most of us would think that she is not. Treating

students at different levels in the same way would do little to help those who lag behind. Those students could benefit from some support to catch up with those ahead. This is the idea behind affirmative action and reasonable accommodation: to enable those who are worse off to become on par with others.

What is true in the classroom context is also true in a policy context. The controversy around the award of scholarships to minority students in Kerala illustrates this. The