

Meritocracy and Affirmative Action in India

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- Women: 33% elected seats reserved in rural and urban local bodies.

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- Status quo is viewed as meritocratic, despite being ridden with caste divisions, but the proposed remedy is widely criticised as anti-merit.

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- It is a “hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one above the other” .
- Ambedkar: “not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitudes ... [the caste system] is an attempt to assign tasks to individuals in advance, *selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents ... this stratification of occupations which is the result of the caste system is positively pernicious*” (emphasis added). (“Annihilation of Caste”, 1936).

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- Creation of “merit” in early childhood (Deshpande and Ramachandran, 2018)
- Discrimination in schools (Nambissan, 2007; Hanna and Linden, 2012)

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- Deshpande and Newman (2007) tracking study: employers actively probed into applicants’ “family background”, all the while professing deep allegiance only to the “merit” of the candidate.
- Personalized recruitment in the private sector : employers find this convenient and “efficient”: it minimises recruitment costs, ensures commitment and loyalty, minimises transaction costs of disciplining workers and handling disputes and grievances.

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- Thus, qualities of individuals replaced by stereotypes that at best, will make it harder for a highly qualified job applicant to gain recognition for his/her skills and accomplishments.

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- Thus, qualities of individuals replaced by stereotypes that at best, will make it harder for a highly qualified job applicant to gain recognition for his/her skills and accomplishments.
- What is missed in the debate over lower entry scores for SC-ST students is the value addition that takes place due to being admitted to a prestigious institution of learning.

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- Bowen and Bok (2000) document the long term positive impact of AA on the lives of beneficiaries who successfully graduate from elite universities in USA, even if they do so with grades lower than their white counterparts. For successful blacks, the transformation in their life chances because of AA is tremendous and the benefits go beyond the final grade they obtained at graduation.

Efficiency Impact of Affirmative Action

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- On the contrary, some of the results of the analysis suggest that the proportion of SC and ST employees in the upper (A+B) job categories is positively associated with productivity and productivity growth.

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- These findings echoed in Bhavnani and Lee (2018) assessing performance of IAS officers.

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- No evidence of the “mismatch hypothesis”. In addition to improving earning potential, they find that AA could also increase access to more satisfying careers, measured in terms of job quality and satisfaction.

The Stigma of Incompetence

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- This undervaluation by peers (the 'externalization' mechanism) could increase the academic burden on AA beneficiaries, with possible adverse consequences for their performance. Alternatively, or additionally, the performance of beneficiaries might be affected (lowered) as a result of self-doubt due to stereotype threat (the 'internalization' mechanism).

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- Deshpande, 2017 & 2018: uptake of AA not negatively affected by fear of added stigmatization.

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- Successful graduates from amongst the beneficiary groups consolidate the growing Dalit and Adivasi middle class that helps break the presumed association between lower-caste status and “merit”.