



MAKING MERITOCRACY

*Lessons from China and India,
from Antiquity to the Present*

EDITED BY

TARUN KHANNA *and* MICHAEL SZONYI



Making Meritocracy

Copyright © 2022. Oxford University Press. Incorporated. All rights reserved.

MODERN SOUTH ASIA

Ashutosh Varshney, Series Editor
Pradeep Chhibber, Associate Series Editor

Editorial Board

Kaushik Basu (Cornell University)
Sarah Besky (Cornell University)
Jennifer Bussell (University of California, Berkeley)
Veena Das (Johns Hopkins University)
Patrick Heller (Brown University)
Niraja Gopal Jayal (Jawaharlal Nehru University)
Devesh Kapur (Johns Hopkins University)
Atul Kohli (Princeton University)
Pratap Bhanu Mehta (Ashoka University)
Shandana Khan Mohmand (University of Sussex)
Ashley Tellis (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)
Steven Wilkinson (Yale University)

The Other One Percent

Sanjoy Chakravorty, Devesh Kapur, and Nirvikar Singh

Social Justice through Inclusion

Francesca R. Jensenius

Dispossession without Development

Michael Levien

The Man Who Remade India

Vinay Sitapati

Business and Politics in India

Edited by Christophe Jaffrelot, Atul Kohli, and Kanta Murali

Clients and Constituents

Jennifer Bussell

Gambling with Violence

Yelena Biberman

Mobilizing the Marginalized

Amit Ahuja

The Absent Dialogue

Anit Mukherjee

When Nehru Looked East

Francine Frankel

Capable Women, Incapable States

Poulami Roychowdhury

Farewell to Arms

Rumela Sen

Negotiating Democracy and Religious Pluralism

Karen Barkey, Sudipta Kaviraj, and Vatsal Naresh

Cultivating Democracy

Mukulika Banerjee

Patching Development

Rajesh Veeraraghavan

Making Meritocracy

Edited by Tarun Khanna and Michael Szonyi

Making Meritocracy

*Lessons from China and India, from
Antiquity to the Present*

Edited by

TARUN KHANNA AND MICHAEL SZONYI

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Copyright © 2022. Oxford University Press. Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>Contributors</i>	ix

Introduction <i>Tarun Khanna and Michael Szonyi</i>	1
--	---

I PHILOSOPHICAL

1. Political Theologies of Justice: Meritocratic Values from a Global Perspective <i>Michael Puett</i>	19
2. Merit in the Mirror of Democracy: Caste and Affirmative Action in India <i>Ashutosh Varshney</i>	41
3. Political Meritocracy in China: The Ideal vs. the Reality <i>Daniel A. Bell</i>	64

II HISTORICAL

4. Locating Meritocracy in Early Modern Asia: Qing China and Mughal India <i>Sudev Sheth and Lawrence L. C. Zhang</i>	85
5. Meritocratic Empires? South Asia ca. 1600–1947 <i>Sumit Guha</i>	118
6. Meritocracy and the Making of the Chinese Academe Redux, 1912–1952 <i>James Z. Lee, Bamboo Yunzhu Ren, and Chen Liang</i>	137

III CONTEMPORARY

7. The Origins and Effects of Affirmative Action Policies in India <i>Ashwini Deshpande</i>	173
8. Merit and Caste at Elite Institutions: The Case of the IIT <i>Ajantha Subramanian</i>	194

9. The National College Entrance Examination and the Myth of Meritocracy in Post-Mao China 206
Zachary M. Howlett

IV PROSPECTIVE

10. The Singaporean Meritocracy: Theory, Practice, and Policy Implications 231
Vincent Chua, Randall Morck, and Bernard Yeung
11. The Merits and Limits of China's Modern Universities 262
William C. Kirby
12. Reimagining Merit in India: Cognition and Affirmative Action 284
D. Shyam Babu, Chandra Bhan Prasad, and Devesh Kapur
13. Meritocracy Enabled by Technology, Grounded in Science 307
Varun Aggarwal
- Afterword 335
Tarun Khanna and Michael Szonyi
- Bibliography* 345
Index 371

2

Merit in the Mirror of Democracy

Caste and Affirmative Action in India

Ashutosh Varshney

Are democracy and meritocracy simultaneously realizable? This question is being asked anew in a world marked by populism, viewed in many quarters as a rebellion against merit in modern democracies.¹ In India, the original debates go back to the early days of independence (1947) and the founding of the Constitution (1950). At independence, India opted for a universal-franchise democracy. Since then, the core premises and the expanding reach of a democratic polity have colored discussions of whether a meritocracy was possible, or even desirable.

In this chapter, I explain how and why, through a variety of affirmative action programs, democracy undermined merit as an organizing principle of Indian polity, its public employment, and education. Given India's history of caste system and its entrenchments of birth-based prerogatives and deprivations, merit was not viewed as a sign of intrinsic ability. Merit was interpreted as an expression of historically accumulated privilege. Meritocracy essentially came to mean the domination of upper castes, the subjection of lower castes, and, therefore, a reproduction of historically inherited ascriptive social hierarchies. Meritocracy, so conceived, was in obvious tension with India's universal-franchise democracy—partly because the traditionally disadvantaged lower castes were numerically many times larger than the historically privileged upper castes and would sooner or later come to exercise greater voting power. The lower castes came to view merit—first in the South, then in the North—as another name for the culturally and socially anchored unjust entitlements lasting for centuries. Merit could not easily be decoupled from privilege.

Paradoxically, it is possible to see India's affirmative action programs not as an attack on meritocracy but as a way to promote meritocracy in the end. One could, for example, say that India attacked merit in the short to medium run only to open up opportunities for all in the long run. Such paradoxes routinely mark affirmative action programs in most parts of the world: their stated goal is to open up opportunity for the historically marginalized segments of society, while those historically privileged are constrained here and now.²

But even if we embrace this line of reasoning, we should note that it is never clear how long the long run is. In other words, how long should affirmative action programs continue to undo historically inherited privileges? In India, such programs have continued in one form or another for more than seven decades, and there is no sign they will soon be terminated. Generally speaking, in the eyes of politicians, policymakers, and intellectuals, these programs are aimed at achieving *social justice*, not at generating a purer *meritocracy* untainted by its association with historically acquired hereditary privileges. It is the language of justice that is used as a rationale, not the language of meritocracy. And the quest for justice is likely to continue as long as democratic politics allows it to be a politically worthy project, perhaps lasting for a few more decades. The notion of meritocracy does not excite political imagination or political passion; the idea of justice does.

Under such conditions, it is perhaps not advisable to equate the concept of justice with the idea of meritocracy. It might be analytically better if, instead of a putatively universal notion of meritocracy, we hew closer to the self-understanding of a society and its actors.

But the undermining of merit in India is partial in that the political project of including lower castes in the various key domains of life—politics, employment, and education—basically characterizes the functioning of the public sector, whereas the idea of merit, in principle, has migrated to the private sector. There is considerable evidence that upper castes dominate the private sector, which only reinforces the lower-caste assertion that what is called merit is simply a transformation of privilege into achievement. It is unclear whether, eventually, the ideals of social inclusion will be politically or legally thrust on the private sector, though some demands in that direction, successfully resisted thus far, have already been made.

Before I proceed further, I should briefly explain what I mean by merit. That merit cannot be defined in a universally acceptable manner is widely acknowledged. Should it mean academic performance or an ability to perform and deliver regardless of academic achievement? Should it also include grit and determination against all odds, as India's Mandal Commission, discussed later, emphasized? Should it include social intelligence, not just academic excellence? As the "Introduction" and "Afterword" to this volume note, difficulties of this kind make a consensus on how merit might be conceptualized elusive. Short of a universally acceptable conceptualization, perhaps a pragmatic solution is to take education and, given education levels, higher academic performance (grades or marks) as the basic yardsticks of greater merit. And a meritocracy, then, would be a system in which positions, power, and jobs are assigned on the basis of merit thus defined.

It is not an entirely satisfactory resolution, but it is not clear that greater precision is possible. More important, for the purposes of understanding the

relationship between democracy and meritocracy in India, which is my main concern here, an education-based conception of merit will adequately illustrate the nature of the problem.

I should also state that this chapter is primarily about the conceptual or philosophical issues. It seeks to analyze the *philosophical foundations of why India's democracy chose to violate the principle of meritocracy, and what limits it perceived as legitimate*. It does not examine in great detail the consequences of how merit was politically constrained and reconfigured. I will simply summarize the available studies of the effects of affirmative action, without taking us too far in that direction.³ Anchoring the discussion theoretically and historically, I will mostly examine how India's democracy came to view merit, and why.

Democracy and Meritocracy: A Theoretical and Historical Background

Since it acquired the form of universal franchise in the twentieth century, democracy and merit can be viewed as two different ways to organize a polity, economy, and society. This was not always so, and the distinction, even opposition, between the two was not always seen as critical to the functioning of either. When franchise was not universal, as in the nineteenth century, democracy had some connection with merit.

In nineteenth-century Europe, the right to vote was accorded on the basis of property, education, and gender, for it was believed that only the propertied and educated men had the rational ability and intellectual capacity to exercise the vote in a mature fashion. Women, children, and the poor did not have such capabilities. Even in the United States, which had the highest franchise in the world after the Jacksonian revolution of the 1830s, all adult White men, regardless of wealth or education, might have received the right to vote, but non-Whites and women were excluded. The 15th Constitutional Amendment (1870) dropped racial restrictions on franchise, thus making the United States the first polity in the world to have universal adult male franchise, but the gains were lost when southern state governments developed criteria such as literacy and poll taxes to restrict voting rights. Since these cuts disproportionately affected the Black community, an effective racial restriction on the vote remained, as did the notion that only the meritorious had the right to vote.⁴

It is generally believed that John Locke laid down the original *liberal* foundations of the relationship between rationality and politics as early as the eighteenth century. An original theorist of social contract, Locke argued in favor of tutelage as a stage through which all children must go through before they became adults and acquired the intellectual capacity to express well-considered

consent.⁵ The notion that some citizens were like children and others like adults followed almost as a syllogism. To have the capacity to reason was to be meritorious.

Democracy and Merit in the Nineteenth Century

This line of reasoning took a much more elaborate form in nineteenth-century Europe as the idea of who should get the right to vote began seriously to be debated. John Stuart Mill provided some of the most widely read arguments. In the early stages of capitalism, Mill said, “the great majority of voters, in most countries . . . would be manual labourers, and the twofold danger, that of too low a standard of political intelligence, and that of class legislation, would . . . exist, in a very perilous degree.”⁶ He had no doubt that:

the employer of labour is on the average more intelligent than a labourer, for he must labour with his head, and not solely with his hands. A foreman is generally more intelligent than an ordinary labourer, and a labourer in the skilled trades than in the unskilled. A banker, merchant, or manufacturer, is likely to be more intelligent than a tradesman.⁷

But why would a laborer be less intelligent than an employer of labor and, therefore, be deprived of vote? Literacy and numeracy were the main reason, according to Mill:

I regard it as wholly inadmissible that any person should participate in the suffrage, without being able to read, write, and, I will add, perform the common operations of arithmetic. . . . No one . . . will maintain that power over others, over the whole community, should be imparted to people who have not acquired the commonest and most requisite essentials for taking care of themselves; for pursuing intelligently their own interests.⁸

From this reasoning, it only followed that “the constitution of the country should (not) declare ignorance to be entitled to as much political power as knowledge . . . and it is important that this conviction should be professed by the State, and embodied in the national institutions.”⁹

After linking vote with merit in his own country, Mill then also went on to draw the implications of the argument for British colonies like India and Hong Kong. He drew a distinction between colonies that were “of similar civilization to the ruling country; capable of and ripe for representative government: such as the British possessions in America and Australia,”¹⁰ and colonies of a different

civilization, or “others, like India (that) are still at a great distance from that state.”¹¹ Governance in latter countries only allowed for “a choice of despotisms,” not vote-based representative government.¹²

In short, being an extension of the European civilization, colonies like Canada and Australia had the intrinsic merit to deserve democracy; India and China were not so deserving. In the latter case, “the absorption of the conquerors in the less advanced people would be an evil: these must be governed as subjects.”¹³

Toward Universal Franchise

In the era of universal franchise, this link between democracy and merit has been broken. As voters, we don’t habitually elect those trained at the best colleges and law schools, nor is our right to vote dependent on whether we are educated, have high grades, or can “copy a sentence from an English book, and perform a sum in the rule of three.”¹⁴

In India, too, there was no big debate during the constitution-making (1946–1949) about whether only the educated (or the propertied) ought to be allowed the right to vote or the right to run for elected office. Rather, the argument that generated near-consensus was different. Though educated at the University of Cambridge, Jawaharlal Nehru argued¹⁵ that universal franchise, including everyone, poor and rich, educated and uneducated, men and women, upper and lower castes, was based on the great twentieth-century premise, wrongly dismissed earlier, that “each person should be treated as having equal political and social value.”¹⁶ This statement became the foundation of universal franchise in India.

Nehru, of course, was not alone. In 1945, a committee formed by the leading thinkers of the Congress party had already argued against those who considered poverty and lack of literacy a basis for franchise disqualification. Although the poor voter’s “judgment may be faulty, his reasoning inaccurate and his support of a candidate not infrequently determined by considerations removed from a high sense of democracy, he is yet no better or worse than the average voter in many parts of Europe where adult franchise has been in force for some time.”¹⁷

Nor was the sentiment confined to the Congress party. In the early years of independence, the most consequential institutional domain for India’s political elites was the Constituent Assembly (CA), which over three years, from late 1946 to late 1949, produced India’s Constitution, a document that remains the bedrock of Indian polity. Though most CA members came from the Congress party, there were several who were not Congressmen and later also became great critics of the ruling Congress, including Hindu nationalists,¹⁸ as well as the head of the

Constitution drafting committee, the famous Dalit leader, B. R. Ambedkar, a well-known critic of Mahatma Gandhi.

With PhDs from Columbia University and London School of Economics, Ambedkar was perhaps the most highly educated Indian political leader after the early 1920s, but he came from a community that was among the least educated, the most highly segregated, and the most heavily discriminated against. His argument was not to restrict franchise to the educated but to give it to all as a right. As early as the late 1920s, when India started debating democracy, Ambedkar had argued:

Those who insist on literacy as a test and insist upon making it a condition precedent to enfranchisement, in my opinion, commit two mistakes. Their first mistake consists in their belief that an illiterate person is necessarily an unintelligent person. . . . Their second mistake lies in supposing that literacy necessarily imports a higher level of intelligence or knowledge than what the illiterate person possesses.¹⁹

The claim here was not that the illiterate people should not be educated, only that illiteracy and intelligence are analytically separable, and even the illiterate understood their interests and knew how to look after them.

There were no doubt some dissenters. “Where the electorate is not enlightened,” argued a CA member, “there cannot be a parliamentary democracy.”²⁰ Another member suggested: “For the first ten years, just limit this right of voting to literate people. Otherwise, in my humble opinion, these elections will be a great farce. . . . My submission is that . . . we should have the provision of literacy put in a clause.”²¹ Such Mill-style reasoning, however, had to contend with the more common view, expressed clearly by another member: “The introduction of any . . . educational qualifications for the exercise of the franchise would be a negation of the principles of democracy. If any such qualifications were introduced, that would have disfranchised a large number of the labouring classes and a large number of women-folk.”²²

With an overwhelming majority, running across the political spectrum, the Constituent Assembly embraced universal adult franchise.²³ “The Assembly . . . adopted the principle of adult franchise . . . with an abundant faith in the common man . . . and in the full belief that the introduction of democratic government on the basis of adult suffrage will . . . promote the well-being . . . the common man.”²⁴

Modern democracy, of course, is not alone in proposing “abundant faith in the common man.” A reference to China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) should illustrate how such political moves can be made in nondemocratic polities as well, though of course not in the form of universal franchise. In 1952, following

the long-standing role of bureaucratic meritocracy in Chinese history focused on the so-called examination system, Mao Zedong had instituted the *gaokao*, the Chinese examination system for college entrance, to facilitate China's economic and scientific modernization. But he also singlehandedly terminated the *gaokao* during the Cultural Revolution. As China's preeminent leader, he forced professors and students from urban China to go to the countryside and learn from the peasants. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao came to view standard educational merit as nothing more than a facade for elitism. For the entire decade of the Cultural Revolution, the universities barely functioned. And it was only fifteen months after Mao's death, in December 1977, that the *gaokao* was reintroduced, when the post-Mao leadership argued that China's modernization required reinvigoration of higher education.

Although such twists and turns can surely come about in nondemocratic settings as well, though never going as far as universal franchise, it should be clear that contemporary democracy cannot possibly abandon the principle of *equal dignity and value of all* as its elective principle. Every single vote has the same weight. Merit, however conceptualized, is not, and cannot be, a cornerstone of democratic *polities*. Democracies must seek to represent all, even if those it seeks to represent have not crossed the great yardsticks of competitive education or succeeded competitively in the economy. One of the best ways to represent all is to give each person also the right to vote. Mill's shadow no longer lingers in the realm of democratic reasoning.

But does democracy ignore merit altogether? In what form can merit emerge in a democracy? Did it in India?

Modes of Selection: Politics, Education, Employment

The fact that modern democracy must embody the principle of equal worth of all does not mean that access to employment or education must necessarily also subscribe to the same principle. Even if inclusionary principles are applied, those meritorious must be given their due weight. Bureaucracies, armies, courts, universities, and corporations are after all not parliaments. Differential institutional requirements and therefore varying institutional logics are part of modern life.²⁵ Some of the biggest political battles in post-1947 India have indeed been fought on the question of how to conceptualize merit in different public spheres and how to combine merit and inclusion.

Here, a brief background note on caste would be in order.²⁶ The caste system has been, historically, an integral feature of Hindu society, constituting about 80 percent of India today. The caste system was envisioned as an ascriptive division of labor, with a clear birth-based hierarchy, also incorporating notions

of pollution and purity. To simplify, the system had a tripartite formation: (1) the upper castes, (2) the middle castes (also called lower castes, and the other backward classes, or the OBCs, after independence), and (3) the Dalits (“untouchable” in the past, and legally called the scheduled castes, or SCs, after independence).²⁷ The upper castes had the “highest” professions: they were priests, scholars, warriors, landlords, and businessmen. Peasants and artisans roughly constituted the middle castes or OBCs. And the Dalits had the “lowest” professions, essentially waste cleaning, leather work, alcohol making, and unskilled agricultural labor.²⁸ Table 2.1 summarizes the statistical magnitudes of these categories.

This was not a voluntary division of labor. It was compulsively birth-based, segregated, and tightly regulated. If violated, the social order was enforced with violence, quite a bit like the Jim Crow American South between the 1880s and 1950s.²⁹ Intermarriage was historically prohibited and temple access limited for Dalits and some lower castes. There were other behavioral codes as well. In a more generalized form, some of these traditional exclusions were explicitly listed in Article 15 of India’s Constitution and their continued practice legally prohibited.

No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex . . . be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to—(a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing *ghats*, roads and places of public resort maintained . . . out of State funds or dedicated to the use of general public.

Table 2.1 India’s Caste Composition (as Percentage of Indian Population)

1. Upper castes ^a	16.1
2. OBCs (also called lower castes)	43.7
3. Scheduled castes (SCs) ^b	16.2
4. Scheduled tribes (STs) ^c	8.2
5. Others ^d	15.8

^aThe upper castes and OBCs are basically estimates. No full caste census was taken between 1931 and 2011. The census of 2011 did not release caste numbers beyond the SCs and STs.

^bThe SCs and STs statistics are based on the 2011 census. Both categories include non-Hindus. For example, the Sikh religious community has its officially recognized SCs, as do the Buddhists.

^cThe STs have a substantial proportion of Christians, especially in the Northeast.

^d“Others” include Muslims, Sikhs (excluding Sikh SCs), Christians (excluding Christian STs), Jains, etc.

In addition, Dalits and even the middle castes, the OBCs, had very little access to education.³⁰ The upper castes, never more than 16–18 percent of the population, had a preponderant share of land, education, and income.³¹ And when the modern public services came, the upper castes also had an overwhelming presence in the upper reaches of administration and education. In Madras Presidency, for example, a large province of British India, Brahmins were a mere 3 percent of the population, but in the 1910s and 1920s, they “comprised something like 70–80 percent of graduates and native holders of gazetted appointments.”³² And Brahmins used to have 70 percent of college seats before the lower-caste affirmative action quotas were instituted in what after independence became the state of Tamil Nadu.³³

How should a democracy handle the problem of the upper caste domination of education and public services? Were only the upper castes meritorious? If not, how should one include the marginalized segments of society, weighed down by the caste system? As early as the 1920s, India started struggling with these questions.

The discussion in the next section starts with reservations in political representation before we get to education and employment. That is because political reservations were first debated nationally at the highest tiers of politics—most significantly, in the Constituent Assembly in the late 1940s and even before that, in the 1930s. Discussion of quotas in political representation provided the conceptual and philosophical template for caste reservations in jobs and education later.

Merit and Political Representation

The question of political representation—how should political representatives be selected?—is different from the right to vote, discussed previously at length. Can the Brahmins (and upper castes in general), the best educated and the richest group of Hindu society, represent the interests of Dalits, among the least educated and the poorest? This question was at the core of national political deliberation.

Analyzing how Chinese politicians are picked for upward promotion, Daniel Bell has argued that in China, political selection, at least after the Maoist era, has been merit-based.³⁴ One may legitimately ask whether merit can at all be evaluated *in politics* in an objective manner, but assuming Bell’s is the right way to understand political mobility in China and a way to judge merit in politics has indeed been devised, the first issue that strikes an analyst of India is that the idea of merit is rarely, if ever, raised in political representation. The debate has always been about who could be most *effective* in representing the interests of a given

community or constituency, not who is most *meritorious*. The debate has never been about merit but about effectiveness in political representation.

This issue acquired enormous seriousness for Dalits who were not simply among the most socioeconomically disadvantaged *but also numerically a minority in society*. How would a universal-franchise democracy defend their interests? Would not the castes above them, constituting a majority, marginalize them, if not checked *via* some widely accepted legal or political method? And what would the best method for checking such majoritarianism look like?

Hanna Pitkin has famously drawn a distinction between descriptive representation and substantive representation.³⁵ Adapting it for India, the former concept would imply that only Dalits can represent Dalits, only women can represent women, and so on. The idea of substantive representation, in comparison, would suggest that Dalit interests could also be looked after by upper castes and women's interests by men, meaning it was possible to rise above one's gender or community in a manner that the "others" could be meaningfully represented.

This distinction did not become a centerpiece of India's debates about political representation. Stating—explicitly, unwaveringly, and relentlessly—that the castes placed above the Dalits were steeped in caste prejudice and, given their historical record, could not be expected to be fair-minded, Ambedkar defined the representational problem as one that would have to ensure that laws enacted by legislatures prevented discrimination.³⁶

To avoid such discrimination against Dalits, Ambedkar's first-order preference was to restructure political representation. He argued in favor of the so-called system of separate electorates, in which only Dalits would vote and only Dalits would run for office.³⁷ The other kinds of electorates would be joint electorates, in which all would vote, and the question of whether all could contest for office or only members of a certain community could was left open. Joint electorates, in principle, could take two forms: (a) They could not only allow all to vote but also all, or any, to contest; or (b) they could permit every adult to vote but restrict the contestation for representing these electorates only to some castes or groups.

Ambedkar's argument for separate Dalit ("untouchable" until 1950) electorates was as follows: "Separate electorate does not permit the Hindus to capture the seats reserved for the Untouchables. . . . The joint electorate does. . . . If there is a joint electorate . . . the representative of the Untouchables would be only a nominal representatives, not a real representative."³⁸

Ambedkar could not obtain his first preference. Pressured first by Gandhi in the early 1930s and then by the dominant opinion in the Constituent Assembly in the late 1940, Ambedkar settled for a compromise.³⁹ Enshrined in India's Constitution, the compromise, lasting until today and most unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future, was that post-independence India would only

have joint electorates, where all citizens would vote, but *some of these joint legislative constituencies, both at the federal and state level, would be reserved for Dalits (as well as the tribals), in which all citizens might vote but only Dalit (and tribal) politicians would have the legal right to contest.*⁴⁰ The number of such “reserved constituencies” would be fixed in accordance with the demographic proportions of Dalit and tribal groups, which at the national level turned out to be 15 percent for the former and 7.5 percent for the latter, adding up to 22.5 percent of the total parliamentary seats today.⁴¹ At the state assembly levels, the population proportions could be different. In the state of Gujarat, for example, the tribal community was always larger than the Dalit community, so the number of reserved tribal constituencies in the state assembly was correspondingly larger than the number of reserved Dalit seats.

In an assessment of these political reservations, Francesca Jensenius remarks that they can best be described as aiming for “social justice through inclusion,” meaning this legislative device sought to include Dalit politicians at the higher levels of the polity.⁴² But was the goal of elite inclusion successfully achieved?

Quotas for SCs have played an important role in breaking down the social barriers associated with the caste system. This success is only partial, as SC politicians are still perceived as weaker than other politicians, and they still experience subtle forms of discrimination. However, some important achievements have been made: this large community that otherwise probably would have been excluded from politics has had the opportunity to gain political experience and know-how and it now seems socially unacceptable to treat SC elites disrespectfully in public.⁴³

In other words, Dalit politicians have indeed arrived at the top tiers of the polity, have acquired political skill sets, and are not subjected to disrespectful behavior in public, though full acceptance as equally worthy might still be missing.⁴⁴ This could be termed a half victory for the constitutional provision of elite inclusion.

The impact of Dalit quotas in the third tier of government, the panchayat level, has also been researched. A careful study, by Simon Chauchard, draws three interconnected conclusions.⁴⁵ First, political seats reserved for Dalits might not have produced a distinct change in personal biases, reflected in stereotypes, but where Dalits hold positions of power, the upper castes treat them better in the public realm and Dalits themselves are more assertive and confident. Second, this “strategic change” is induced by changing social norms of interaction as well as the threat of legal action. If Dalits had not had legal rights and political power, such change would not have come about. Finally, significant revisions in social behavior are no small achievement in a society where, historically speaking, the Dalits were rarely received with elementary courtesy and politeness.

In short, political quotas have gone a long way toward the production of behavioral change and the emergence of a modicum of respect for Dalits in the public sphere. This change was not a result of subscribing to merit in politics, however such merit could be defined. Rather, it was a consequence of a justice-based intervention, conceptualized as group-based representation, undergirded by the legal abolition of untouchability and the legal possibility of punishment for publicly expressed prejudice based on untouchability. Dignity might not have been fully achieved, but substantial steps toward it have been taken.

Education and Employment

On how to structure employment and education, the question of merit acquired a different form. The issue again was not meritocracy per se. Rather, political debate centered on the right balance between merit and social justice. How should this balance be achieved? What formulas are available and should be adopted? These questions have been vigorously discussed since independence—and in some parts of India, they were debated, and acted upon, even before that.⁴⁶

At the time of independence, arguments about affirmative action in education and employment appeared first in the Constituent Assembly. Chiding his upper-caste colleagues, H. J. Khandekar, a Dalit member from the Central Provinces, argued:

You are responsible for our being unfit today. We are suppressed for thousands of years. You . . . suppressed us to such an extent that neither our minds nor our bodies and nor even our hearts work, nor are we able to march forward. . . . You have reduced us to such a position and then you say that we are not fit and that we have not secured the requisite marks. How can we secure them?⁴⁷

This kind of reasoning, making centuries-long caste discrimination responsible for the terrible educational condition of Dalits, did not go unchallenged. Advancing *class-based*, not *caste-based*, arguments for deprivation, another member, pointing to Ambedkar's education credentials, argued: "How is Dr. Ambedkar a member of the Scheduled Castes? Is he illiterate? Is he ill-educated? Is he an untouchable? Is he lacking in anything? He is the finest of the fine intellectuals in India and still he is in the list of Scheduled Castes."⁴⁸

However, this alternate conception, linking class to deprivation, could not acquire dominance. Even the most fervent advocates of class-based reasoning were unwilling to view Dalit deprivation as only class-based.⁴⁹ There was something incomparably degrading about untouchability. And this was explicitly recognized in the Constitution. Article 17 criminalized the practice of

untouchability: “Untouchability is abolished and the practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offense punishable in accordance with law.” Article 46, then, committed the state to affirmative action in educational and economic arenas.

The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Over time, slowly but surely, the idea of reservations in education and public employment began to be devised and implemented. For Dalits (legally SCs) and tribals (legally STs), in accordance with the demographic proportions, a 22.5 percent reservation was made in central government services and central educational institutions, administered directly from Delhi. The exact SC and ST quota in the state government services and the educational institutions was left to the states.

How do we assess what has been achieved through such reservations? The studies of SC/ST quotas in education and employment are divisible into two parts. The first question is: Have the quotas led to higher SC/ST representation in the first place? The second question is: What is the impact of quotas on the workings of organizations where the representation has clearly gone up? Have such organizations become more or less efficient?

On education, there has been a significant narrowing of gap between SCs/STs and others. In 1983, measured by average years of education, the relative discrepancy between SC/ST and others was 157 percent. By 2004–2005, it had declined to 74 percent, showing that more SCs/STs were getting education compared to the past and their relative numbers were rising more than those of the non-SCs/STs.⁵⁰ These averages, however, acquire a different meaning when figures are disaggregated for (a) high school and (b) higher education.⁵¹

What about employment? If we divide jobs as falling into three categories—(a) agricultural, (b) blue-collar nonagricultural, and (c) white-collar nonagricultural—caste gaps have narrowed across all categories, but the greatest relative gains for the SCs/STs have been in (a) and (b), while (c) remains the least affected.⁵²

Let us turn now to the impact on organizational performance. How have the SC/ST quotas in public employment influenced the functioning of the public sector? While the entire public sector has not been studied, some important parts of it have been. A study of the railways, the largest single employer in the public sector, shows that with higher SC/ST representation, the efficiency of service provision has not gone down at all, and might even have

improved.⁵³ Another study focuses on the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the nation's elite bureaucracy. Comparing districts served by quota-based IAS recruits with districts served by nonquota and, therefore, presumably, merit-based recruits, it measures performance on the government's massive national rural employment guarantee program as well as road construction. It finds no statistically significant difference between the two sets of districts, showing thereby that SC reservations cannot be said to have lowered administrative performance.⁵⁴

The Case of OBCs

The discussion in the previous section is about SCs and STs. Let us now turn to the middle castes, politically known as lower castes and officially classified as OBCs. In the 1950s, as Delhi went about instituting SC/ST reservations in employment and education, OBC reservations were left to the states. Using that clause and including the OBCs, not simply the SCs and STs, some southern states reserved 60–69 percent of seats in higher education and jobs in government services in the 1960s.

South India was the first regional theater of passionate caste debates. For a whole variety of historical reasons, Hindu–Muslim divisions did not play the same role in southern India as in northern and western India. Internal caste divisions of Hindi society were more significant—socially, culturally, and politically.

In the lower-caste southern discourse, which became dominant in politics, caste has long been viewed as a central determinant of merit and achievement. Ajantha Subramanian has recently summarized this dominant view as the “upper caste underpinnings of meritocracy” and the “historically sedimented disadvantages” of the lower castes.⁵⁵ The Dravidian movement, rising in the 1910s, pointed to the Brahmin dominance of civil services and education, especially at the higher levels, as an example of how opportunities were “hoarded” by Brahmins because of what Bourdieu has called cultural capital (based on birth-based backgrounds) and social capital (based on birth-based networks).⁵⁶ How could it be that the huge non-Brahmin community had such little representation in education and public employment, the Dravidian movement asked? Could the lower castes be entirely without merit?

This understanding of the determinants of merit reached another milestone in the 1980s. Asked by the Government of India to investigate whether the reservations should also be extended to the OBCs in central services and education all over India, not simply confined to SCs and STs, the Mandal Commission (1980) wholeheartedly recommended such an extension. The

Mandal articulation of the caste determinants of merit has become a classic. It is worth noting at length:

It is argued that by selecting candidates with “lower merit” . . . the nation (will be) deprived of the services of the best talent that is available to it.

This line of argument, though plausible on the face of it, suffers from a serious fallacy regarding the nature of “merit.” We shall try to illustrate this point by a homely example. Mohan comes from a fairly well-off middle-class family and both his parents are well educated. He attends one of the good . . . schools in the city which provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities. At home, he has a separate room to himself and he is assisted in his studies by both his parents. There is a television . . . set in the house and his father also subscribes to a number of magazines. . . . Most of his friends are of a similar background. . . . Some of his relatives are fairly influential people and he can bank on the right sort of recommendation . . . at the right moment.

On the other hand, Lallu is a village boy, and his backward class parents occupy a low social position in the village caste hierarchy. His father owns a 4-acre plot of agricultural land. Both his parents are illiterate and his family of eight lives huddled in a two-room hut. Whereas a primary school is located in the village, for his high school he had to walk a distance of nearly three kilometers both ways. Keen on pursuing higher studies, he persuaded his parents to send him to an uncle (in a nearby town). . . . He never received any guidance regarding the course of studies. . . nor the career to be chosen. Most of his friends did not study beyond the middle school. . . . Owing to his rural background he has a rustic appearance. Despite his college education, his pronunciation is poor, his manners awkward and he lacks self-confidence.

Let us suppose that both of them (appear in) the all-India Services Examination, and Mohan secures 50% more marks than Lallu. Does it mean that Mohan’s merit is 50% higher . . . ? Is it possible to determine . . . how these boys would have fared in case they had exchanged places? If merit also includes grit, determination, ability to fight odds, etc., should not the marks obtained by Mohan and Lallu be suitably moderated in view of the privileges enjoyed by the former and the handicaps suffered by the latter?

What we call “merit” in an elitist society is an amalgam of native endowments and environmental privileges. Mohan and Lallu are not equals. . . . The conscience of civilized society and the dictates of social justice demand that “merit” and “equality” are not turned into a fetish and the element of privilege is duly recognized and discounted for when “unequals” are made to run the same race.⁵⁷

The Mandal articulation, it should be clear, supports the view that merit is historically produced and socially constructed in deeply hierarchical societies like

India. It extends the “southern dialectic of lower caste claims to rights and upper caste claims to merit to the North.”⁵⁸

The Mandal formulation was not only accepted by the central government in 1990 but also endorsed by the Supreme Court in 1992, after Mandal’s recommendations were challenged by those who thought it was deeply unjust to the meritorious among the upper castes. Since the early 1990s, South India’s conventional political wisdom has thus become nationally accepted.

To recall our earlier discussion, OBCs are the middle castes, sandwiched between the upper castes and SCs/STs. As no caste census has been taken since 1931, we can’t be sure of their exact numbers, but the best estimates point to the OBCs constituting 43–44 percent of the total national population (table 2.1).⁵⁹ Thus, after Mandal, the castes covered by reservations—OBCs plus SCs and STs—constituted 65–66 percent of India.

Mandal recommended that a 27 percent OBC quota be added to the 22.5 percent that already existed for SCs and STs. As a result, India’s public services and public education became “fifty-fifty.” Half the slots in colleges and universities and jobs in the public sector and civil services (49.5 percent, to be precise) were reserved for three categories: OBCs, SCs, and STs. The other half was “open” and fully competitive.

Since the nationwide OBC reservations in central services and education are quite recent, there are not many studies of their impact. One recent study that evaluates the effect of OBC job quotas as well as OBC quotas in secondary education finds that “the probability of access to government jobs increases for younger OBCs as compared to the older cohorts” and also to “an increase in access to secondary education,” which it interprets “as an incentive effect of the existence of quotas.”⁶⁰ But this study does not assess whether the productivity levels of public-sector organizations have changed as a result of OBC quotas.

At the state level, however, the OBC quotas have lasted since the 1960s in South India. Although statistically precise conclusions assessing civil service productivity in southern states compared to the north have not been derived, there is consensus in the literature on India’s development that relative to the northern states, where OBC quotas were mostly instituted after the early 1990s, the southern states, having large OBC quotas for over five decades, have done better on most social indicators (which are under government control and administration). From this, scholars have generally drawn the inference that southern governments have functioned much better than their northern counterparts.⁶¹

In development circles, the North–South differences have led to serious questioning of the idea that quotas undermine efficiency. Whatever their short-run effect soon after they were introduced in the 1960s, quotas appear not to have lowered government performance in the long run. It may well be that by providing education to those who did not have it earlier, educational quotas prepared the lower castes for efficient participation in public services.

One should also briefly cover some post-Mandal developments. Of late, several states have decided to go beyond the 49.5 percent ceiling, which had become a court-mandated norm by 1993. They have sought to assign a new quota in government jobs for the upper tier of OBCs, famously conceptualized as “dominant castes” by M. N. Srinivas.⁶² These were not upper castes, but they were nonetheless dominant in their respective states or regions—because they owned substantial land and were sufficiently large in numbers.⁶³

Another development, even more recent, is also worth mentioning. In 2019, the central government introduced a 10 percent quota for the “economically weaker sections” of society. This was in addition to the 49.5 percent quota for SCs, STs, and OBCs. The best available analysis of this new policy suggests that “poor Brahmins are the best suited to take advantage of the new quota.”⁶⁴

Most of these new quotas are either stuck in courts, as their constitutionality has been challenged, or the courts have already struck them down as unconstitutional. It is unclear whether such politically induced additional quotas will be able to overcome the judicial obstacles.

The Private Sector

A brief note, finally, on the private sector would be in order. India’s private sector is divisible into two parts: a large informal sector, in which an estimated 85–93 percent of India’s labor force works,⁶⁵ and a smaller corporate sector, which is also smaller than the public corporate sector.

Since the labor contracts in the former are mostly unregulated, the question of affirmative action in the informal sector for all practical purposes does not arise.⁶⁶ But it could, in principle, be applicable to the corporate sector. However, there are no legally enforceable quotas in that sector yet. In theory, the sector is entirely based on merit.

The studies looking at corporate recruitment show that “SC as well as ST groups were over-represented in low paying occupations and severely under-represented in the high paying occupations” and conversely, “upper caste groups . . . were overrepresented among professionals, managers, and clerks, that is, occupations requiring higher levels of formal education.”⁶⁷ The equation between merit and upper castes thus yet again comes out clearly. Studies also provide evidence of subtle forms of discrimination based on caste (or religion).⁶⁸

After 1991, as India embraced markets and moved away from central planning, the private sector flourished more than the public sector. More jobs have been created in the private sector in the last three decades than in the public sector, something likely to be true in the future as well. As a result, arguments about reservations in the private sector have started to emerge in politics.

The first such political move was in 2006, when the Government of India asked the corporate sector to develop an affirmative action agenda if it wanted to preempt legislation. In response, the various business associations of India drew up a voluntary plan, aimed at increasing SC/ST presence in private-sector corporations. Most of the effort was aimed at skill enhancement and training of SCs/STs, to improve their employability. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) defined its position thus:

While Indian industry commits itself to employing many more SC/ST youth, it believes the most urgent need is to ensure that the pool of employable SC/ST youth continues to keep growing. This realization explains the CII's emphasis on initiatives under the Employability agenda. Indian industry is clear that any compromise on merit will restrict its competitiveness in this era of increasing globalization and any attempt to circumscribe its right to hire on merit would be resisted with all the resources at its command. Indian industry shares the nation's resolve to address the deprivation suffered by the SC/ST communities and commits to stepping up its Affirmative Action agenda in the years to come to ensure that India becomes a land of equal opportunity.⁶⁹

Although exact statistics are hard to come by, it has been reported that in 2011–2012, CII set itself a target of recruiting 50,000 SC and ST employees annually in its member companies, in addition to reserving resources for training.⁷⁰ Whether this target has been achieved or has stayed unchanged remains unclear. It is also unclear whether other industry associations have followed suit.

No one can be sure how long the private sector will remain impervious to the quota-based larger political trends. Much depends on what happens to the power of lower castes in democratic politics, how they organize themselves, and whether the political parties representing their interests acquire greater power and push in that direction. Affirmative action battles are by no means over in India's politics and political economy.

Conclusion

By linking democracy and merit, this chapter has basically argued that in a society marked by historically enduring birth-based inequalities, the idea of merit as the innate ability of individuals was simply not viable once such a society adopted a universal-franchise democracy. In India, merit came largely to be viewed as a function of inherited privilege. This idea had varying implications in different public realms. In political representation, merit played no role at all. In public employment and education, a balance between merit and social inclusion

was sought. Private sector is the only arena where the idea of merit has had a more or less uninterrupted run. But there, too, it is unclear how long the primacy of merit will continue. In a society marked by historically inherited ascriptive hierarchies, tensions between merit and inclusion are bound to remain until the project of inclusion has achieved success that the political realm finds acceptable.

Notes

1. See, for example, Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).
2. In the "Introduction" to this volume, Khanna and Szonyi put it as follows: "One could see compensatory discrimination as unmeritocratic in the short run and in the service of meritocracy in the long run." Affirmative action is a form of "compensatory discrimination."
3. Although some specific studies of impact are listed later, the best overview is available in Ashwini Deshpande, "Caste Discrimination in Contemporary India," in *Inequality and Growth: Patterns and Policy*, ed. Kaushik Basu and Joseph E. Stiglitz (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016).
4. Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019). It was only in 1965 that the Voting Rights Act returned the United States to the 1870 levels, though even after that several southern states have tried voter suppression via various means.
5. See the discussion in Uday S. Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke's Political Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).
6. John S. Mill, *Three Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 281.
7. *Ibid.*, 284.
8. *Ibid.*, 278–279.
9. *Ibid.*, 288–289.
10. *Ibid.*, 15–16.
11. *Ibid.*, 16.
12. *Ibid.*, 410.
13. *Ibid.*, 386.
14. *Ibid.*, 279.
15. Another Cambridge-educated political giant of Asia, Lee Kwan Yew, argued very differently, saying democracy at low levels of income devalues merit and promotes both mediocrity and chaos.
16. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (New York: John Day, 1942), 528.
17. Sapru Committee Report, cited in Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1966).
18. Shyama Prasad Mukherji, later the founding president of Jan Sangh, predecessor of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was among the most prominent Hindu nationalists to be a member of the Constituent Assembly, but he was not the only one.

19. Ambedkar's presentation to the Simon Commission, May 17, 1929, reproduced in Christophe Jaffrelot and Narendra Kumar, eds., *Dr. Ambedkar and Democracy: An Anthology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 34.
20. *Constituent Assembly Debates* (Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1999), vol. IX, August 19, 1949.
21. *Ibid.*, vol. VII, January 4, 1949.
22. *Ibid.*, vol. XI, November 23, 1949.
23. Also see the summary of the debate in Austin, *Indian Constitution*, 46–49.
24. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. XI, 835.
25. Some of the best arguments about differential institutional logics have been made by Andre Beteille, "Caste in Contemporary India," in *Caste Today*, ed. C. J. Fuller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 150–179.
26. The literature on caste is voluminous. Some notable general interpretations of caste are Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Surinder S. Jodhka, *Caste in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015); Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Burden of Democracy* (Delhi: Penguin, 2003); Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).
27. For greater elaboration, see Ashutosh Varshney, "Is India Becoming More Democratic?," in *Battles Half Won: India's Improbable Democracy* (Delhi: Penguin, 2013).
28. Such was the dominance of Hinduism that non-Hindu communities, including those committed to social equality, were also influenced. Sikhs have a large Dalit community, called the Mazhabis, and Muslims and Christians also have their untouchables. For Dalit Sikhs, see Surinder S. Jodhka, "Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 19 (2002): 1813–1823; for Dalit Muslims, Prashant K. Trivedi et al., "Does Untouchability Exist among Muslims?: Evidence from Uttar Pradesh," *Economic and Political Weekly* 51, no. 15 (2016): 32–36; for Dalit Christians, Andrew K. J. Wyatt, "Dalit Christians and Identity Politics in India," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 30, no. 4 (1998): 16–23.
29. For more details, see Ashutosh Varshney, "Two Banks of the Same River? Social Orders and Entrepreneurialism in India," in *Battles Half Won: India's Improbable Democracy* (Delhi: Penguin, 2013).
30. A partial exception, ritualistically speaking, would be those castes that were not *upper* but were still *dominant*. The concept of dominant castes was coined by M. N. Srinivas. See Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*.
31. India has not taken a caste census since 1931, so other than the Dalits (and tribals), the object of the state's social welfare policy since independence, all caste statistics are estimates.
32. David Washbrook, "Caste, Class and Dominance in Modern Tamil Nadu: Non-Brahmanism, Dravidianism and Tamil Nationalism," in *Dominance and State Politics in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, ed. Francine R. Frankel and M. S. A. Rao

- (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 212. Gazetted appointees were the high officials of the government. Washbrook adds that “96 percent of the population was illiterate in English and hence scarcely in position to compete for higher education and senior government jobs.”
33. Ajantha Subramanian, “Meritocracy and Democracy: Indian Reservations and the Politics of Caste,” *Public Culture* 31, no. 2 (2019): 279. Also see Subramanian, chapter 8, in this volume.
 34. Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
 35. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).
 36. Madhav Khosla, *India’s Founding Moment: The Constitution of a Most Surprising Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), ch. 3.
 37. The British promoted the idea of separate electorates for India’s religious minorities, beginning with the Muslims in 1909. India’s freedom fighters like Gandhi and Nehru argued that the British did so to forestall the emergence of a united India.
 38. Francesca R. Jensenius, *Social Justice through Inclusion: The Consequences of Electoral Quotas in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 48.
 39. Gandhi’s opposition to the British proposals for separate electorates for Dalits led to the so-called Poona Pact (1932), which allowed for joint electorates but some reserved constituencies for Dalits.
 40. The compromise was initially for a period of ten years, but it has been renewed by parliament every ten years.
 41. In the first decade of India’s independence, 20 percent of parliamentary seats were reserved. It was raised to 22.5 percent after 1962.
 42. Jensenius, *Social Justice through Inclusion*.
 43. *Ibid.*, 29.
 44. For an earlier assessment, see Marc Galanter, *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
 45. Simon Chauchard, *Why Representation Matters: The Meaning of Ethnic Quotas in Rural India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
 46. Affirmative action in employment and/or education dates back to the first decades of the twentieth century in some southern princely states, such as Mysore. See Narendar Pani, “Reservations, Exclusion, and Conflict: Some Insights from Mandal and Mysore,” *India Review* 9, no. 4 (2010): 397–424. In the nonprincely Madras state, called Madras Presidency by the British, too, the affirmative action debates emerged in a big way as early as the 1920s. See Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, chs. 12–13.
 47. Cf. Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 126.
 48. Mahavir Tyagi, in Jensenius, *Social Justice through Inclusion*, 55.
 49. Nehru would be an example. He ultimately agreed that Dalit backwardness cannot be reduced to class. The social discrimination had lasted for centuries.
 50. Viktoria Hnatkovska, Amartya Lahiri, and Sourabh Paul, “Castes and Labor Mobility,” *American Economic Journal. Applied Economics* 4, no. 2 (2012): 274–307.

51. Ashwini Deshpande and Rajesh Ramachandran, "Traditional Hierarchies and Affirmative Action in a Globalising Economy: Evidence from India," *World Development* 118 (2019): 63–78. Also see Deshpande, chapter 7, in this volume.
52. Hnatkovska et al., "Castes and Labor Mobility"; Deshpande and Ramachandran, "Traditional Hierarchies and Affirmative Action in a Globalising Economy."
53. Ashwini Deshpande and Thomas E. Weisskopf, "Does Affirmative Action Reduce Productivity? A Case Study of the Indian Railways," *World Development* 64 (2014): 169–180.
54. Rikhil Bhavnani and Alexander Lee, "Does Affirmative Action Worsen Bureaucratic Performance? Evidence from the Indian Administrative Service," *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 1 (2021): 5–20.
55. Subramanian, "Meritocracy and Democracy." Also see Subramanian, chapter 8, in this volume.
56. The best summary of Bourdieu's thought is in Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–258.
57. Government of India, "Report of the Backward Classes Commission—Volumes I and II," 1980, 23.
58. For how the OBC arguments were made in Tamil Nadu, see Ajantha Subramanian, *The Caste of Merit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020). For the rise of OBCs in northern India, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Silent Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
59. Varshney, "Two Banks of the Same River?"
60. Deshpande and Ramachandran, "Traditional Hierarchies and Affirmative Action in a Globalising Economy," 65.
61. Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2013).
62. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*.
63. For details, see Ashwini Deshpande and Rajesh Ramachandran, "Dominant or Backward? Political Economy of Demand for Quotas by Jats, Patels and Marathas," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 19 (2017): 81–92.
64. Ashwini Deshpande and Rajesh Ramachandran, "The 10% Quota: Is Caste Still an Indicator of Backwardness," *Economic and Political Weekly* 54, no. 13 (March 2019): 29.
65. The Government of India's *Economic Survey 2018–19* cites 93 percent, whereas the same Government's Niti Ayog cites 85 percent. That the informal sector is huge remains undisputed, but its exact size is trapped in India's statistical muddles of recent years.
66. For caste distribution of firm ownership in the informal sector, Lakshmi Iyer, Tarun Khanna, and Ashutosh Varshney, "Caste and Entrepreneurship in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 6 (2013): 48–60.
67. Azim Premji University, *State of Working India 2018* (Bangalore: Centre for Sustainable Employment, Azim Premji University, 2018), 133.

68. Sukhdeo Thorat and Katherine Newman, eds., *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination and Social Exclusion in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); S. Madheswaran, "Is Affirmative Action Policy for Private Sector Necessary?," *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations* 44, no. 2 (2008): 164–184. An earlier study is Deshpande, "Caste Discrimination in Contemporary India."
69. Confederation of Indian Industry, "Affirmative Action: Empowering Society for a Better Tomorrow" (Annexure 1, 2008).
70. "CII Boost for Affirmative Action," *Hindustan Times*, May 2011.