**Multiple realities of meritocracy in business higher education**

**ABSTRACT**

Under a meritocratic system, elites are selected and socialized to believe that they have earned their status and associated rewards rightfully, through a combination of their knowledge and effort in a purportedly just system. As such, practices of ranking, judging, selecting and anointing individuals have become commonplace across the workplace and in education. I examine the case of business higher education in particular, and one particular instance of its internationalization in seeking to improve our understanding of meritocracy.

I study how meritocracy acts and is acted upon by the various human, non-human and non-corporeal actors that support it. Using the concepts of multiplicity and ontological politics from Mol(1999), I seek to understand the multiple realities of meritocracy in business higher education. I aim to show how one ontology (state of reality) of meritocracy is codependent on and coexistent with with another ontology of meritocracy, creating multiple, coexistent levels of meritocracy.

**Keywords:**

Actor-Network Theory, Meritocracy, Multiplicity

**Multiple realities of meritocracy in business higher education**

Meritocracy is ostensibly an anti-elitist system of allocating scarce opportunities to the worthiest aspirants via a process that, in theory, picks those with the most merit for the task at hand. Based on my understanding of Daniels(1978), this is through the : 1) selection of meaningful merits to measure, 2) equality of opportunity to develop and display merit, and 3) stratification of rewards that results from differential merits. It serves as an extension of a general system of rewarding merit, elements of which have been present in human history in one form or another – however, in this case, merit is associated with the person rather than the action (Sen, 1999). People are sorted into roles and positions; their rewards and privileges are distributed accordingly, so that positions of highest authority are occupied by those of greatest merit(Scully, 1997).

In its twentieth century form, meritocracy was meant to cut through biases and sort only by talent, yielding what Daniel Bell(1960) hoped would be an “end to ideology” as technical merits and a “technocracy” prevailed. At present, meritocracy is an idea that is deeply rooted in schooling and education. Students are judged and rewarded by merit, in all aspects of testing, grading, sorting and admission in educational institutions(Deresiewicz, 2014; Guinier, 2015; Karabel, 2005; Kett, 2013) and faculty are increasingly subject to similar systems of sorting, judging and segregating.

Since meritocracy as an idea acts upon human beings but is simultaneously acted upon and changed by other humans, I use Actor Network Theory(Callon, 1986; Latour, 1996; Law, 1992), to trace meritocracy as a non-corporeal actant(Hartt, 2013; Hartt, Mills, Mills, & Corrigan, 2014). This allows me to treat social relations as network effects(Latour, 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2011; Law, 1992; Mol, 2010), which include interaction of a network of actors(living, human) and actants(non-human, non-living, even abstract). As a non-corporeal actant, it functions upon human actors even while being “embodied” by them in a manner analogous to “embodied” institutions(Zilber, 2002) by influencing their worldviews, decisions and actions.

The concept of translation within Actor-Network Theory has been interpreted differently by different scholars(Callon, 1986; Latour, 1986; Law, 1992), but I choose the basic translation model outlined by Latour, in which such an idea or directive, if it is successful in spreading, results from the actions of a chain of agents who translate it in accordance with their own understanding and interests(Latour, 1986: 264).

Further complicating the translation process, Czarniawska speaks of the idea of the ‘action-net’ rather than the organization, a network of actions of which the organization and the actors within are the by-product(Czarniawska, 2004; Lindberg & Czarniawska, 2006), with the formal organization itself being effectively a legal fiction than a clearly bounded entity(Czarniawska, 2013). From the work of Mol(1999) in studying the ontological politics(referring to the contestation involved in constructing an ontology, or knowledge of reality) of anemia and the different physical realities of it (clinical, statistical and psychopathological) – I theorize that there might be different “realities” or performances of meritocracy that are linked together in the translation process. This raises questions: when dealing with the IIMs and looking at their early involvement with Harvard and MIT, during which people went from one organization to another, how did the organizing process affect the institution? And how did the enactment of meritocracy within the Harvard Business School and the MIT affect the enactment of meritocracy within the IIMs as a result?

By default, ANT is critically reflexive because the researcher is always a part of the actor-network that is used to produce knowledge. As an ANT researcher and more importantly as an individual in the 21st century, I am being influenced by a wide set of readings outside my subject, be they scientific or academic, or otherwise. I read a large number of books, I have watched the news and different TV shows, and I have had a variety of experiences throughout my life in the different places I’ve lived in. My own interest in the idea of meritocracy stems from the discrepancy between the claims of various proponents of it and the particular reality of it that I experienced as a student of business administration, a discrepancy that combined with my own background and knowledge as a former student of political science and which drove me to study it as a phenomenon.

From this perspective, I am a network of different non-corporeal actants, and my paper is informed by many implicit ideas, ideologies, values and principles that I have come across and consciously and unconsciously, explicitly and implicitly, use to create my work. My work is created in the reality that I have experienced and enacted in the reality that I experience at present, and as such, includes more than I can explicitly place within my arguments, demonstrations, or references. It belongs to a larger Actor-Network than I can explicitly acknowledge as its “author”.

# ELITE HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE INDIAN INSTITUTES OF MANAGEMENT

Elite higher education has long served to legitimize and reproduce existing social and economic arrangements. Various human actors have used elite business education in spreading the meanings and norms surrounding the role of business executives as a socioeconomic elite(Khurana, 2007). However, the spread of elite business education has been taken-for-granted and scholars have assumed that dominant ideas about business education and business elites flow, as though naturally, from powerful nations like the U.S. around the world. This worldview is implicit when, for instance, Srinivas(2002) states that “The export of North American management to India, in the 1960s, was a significant process” or “Indian academics were essential conduits for transferring American pedagogical methods”.

The Indian Institutes of Management represent India’s top business schools. At present, they send their highest-ranking graduates to compete with the supposed best from Harvard Business School and other global schools of business. According to previously existing histories, these institutes were established in the early 1960s by the Government of India and the Ford Foundation, with the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad being mentored by the Harvard Business School (HBS) and the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta being mentored by the MIT Sloan School of Management (Sloan)(Hill, Haynes, & Baumgartel, 1973).Indian Institutes of Management select only one out of fifty students in an entrance exam, followed by interviews. An IIM degree opens opportunities for students from a range of backgrounds(Gupta, Gollakota, & Sreekumar, 2003) and trains future managers of Indian corporations.

Managers who graduate from IIMs present themselves as having earned their elite status and its associated rewards rightfully, as a result of their qualities and their efforts, and in terms of their qualifications and ideology may be seen by their peers as belonging to the broader global corporate elite. From my understanding, the socioeconomic status of this elite may be considered contingent on them having graduated from the IIMs or similar elite institutions of business education. Having been in an IIM myself and perceiving the supposed intelligence and superiority of “elite” business students very differently from within made me wonder how this system of elite business schools was created in the first place, or why an Indian business school should depend on Harvard Business School cases and textbooks. From my later reading of research suggesting that most organizations were influenced by factors present at the time of their creation, this led to me choosing the archives at the Harvard Business School and the Sloan School of Management at MIT - two institutions involved in the creation of the first two IIMs at Ahmedabad and Calcutta during the 1960s - as a site of my study.

American business practices, diffused through globalization(Boxenbaum, 2006; Engwall, 2007) beginning in the mid-20th century and growing exponentially in recent decades, as has the growing Americanization of business schools, which have increasingly started to adopt American methods and practices even in countries that had their own established format of business education(Antunes & Thomas, 2007; Bennis & O’Toole, 2005). My research on the IIMs is meant to add a historic dimension to a growing interest in global management education(Alvesson & Kärreman, 2004; Hedmo, Sahlin-Andersson, & Wedlin, 2007; Khurana, 2007; Khurana & Spender, 2012; Vaara & Faÿ, 2012) as the setting in which global elites are socialized and positioned to steward and legitimate neoliberal institutions, by examining the realities surrounding their socialization.

It is possible that the early influence of HBS and Sloan on the IIMs in the 1960s allowed the IIMs to derive their methods of socializing and creating elites directly from these two business schools during an era in which business education was expanding in the United States but limited outside North America and Europe. By drawing on rich archives at Harvard Business School (HBS) and the MIT Sloan School of Management(Sloan), I trace the manner in which the meanings, practices, ideologies and seemingly “obvious” and “self-evident” assumptions that reified meritocracy ontologies were transferred to the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) during the 1960s.

Meritocracy has to be made real at different levels to different people. For instance faculty members tend to uphold universities in particular as ‘true meritocracies’, where the most competent and hard-working get furthest ahead, and this view is often shared by those students who benefit from the system. It is faith in this meritocracy that leads to the maintenance of inequality and reproduces the institution of elite higher education(Scully, 2002). This does raise its own question: who is judged in this meritocracy, the faculty or the students? If there exists a meritocratic system for both, how does it coexist for both of them and how do these two very real meritocracies serve to sustain each other? How does a meritocracy for students reflect a meritocracy for the faculty who have to work hard, conduct case discussion perfectly in a classroom, and keep publishing in top journals, and vice-versa?

Scholarship suggests that exclusive, elite educational institutes have long been used as gatekeepers to the socioeconomic elite with a variety of factors playing roles in the decision-making process for admissions to elite colleges(Deresiewicz, 2014; Karabel, 2005). Gatekeeping is the process of developing and implementing criteria that yields access to scarce resources(Karen, 1990; Rivera, 2016) and it is also used to define social reality, the way in which individuals perceive their world and act upon it(Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The business school has been crucial in establishing beliefs about business(Huczynski, 1994), as well as acting as an establisher of identity(Khurana & Snook, 2011), because they are accepted as legitimate in these roles. Indeed, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, each nation had its own elite institutions of higher education(Karabel & Halsey, 1977; Wren, 1983) and its own norms of how a business elite was trained and composed(Goldthorpe, Payne, & Llewellyn, 1978; Khurana, 2007; Sass, 1982). To understand how a meritocracy exists within such an institution would provide key insight into how 21st century business elites are socialized and groomed to accept their present status as just and rightly deserved.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF MERITOCRACY

**American actors and their histories around merit in the early American republic**

Owing to the scope of the idea and growth of meritocracy over the centuries, I have chosen to enroll previous histories, with their networks of actants, into my own history of meritocracy. Within each of these networks, meritocracy has been enacted rather differently, but each enactment serves to influence the enactment of a future meritocracy.

For instance, the idea of merit has been described as a “founding ideal” of the United States by the historian Joseph Kett in his book *Merit : The History of a Founding Ideal from the American Revolution to the Twenty-First Century*(2013), who, alongside others, created a history in which much of the objective, technical idea of merit was born from the thinking surrounding the time of the American Revolution and advanced by thinkers who sought to establish systems that would be able to identify and select elites fit to govern(Carson, 2004, 2007; Kett, 2013; Lemann, 1999). In this history, the proponents of meritocracy were American colonists, who were often of a business or mercantile background, and whose belief in their own merit was a factor in the American Revolution(Brinton, 1965). Other histories are constructed to show how the idea of scientific objectivity and of objective merit was used to guide policy(Jasanoff, 1987, 2004) and in particular business decisions, beginning from this time.

Thomas Jefferson’s idea of a “natural aristocracy” based on intelligence, talent and innate virtue was used to justify inequality within the American republic, replacing a system where position granted by birth was replaced by position granted on the basis of ability(Carson, 2007). Several founding fathers of American Independence had labeled themselves “Men of Merit”, with merit being a quality that they possessed and which, if not unencumbered by bad fortune, would be displayed in their actions and decisions. This was a form of what Joseph Kett(2013) calls ‘essential merit’, or the quality of merit resting on but not limited to an individual’s visible and notable achievements and performances, in this case the merit associated with and indicated by birth or deeds. Essential merit differs from ‘institutional merit’, which emerged in part in reaction to the individual excesses associated with essential merit and which attached great importance to exact and specialized knowledge. The American notions of essential and later institutional merit apparently differed from the later European notion of merit, which was followed by groups excluded from power and authority to gain influence(Kett, 2013). I enroll these different ideas of “merit” into my history as non-corporeal actants(Hartt, 2013) that influence the human actors in my network. The American practice of choosing individuals to high positions on the basis of “merit” alone is an enactment of meritocracy that is now common in business schools across the world.

**British meritocracy and British colonial education in India**

Britain had one of the most rigorous and extensive systems of competitive examinations in the world in the 19th century(Kett, 2013) and the system of education in British colonies like India followed the same pattern. The idea of merit through examination was institutionalized within the British system, although in practice being from Oxbridge guaranteed entry into the elite at a level not possible for the lesser universities(Nicholas, 1999). Accordingly, merit was judged through scoring in competitive examinations to increasingly exclusive and limited institutions of secondary and then higher education(Kumar, 1988; Myrdal, 1970). Within India, the ultimate aim of a student was to join the extremely competitive Indian Civil Service, an instrument of colonial rule(Dewey, 1973; Kumar, 1984).

Among potential candidates, the pressure to succeed was immense and directly linked to their employment opportunities(Kumar, 1988). Within Europe, social status was determined through class, and within India, through a combination of caste and class – thus bringing into practice a form of “merit by birth”. Since those who entered the Indian Civil Service as well as Indian Institutes of Management in the early days were predominantly people of higher caste and class who could afford the educational opportunities offered(Hill et al., 1973) higher education did not explicitly change the reality of “merit” or who was “meritorious” within India in terms of born social status, although it did represent a shift in anointment. Rather than being anointed as meritorious purely on the basis of birth (which the growth of egalitarian movements would challenge), these individuals were being ranked on the basis of what was ostensibly a more objective form of merit through examination.

**Foundations and early Business Education**

Nonprofit organizations have been influential in the United States ever since the beginning of the 19th century, and provided education, healthcare and other social services in the absence of any free public services at the time(Lagemann, 1999). Private foundations established by rich individuals, particularly the Carnegie, Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, were central in the creation of business education as it exists at present(Berman, 1983; Khurana, 2007; Khurana, Kimura, & Fourcade, 2011; Lagemann, 1983, 1989, 1999; Sass, 1982; Schlossman, Sedlak, & Wechsler, 1998; Wren, 1983). Foundations connected elite individuals and organizations and granted legitimacy to organizations and practices(Khurana et al., 2011).

Henry Pritchett, first President of the Carnegie Foundation in 1905 and the President of the MIT, was among the first to emphasize the need for standardized testing to admit students from high school to college and backed the formation of Educational Testing Services and the Scholastic Aptitude Test, which placed an emphasis on testable “merit”(Lagemann, 1983). Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University and founder of the Harvard Business School in 1908, was the head of its board. Eliot’s successor, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, had the aim to legitimize business and to turn it into a profession like Law, Medicine or the Clergy, in order to provide a new form of moral guidance for America through the stewardship of managers, much like the previous Harvard emphasis on “men of character”(Khurana, 2007). Through the foundations, a handful of individuals were allowed to decide what counted as merit.

In addition to their involvement in business education, which continued into the mid-20th century, these Foundations were responsible for the promotion of American culture and serving American interests abroad during the early cold war in the 1950s(McCarthy, 1987; Parmar, 2012) including many interests in India(Hill et al., 1973; Rosen, 1985; Staples, 1992; Stifel, Coleman, & Black, 1977). Therefore, the network of organizing and the individuals who enacted meritocracy within American business education were involved in Indian business education as well through the IIMs.

# MERITOCRACY IN THE PRESENT

I have thus traced one history of the idea of meritocracy and how it was used to drive the processes of selection and classification of elite students in business administration. I also showed how elite actors used their power to advance their own interests and create conditions for the creation of new elites through a meritocratic system. However, the system has been contested by different elites and their competing views of meritocracy, and elite creation. Further, meritocracy within higher education has met with significant criticism by the same academics who hold absolute faith in its efficacy(Scully, 2002). The idea of meritocracy itself has been criticized for getting co-opted by elites since the time of Max Weber[[1]](#footnote-1), which I trace here as conflicts between different elites and conflicting notions of eliteness and the legitimate transmission of power.

This history of meritocracy would help explain a number of longstanding criticisms and questions regarding it. For instance, it explains why the ostensible purpose of a meritocracy in reducing inequality leads to failure, to the point of being a “myth”(Liu, 2011; Mcnamee & Miller, 2004; Nicholas, 1999). Since meritocracy is determined by elite actors, the contrary effect of increasing prejudice and discrimination in the workplace(Castilla, 2008; Castilla & Benard, 2010) can be understood as a process of exclusion from an upper class. Mijs(2015) has criticized the very premise as fundamentally flawed and contradictory from a logical view – however, if a meritocracy is acknowledged as creating and justifying the existence of a new kind of elite, the paradox surrounding it may be resolved.

The power and entrenchment of meritocracy is demonstrated through the relative insouciance to criticism the idea meets and the extent to which the idea has been used and justified in order to maintain social inequality(Mcnamee & Miller, 2004; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2013). For example, within the United States itself, a large number of Americans believe that their workplaces are meritocratic to the point of justifying their own low status due to personal failings rather than structural factors (McCoy & Major, 2007; Scully, 2000); Other data suggests that Americans in general rate meritocratic factors as extremely important for success(Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Mijs, 2015), demonstrating the extent to which meritocracy has been socialized within the United States among elites and non-elites alike. This further reinforces the idea that meritocracy as we understand it as present is largely of American origin.

The acceptance of meritocracy may be different across the general population of other countries(Mijs, 2015), but its commonality across elite business education internationally suggests that the idea was translated from the American business context into other contexts. More importantly for my purposes, meritocracy appears to be a rhetoric into which meaning is imputed through actions that are deemed “meritorious”, and that the absence of a clear definition in the public mind is indeed essential for meritocracy to be performed.

**PRIMARY DATA**

For primary data, I have obtained access to the Historical Collections of the Baker Library of the Harvard Business School and the Hayden Library of the Sloan School of Management at MIT to access their archives for all material connected to the Indian Institutes of Management. Using historical archival material allows me to study communications that happened across multiple individuals in multiple locations over a timespan of months or years, in this case the timespan of my archival correspondence being from approximately 1960 to 1967, with a few documents being post-1967. As such, archives serve to compress space and time and give me the ability to, in a limited way, act as an observer witnessing a broad network of recorded events as a series of snapshots and giving me a much broader view than any single human observer at any one point of time in one place, but without that immediately present observer’s ability to control the content of the information recorded.

Some of the conversations recorded in the archives were confidential at the time but have since become available for researchers, which affords me the ability to look into the actions that took place between the human actants in Harvard and the IIMs at a level which I would never have been privy to had I been present at the time as an external observer.

From the archives, I obtain a set of raw materials. These raw materials include a broad variety of communications discussing all aspects of academic life and life in Ahmedabad, ranging from brochures, to general observations, to memoranda, to works in progress by various faculty members. I log these materials in stages, particularly the large quantities of printed material. Logging in the gathered material is a first step. My next step is to organize the materials into some preliminary analytical categories.

## Data analyses

My data analysis strategy was iterative. First, I collected the data with the aim of looking for documents where the actors have discussed action, intention, or conflict in some form or the other. Now my data analysis has shifted towards understanding how meritocracy is enacted, so intention needs to be brought alongside practice.

First, I begin working on a coding system for the raw archival materials. For example, I observe flows of people, pedagogies, and legitimating ideas or overarching mission statements. Otherwise, I collect correspondence between individuals at different dates and different times and classify the correspondence by the time and date and correspondents involved. Particularly content-rich correspondence, large documents, etc. is coded differently from shorter communications, with more of an emphasis on the content itself than on any hidden subtext that I perceive. In this manner, I allow the actors to speak for themselves to a greater extent, with me translating proportionately less of what they say or mean.

For these larger communications, the primary questions I ask are: Who do these communications represent and what actor-networks are there? Czarniawska identifies four major areas of study for organizational studies : places, people, issues and events. Of these four, Czarniawska identifies events as the most promising subject for the study of organizing(Czarniawska, 2004) and I accordingly seek to identify the events present in these communications as well as the issues as understood by the individuals at the time of their identification. Events are also a preliminary to enactment, so key events tend to shape how ideas are brought into practice.

I also “enroll” individual human actors through the archives, including Honorary Director Dr. Vikram A. Sarabhai, Program Coordinator Kamla Chowdhry, and many Harvard professors, all of whose actions, intentions and communications are of critical importance to my understanding of the ideas and ideologies that were placed in contact in the educational institute that they helped establish.

Second, from this basic coding, I look for exchanges. My search of the archival records and textual material surrounding the Indian Institutes of Management suggested a process of translation that involved a large number of actors with a variety of interests, some of which were stated in existing histories, others which were obscured. Nevertheless, it was evident that the creation of these business schools had involved a negotiation of interests across a broad spectrum of organizations as well as with powerful individuals who were situated within their organizations and across formal organizational boundaries. Some of these involved pre-existing processes, documents as well as modes of communication (air mail versus personal contact, for instance).

From this flow of actions and events, I tried to interpret how these networks of merit animate the exchanges between the HBS, Sloan and IIM, and how Harvard’s agenda and Dr. Sarabhai’s agenda fit within a broader social and political agenda as well as the terrain of India-U.S. relations in the early Cold War. National and international politics remained a substantial, if often indirect, influence on the IIMs.

One of the features of Actor-Network Theory compared to classical theories of organization is its “flat” ontology that does not privilege human actors above non-human or non-corporeal actants, and which allows an examination of macro and micro levels simultaneously. This enables me to create a history of meritocracy that simultaneously takes into account individuals and organizations(Latour, 1996). I have the option to examine the interactions of the large number of known and documented actors and actants involved and study the network effects based on archival and historical data(Durepos & A. J. Mills, 2012; Durepos, Mills, & Mills, 2008; Law, 1986).

### Preliminary Discoveries

In this section, I aim to give a flavor of some of the ways in which I am using the data from the varied sources and through specific lenses. It is where I bring together some of my observations from the archival data as well as the practice of meritocracy at present together. Through this, I can set up and expand areas of interest within the primary and secondary sources that I can use to trace the movement of specific human, non-human and non-corporeal actants. These are areas of interest that I want to include in my exploration of how meritocracy is made real, how the idea links human, organizational and institutional actors, or how elite interests are propagated emerges from my rough, preliminary observations. The movement of letters among individuals results in noteworthy findings.

***The invisible support staff of a meritocratic system.*** The essential invisibility of the gendered and classed support staff needed in a meritocratic system. While the secretarial staff in India were all men of lower educational and social status than the professors they assisted, the staff at Harvard were all-female. Apart from personal references to one prominent female secretary at Harvard and one male Indian secretary belonging to a professor who was in constant correspondence with Harvard, the secretarial staff are almost entirely invisible within this collection except for their initials at the bottom of a typed letter. The class(India) or gender(US) disparity between secretaries and the professors is immense but the entire system is reliant on secretaries for the communication and paperwork that serves as the acts of organizing.

From this, I observe that despite the belief in meritocracy it is not *meant* to be universal. There are clearly categories of people crucial to its enactment but rendered mostly invisible and excluded from it by default. Meritocracies may be enacted by those people whose roles are so entrenched and taken for granted that they are invisible – it is hard to imagine Harvard or the new IIMs functioning at the time without dedicated staff to handle the paperwork and communications. The role of these secretaries was so entrenched that one professor had to rely on his wife to serve as his secretary and typist when typing a confidential letter rather than doing it himself. I intend to look further into the phenomenon of the support staff and expand into it in future.

***The case method as a ‘token’.*** The ‘token’ is an object that several Actor-Network theorists make use of in their interpretations of translation. Tokens can be objects, pieces of information, or ideas transferred between actants(Fuglsang, 2008; Scheuer, 2008) These are analogous to boundary objects in knowledge management(Carlile, 2002, 2004) in that they serve as a means of representing, learning about or transforming an idea, knowledge or information to resolve the consequences that occur at a knowledge boundary(boundary objects) or between actants (ANT). A case moves between different individuals, different universities, and in this case, internationally, from one system of education to a very different one. The case method is part of what Harvard has institutionalized as having merit when it comes to training managers of merit – but in being transferred to a new system, it is being contested and challenged.

I know from existing historical material that HBS’s faculty had long used and developed the case method, and felt that they had to justify the use of the case method as being essential to the development of “professional” managers, along with the need for “professional” managers and extending further into the justification of treating business as a profession(Karabel, 2005; Khurana, 2007). Although cases have indeed been studied rather exclusively as pedagogy and as performance, I am interested in understanding the ontological politics of teaching the case method in the classroom and how the case pedagogy itself creates its own reality of merit.

# CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Even with the barest analysis of the archival data, I find multiple enactments of meritocracy in historical data in both India and the United States, as well as evidence for this system being translated internationally through a limited number of individuals who acted as judges of merit. There also exists at present a very prevalent belief in and performance of meritocracy that is widespread within the business community but is at odds with what meritocracy is purported to achieve. I anticipate my future research to focus on the following directions -

(i) The use of the case method by Harvard as a unique way of judging an individual’s “merit” whether they be the student or the instructor. The case method has already been studied extensively by other scholars, but not in terms of its relation to meritocracy as a concept. How Harvard used cases to create its own reality of a meritocracy within itself would be a highly interesting study, since it would tie into the growth of the Harvard case method in other institutions as well.

(ii) The linkage between the concept of merit and the stated motivations of elites, as opposed to the underlying desire to retain elite status and privileges. The ostensible Indian need for the IIMs was to train selected candidates as managers for India’s growing industries, which conflicted with the small number and privileged status of the new managerial class created by the IIMs(Kumar, 1982). Questions regarding the quality of applicants being admitted to the program potentially reflect on the perception of merit by politically dominant forces in both India and America.

(iii) This work could add a new dimensions to studies that connect present America-centric conceptions of neoliberal democracy with its emergence in Cold War era political contestations.

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1. “Special examinations, on the one hand, mean or appear to mean a “selection” of those who qualify from all social strata rather than a rule by notables. On the other hand, democracy fears that a merit system and educational certificates will result in a privileged caste” (Max Weber translated by Thorne, Gerth, & Mills, 1946) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)