

Proponents of group-based preferential treatment argue that such policies help equalise life chances for members of historically disadvantaged groups. Opponents argue that they violate meritocratic ideals and worsen economic performance. A better understanding of how institutions allocate positions across individuals and groups helps clarify what is at stake. In a collaborative work with Rajiv Sethi of Barnard College, Columbia University, Prof Somathan studies this process of allocation using a model in which individuals differ along two dimensions – ability and training – both of which matter for performance. Training also depends on ability and additionally on resources, such as school and neighborhood quality. One group is disadvantaged in that a smaller fraction of its members have access to superior resources. Training is observable but ability is not. They call an allocation *psuedomeritocratic* if selection is based on a single training threshold common to the two groups. It is *group egalitarian* if the same share of each group is selected. They show that *performance-maximising* allocations can take a variety of different forms. They are generally not *psuedomeritocratic* and often favor the disadvantaged group. Moreover, in the absence of legal restrictions, selection can be non-monotonic even within groups, meaning that individuals with low and high training levels may be hired while those in between are excluded. The authors see the main contribution of the paper as clarifying the concept of meritocracy and questioning policies based on its common interpretations.

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### Public Lecture



### Meritocracy in the Face of Group Inequality

by

**ROHINI SOMANATHAN**

Thursday, 25 January 2018 | 4:30 pm

**Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS)**  
Chennai

சென்னை வளர்ச்சி ஆராய்ச்சி நிறுவனம்  
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invites you to a special lecture on

**Meritocracy in the Face of  
Group Inequality**

by

**Rohini Somanathan**

Professor, Delhi School of Economics  
University of Delhi

Chair

**T.N. Srinivasan**

Distinguished Professor  
Indian Institute of Technology Madras

All are cordially invited

**Shashanka Bhide**

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