

Casteocracy: A millennium standard of merits and tests

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Abstract

Michael Young, a British Sociologist, and Labor Party activist coined the term meritocracy in his book *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870-2033 An Essay on Education and Equality* (1958) to vilify the growing assertion of the aristocratic elite class into the British social order. By critiquing the evolving methods of testing and grading, which defined merit, Young observed that the calculation of *one's* success which was defined in the narrow yardstick of civil service oriented results. This, he argued was now breaking the traditional codes of nepotism and plutocracy of wealth – by the meritocracy of talent. Is this the case?

Then came a phase of testocracy, a term coined by an African American Harvard Law professor Lani Guinier in her provocative *The Tyranny of Meritocracy Democratizing Higher Education in America* (2015) which states testocracy as an aristocracy in action. A “twenty-first century cult of standardized, quantifiable merit, (that) values perfect scores but ignores character.” The extreme competitiveness has put the notion of “entitlement” into the foundations of a meritocratic society that privileges the individualized merit by overlooking manifold hands that remain invisible in the individual-centric celebration of achievements. In this talk, we will overview the concepts of meritocracy and testocracy by looking at the case of casteocracy that is global yet a millennium phenomenon. Casteocracy carries with it histories of greater depth and lived experiences of the present burdened with felt-past. So far the idea of merit and test was promoted and critiqued as a shallow predicament of the societal developments. By overlooking the caste classifications in societies, the analysis thus far has fallen short to call it out loud and invariably maintained a silence on casteocracy.

Speaker Profile

Dr. Suraj Yengade is currently at Harvard University where he specializes in inter-regional labor migration policies with a focus on global south migration. He is also a published author in the field of Caste, Race and Ethnicity studies. Currently, he is involved in developing a critical theory of Dalit and Black Studies. Suraj Yengde is India's first Dalit Ph.D. holder from an African university in the nation's history.

Suraj is a passionate Human Rights attorney, who is also an anti-caste and anti-racism advocate, columnist at The Huffington Post, The Indian Express, The Mexican Times, The Conversation, The Root. His writings have appeared in the Sunday World, Mail & Guardian Africa, Saturday Star. He is frequently invited by the media to offer expert advice on the issues of caste, migration, race relations and international law. He was featured in the independence day magazine of The Economic Times magazine.

His recent work with the philosopher Cornel West has received global attention and calls for unity between the African Americans and the Dalits.