



‘Merits’ of Merit

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand the concept of merit, and it tries to address its surrounding attributes like what constitutes merit, how merit is calculated, how merit is acquired in a particular socio-economic and political environment, how merit merits the prospects of an individual or group, and how demerit diminishes the same prospects etc. Various merit related arguments like meritocracy, hard work pays out, equal opportunities, merit based justice or allocation of resources, merit as means, and merit as a measurement to measure things etc. are critically looked at. The paper attempts to present different socio-economic and political reasons for merit in a critical manner. The paper tries to look at merit from the perspective of natural resources that groups or societies inherit, and how these resources shape the merit of these groups or societies. Similarly, the paper also attempts to understand the role of inheritance of individuals and the role of inherited assets or liabilities in shaping the merit of the individuals. The paper tries to uncover whether merit leads to means or is it the vice versa i.e. whether means lead to merit.

Keywords: Competition, Differential Merit, Inequality, Inheritance, Means, Merit, Merit and Means Cycle.

Introduction

“The rich feel full of merit” – Mason Cooley.

Merit is considered as a meritorious thing in every field. Merit has been assigned a positive and unequal socio-economic, political and cultural status in human history. All cultures, societies, and systems hail merit as an indicator to measure merit of all things. The meritorious are hailed as heroes in their respective fields. Merit has been considered as a personal value, attribute or quality of an individual or group. A student with seventy percent of marks is considered as meritorious vis-à-vis the student who has scored sixty nine percent. Similarly, the student with sixty nine percent is considered meritorious vis-à-vis the student with sixty eight percent. This grading, hierarchy, or measuring merit by using indicators like marks sounds to be reasonable as it gives an objective picture of who is meritorious in the class, and vis-à-vis whom. Merit is measured by using both objective and subjective ways of measurement. Objective ways of measuring merit includes, but not limited to, grades of a student, financial returns on an investment, durability of a product, runs scored by an individual batsman in a cricket, rank achieved by a civil services aspirant, number of loops a participating driver finishes in Formula One within a given time, or number of audio tracks that an artist sells etc. Subjective ways of measuring merit includes, but not limited to, seeing the ‘beauty’ of a person, ‘competitive’ spirit of an individual or group, looking at the ‘personal attributes’, looking at the ‘quality’ of a thing or outcome, how ‘innovative’ is an individual’s or group’s ideas, how ‘strong’ is a person or group – both physically and mentally, how ‘capable’ a person or group is in terms of their capacities to do a certain thing, how

‘meritorious’ is a particular way of doing things when compared to other ways etc. These types of comparisons sounds reasonable when it comes to measuring merit, as long as one can see merit as an objective outcome of a set of well-established or calculable attributes. But in reality, measuring merit is difficult as the concept of merit includes many aspects that interfere with the measurement or evaluation mechanism¹.

Different factors influence merit. An educated person is bound to be meritorious in reading a piece of paper vis-à-vis a person who cannot read or write. Similarly, a professional athlete is bound to be speed in finishing a track in a given time when we compare her to a regular housewife. On the contrary, the house wife can be meritorious than the athlete in doing household chores. These differences point to the fact that merit depends on various factors like who is competing with whom, and in which aspects? It is like this – the elephant is strong on land but the crocodile is stronger in water. Comparison between two or more entities or ideas usually takes place in a relative manner, in a relative environment, by comparing the relevance of their ideas or performance. But there are difficulties in measuring the merit of individuals, or ideas, as measurement of merit inherently involves different socio-economic, cultural and N number of stereotypes that an individual uses while judging other individuals or ideas. Harry Potter – a fiction story – is usually regarded more meritorious in its presentation and content than a tale or a riddle in a vernacular daily. And, we do not know the measurement mechanisms that were used to judge the merit of these two works. While the methods used to measure merit are debatable, there seems to be doubts regarding the idea of merit

itself. How can we consider an athlete as a meritorious person, say for example, when we compare her to a housewife or a teacher? Similarly, how can we say that the outcomes of such competitions or comparisons really reflect 'merit' when such events or aspects themselves are under question? The merits of the idea of merit sounds to be floppy, and what constitutes merit, or how merit is achieved or acquired, and which aspects can be considered as meritorious – all seem to fluctuate so heavily that it continuously keeps on changing based on the merit of the circumstances, and based on why we call certain things as merit in a particular context vis-à-vis other things etc.

Random Distribution of Natural Resources and Randomized Merit

What is merit? How is merit acquired by individuals or groups? How useful is merit for an individual or group? Do the meritorious deserve more? Why merit is merited? Is merit natural, or is it nurtured by circumstances? Attempts to answer these questions tell us that the answers are not easy to come. But the attempts may give us some idea about how complex the idea of merit is, and how 'meritorious' merit based results and positions are. Merit – on the face of it, seems to be a positive thing to be promoted. No doubt about it, if we were to think in a rational-utilitarian sense where we can objectively establish that X is so and so units meritorious than Y. The problem is not with the merit itself but it is with the question; what constitutes merit? To define in a simple manner, merit is the capabilities that an individual or group acquires vis-à-vis the others, to do certain things in a better manner. X is meritorious compared to Y if X is in a position to do things in a better manner than how Y would do it¹. But not all things are considered as worth looking for merit. Socio-economic and political values are assigned to the things that are considered meritorious, or issues where merit can be applied or not applied. One thing is certain about merit – it is considered, and used positively – hence, we can assume that merit is applicable in positive aspects only i.e., positive according to the given socio-economic and political circumstances. An individual with the highest marks is relatively more meritorious than the individual with second highest marks, and the individual with second highest marks is more meritorious than the individual with third highest marks – and, both the individuals with first and second highest marks are considered meritorious than the individual with third highest marks. We have been calling the individuals with first and second highest marks as meritorious in one circumstance or other, and the third person has not been called or considered as meritorious so far. Should we assign some merit to her by comparing her to the person who has got the fourth highest marks? Can we go on assigning merit to everyone by comparing them with their immediate underperformers? Inevitably, we have to draw a line at a particular point, and those who stand above that point become meritorious – and those who fall below the line become non-meritorious automatically. The point is, the line that we draw is dividing a list of students into two categories – meritorious ones, and non-meritorious ones. Hence,

merit is, at least in this particular case, decided by where we want the line of merit to be drawn. When a simple list of students can present us with a complex problem of how to demarcate the meritorious ones from the non-meritorious ones, how are we supposed to decide the meritorious ones from non-meritorious ones in all socio-economic and political aspects? Sounds difficult, but an attempt is worth.

Socio-economic and political aspects of an individuals or groups seems to influence or decide their merit in a significant way. There are many factors that are part of these socio-economic and political aspects, and natural resources is one among them – the most important one indeed. Distribution of natural resources, apparently, decides the means of the individuals or groups to be meritorious². As is apparent, the distribution of natural resources is not in the hands of the individuals or groups – whereas their control can be. Natural resources are naturally, or by structural limitations, limited to certain sections of people only. Take the example of land as a natural resource. Access to land gives different means that are necessary to individuals or groups to be meritorious, whereas on the other hand, restrictions in access to land apparently makes these individuals or groups to fall behind in terms of building their merit². A country like Canada or Russia, with vast lands and relatively less population, is bound to be rich in providing access to land to individuals and groups in its territory, whereas in a country like India, though the country is big in size, the size of the population nullifies this advantage, and is bound to provide less access to land to its people. The average size of the landholding of individuals decide different aspects that decide their merit. First, access to sufficient size of land relieves an individual from the struggle to get a good home, and on the other hand, less access to land means the individual has to struggle to find a piece of land to get a home. Most of the people in countries like India or China spend most of their lives to get a home. Whereas the individuals in countries like Canada or Russia need not to spend their time in getting a piece of land for their homes. The capabilities or merit of the individuals from these two categories of countries apparently gets decided by their natural access to a piece of land for home. The levels of merit of these individuals gets decided by the structural limitations of the sovereign boundaries that they are born into³. An individual in India or China has to spend a significant period of her life, or earnings in buying a piece of land to get a home. After spending sufficient time and earnings also, individuals from these countries end up owning a relatively low quality, or relatively a small size home than their counterparts in countries like Canada or Russia. The levels of merit of the individuals from these two broad category of countries are tied to their nationality by birth that happens in a random manner. Access to natural resources gives individuals or groups certain type of advantage over those who have less access or no access to these resources. Take the example of US or Canada. Both the countries have vast resources of land and relatively small size of population vis-à-vis their Asian counterparts like China or India. When we compare the possible merit that the individuals from these two different categories of

countries can achieve, the results apparently favor individuals or groups from US or Canada over China or India. Access to land liberate the people from difficulties of finding a proper place to live. Having a proper place to live is one of the important resource that is required for an individual or group to be independent and competitive, and without being independent and competitive it is not apparent how these individuals are going to merit their merit, and compete with the merit of others who are independent of these types of troubles naturally.

Similarly, other natural resources like oil, natural gas, forests and animal wealth, good climate etc. decide the capabilities, and eventually the merit of the individuals or groups having access to these natural resources³. A person born in countries in Sahara region is bound to be less meritorious vis-à-vis a person born in Sweden or Switzerland. The individual who is born in Sahara region inherits poverty and scarcity of natural resources by default⁴. Apparently, the merit, or chances to achieve merit, for an individual from this region is bound to be weak when we compare her to her counterparts from Sweden or Switzerland. Natural restrictions on access to different types of natural resources like land, water, and normal environment puts individuals from these regions in adverse situations like poverty, malnutrition etc. and individuals from these regions are bound to be less meritorious when we compare them with individuals from Sweden or Switzerland. Let us take a hypothetical example of how many athletes can United States and Algeria, Libya or Niger raise. Given the differences in their natural resources, United State is bound to be successful in raising more number of athletes than Algeria, Libya or Niger as these countries are located in the heart of Sahara desert. Getting sufficient access to food or drinking water itself is a big problem in these countries – and expecting the people from these countries to become athletes apparently turns out to be very witty. There is a huge gap in the access to natural resources, and people from these countries lack access to absolute basics that are fundamental for living. Comparing the merits of people from these countries with the merit of people in United States is not rational at all. Forget about the chances of producing good athletes – the chances for the people from these African countries for their survival itself is difficult, and chance for them to get access to basic education and health itself is a herculean task. The chances for them to be meritorious in terms of education, physical capabilities, innovation etc. are bound to be weak when compared to someone who has access to all these natural resources. Changing these factors is not within the domain of their judgment or capabilities, and accepting ‘merit’ based competition will do nothing good to them except to make them face defeat.

Similarly, structural limitations also play a crucial role in deciding the merit of individuals or groups. The possibilities of becoming meritorious is decided by the socio-economic and political structures that an individual is born into³. Different structural limitations that the human beings have built over a time acts as a hindrance or advantage to individuals or groups who are accidentally born into them⁵. An individual born in

Spain is bound to be capable, and hence meritorious than her contemporary counterparts born in Sudan. The socio-economic and political structure of Spain is far more advanced when compared to the socio-economic and political structures of Sudan. An individual born in Spain automatically gets the means like education, good nutrition, health, security, economic support in all stages of life etc. which gives her a chance to enhance her merit. On the other hand, her contemporary counterparts in Sudan get poverty, malnutrition, insecurity, lack of economic opportunities etc. as challenges that she need to challenge continuously, throughout her life. The societal conditions in these two countries are totally opposite, and people born into these two opposite conditions cannot possibly compete with each other in terms of merit – unless they are tested for different things on different scales. The Spanish can be expected to be meritorious in terms of education, health, work output, political participation, civic culture, value pluralism, IQ levels etc. but their ability to survive in starving conditions cannot match the abilities of their counterparts in Sudan⁶. Though starving itself cannot be called as merit, or a quality that one needs, the differences in surrounding conditions of the individuals present us the puzzling question – how can we compare the merit of two individuals who are born into different socio-economic and political structures? And in which aspects the merits of these individuals can be compared? An individual born in a peaceful country apparently can try something new in her life like trying to be a writer, doctor, soccer player, musician, or a psychologist, whereas an individual born in a war ridden territory like Palestine continuously tries one thing – to survive from violence³.

Similarly, economic structures of the country in which the individual is living also decides the prospects of an individual to be how meritorious she can become. An individual in a free market economy can turn out to be creative – at least the possibilities are there. One can hope to become an astronaut if she is born in United States – but not if she is born in Bhutan or Bangladesh. An individual born in Qatar stands to earn more than a hundred thousand USD in a year whereas an individual born in Central African Republic ends up earning a mere six hundred USD in a year⁷. Now, to compare the merits of two individuals from these two different countries becomes absolutely senseless. A person in Qatar is bound to earn a hundred or more times of income than her counterpart in Central African Republic, and this earnings automatically gives her means like access to education, health, nutrition, leisure, information, security, training etc. things as investment to gain merit, whereas a person born in Central African Republic, however hard and dedicated her efforts might be, cannot match the merits or means achieved by her counterpart in Qatar. All the socio-economic and political structures like the sovereign boundaries that shield certain natural resources and reserve it to certain groups, economic structures – like European Union – that allows the people from these countries to transcend boundaries to get economic opportunities etc. influence the merit of individuals who fall into these structures. Certain

structures are liberal in allowing creativity whereas other structures severely restrict creativity⁸. One can expect to be scientific and innovative in any of the European countries, and the same cannot be expected from an individual from Saudi Arabia. Similarly, an individual from US or Russia can put her efforts on exploring other planets by pursuing space science, whereas similar efforts by her counterparts in Saudi Arabia may make her land in jail, or may force her to face death punishment – sometimes just for driving a car. How can we compare the merits of two different individuals who are part of these two different structures?

Inherited Inequalities – ‘Merits’ of Merit

Merit depends heavily on the resources that an individual or group inherits from its earlier generations, parents, surrounding environment, political system and society in general. And resources, or liabilities that an individual or group inherits depends on many aspects like societal surroundings, natural resources, education of parents, what their earlier generations have inherited etc. etc. Hence, it can be said that the inheritance of socio-economic and political conditions give certain advantages or disadvantages to the individuals or groups that inherit these factors. The socio-economic and political aspects that individuals or groups inherit are of many types that includes race, gender, language, social values, class, capital, wealth, education, human capital, and political structures etc⁹. A critical analysis of how these factors influence the outcome of merit may help us understand how meritorious our support to merit is. Inheritance is natural to any individual, and certain types of inheritances are unavoidable. This inheritance decides the means, merit and societal position of the individual, and puts her at a particular point in the societal race for resources, power and identity. The same inheritance can also restrict an individual or group from becoming meritorious. An individual is naturally born into a particular race, caste, gender, class, or ethnicity. These factors give access or restrict access of an individual to the socio-economic and political benefits that the society offers based on these factors. A non-white person has less chances of becoming something when compared to her white counterparts. Similarly, a person born into a Brahmin caste in India has immense chances of getting educated and becoming meritorious when compared to a person born into a Dalit caste. In most parts of the world, a male child has higher chances of getting educated when compared to a girl child. Similarly, a male child has higher chances of inheriting the wealth or liabilities of his parents when compared to a girl child¹⁰.

Parental property also plays a major role in deciding the merit of the children. Children with some assets or wealth are bound to get education, have higher chances of staying healthy, and have higher chances of enhancing capabilities that enhance merit⁹. A child with no wealth is bound to get dropped out of the school in order to take up some living. This apparently means she is forced to choose a relatively less meritorious position in order to take up a choice that ensures her sustainability, and all

sustainable options are not meritorious ones. Educated parents provide educative environment to the children. A girl child inherits more disadvantages when compared to a male child. An individual born into a majority, ‘upper’ caste, or dominant religion or race enjoys significant support from the society, whereas an individual born into a ‘lower’ caste, or minority religion has to spend time avoiding adverse conditions that the society forces on her. Parents with politics as their profession apparently gives their children a political platform like continuous exposure to the public, public issues, societal attention etc. that puts the children in the meritorious position to take up politics. The merit of these individuals apparently stands at a high level when compared to those who want to take up politics as their profession without any political background.

Social factors like culture and social values etc. also influence the merit of individuals or groups¹¹. A person born into a mainstream culture is bound to enjoy the fruits in many aspects in an invisible manner whereas a person born into a subaltern or regional culture is bound to face restrictions that restrict her merit, or at least does not give a boosting to her merit. For example, a novel written in English is bound to be read by a large number of people when compared to a novel written in Turkish or Gujarati. The platforms that culture, language, or homogeneity or heterogeneity of these cultures or languages provide acts as an asset and puts the individuals or groups from these backgrounds in a particular meritorious position. To be a world pop star one must be from an English speaking country, or at least one must get adopted to the English and their circumstances like Michael Jackson. The hegemony of English language provides a universal platform for those who speak it or use it as a medium of expression. A singer or dancer from a non-English speaking nation may find it hard to beat the artists from English speaking nations, especially if the work is done in non-English language. A comparison between two individual artists – one from an English speaking nation and the other from non-English speaking – say, for example, a comparison between Michael Jackson and A R Rahman apparently makes us believe that Michael Jackson is more meritorious than A R Rahman – but no one knows how. Similarly, a comparison between Lionel Messi and Abraham De Villiers may end up in favor of Messi being considered as a meritorious athlete as majority of the world may not know who De Villiers is. Here, Messi and Michael Jackson are popular because of the language or countries they are from. English is used across the world, hence, a music album in English apparently reaches the whole world thus establishing a platform for the artists from English which puts Michael Jackson or Elvis Presley in a meritorious position when compared to A R Rahman. Similarly, soccer is watched across the globe which puts Messi in a popular and meritorious position than cricketer Abraham De Villiers as cricket is played and watched in few nations only. This makes us infer us that merit depends on how mainstreamed you are, or how mainstreamed your field or choices are. Geographical area, class of an individual or group, different forms of capital, liabilities or cultural stigmas that a group inherits, race, gender, ethnicity,

resources that these individuals or groups have, political structure of the state they are living in, tolerance level of the society, civic culture, social capital, natural resources, environment, how resources are distributed across the societal sections etc. factors seem to influence the merit of individuals or groups. This puts us in a difficult position to define merit in a precise manner. One becomes meritorious when one gets everything that puts one in a meritorious position. To put it simply, people inherit inequality and these inherited unequal means merits or demerits merit.

Means as Merit – Meritas Means

Merit apparently decides the means an individual or group can acquire or get access to, similarly, as discussed above, means also decide the merit of an individual or group. There are merit based means, and means based merit. A critical evaluation of few examples may make this statement more clear. Different means like access to education, health, nutrition, infrastructure facilities, peaceful conditions, and a strong and stable economy can put an individual on the path of merit when compared to an individual who lacks access to all these sources¹². A student from a resource rich parental background is well placed to spend the required money to join a good college or university whereas a student from poor parental background faces less chances of joining a good college or university which restricts her to take the path of merit. For example, when applying for Oxford or Cambridge University, the students are usually asked, in the application, about how they are going to fund their education at Oxford or Cambridge. The students are asked whether they can fund their own education, or do they need funding from the university. Those who ask fund from the university have to go through a selection process that filters the merit students among the applicants seeking for fund. And those who succeed – usually one in ten of the joiners – get access to education at Oxford or Cambridge. On the other hand, those who are capable of funding their own education are also selected based on the merit of the applicants, but the proportion of candidates who succeed in getting admissions are almost nine in ten. In other words, those who depend on the university fellowship have to face stringent competition from thousands of applicants whereas those who can fund their own education get admission in a relatively smooth way. The process sounds reasonable from university's point of view, especially from cost dimensions as they are supposed to raise funds for those students who seek fund, but from the point of merit, those who cannot fund their education may end up not getting the admission, and hence, may become relatively less meritorious when compared to their counterparts who get admission into Oxford or Cambridge with their power to fund their education or merit. Eventually, a degree from Oxford or Cambridge puts the resource based meritorious students in a further meritorious position, whereas on the other hand, those who fail to compete for the extremely limited funded positions eventually become relatively less meritorious than their counterparts who got admission through their resources power¹³. Here, we can clearly see means turning into merit, and this merit eventually leading to means.

Different measurements are used to measure merit, and these measurements lead to filtering of 'merit' in a more or less random or skewed manner. For example, just assume that the number of funded positions available at Oxford are two, this means that only two applicants out of the hundreds of applicants turns out to be meritorious. And if the same funded positions are to be increased to three, the third person who was not in the merit list so far becomes meritorious suddenly. Here, merit is directly related to the available funding, and the dependent cutoff line that demarcates the 'merit' from 'non-merit'. Similarly, in an entrance exam, a different cutoff marks in English paper, certain percentage of marks as a basic criteria for applying for a job or fellowship, 'suitability' of an individual based on the personal statement etc. things influence the merit and means, and means and merit of the individuals or groups in a significant manner¹⁴. This puts us in a difficult situation to understand whether means lead to merit, or merit leads to means. Figure 1 shows how means and merit act in a circular manner, and how difficult it is to find out which one is the cause and which one is the effect.

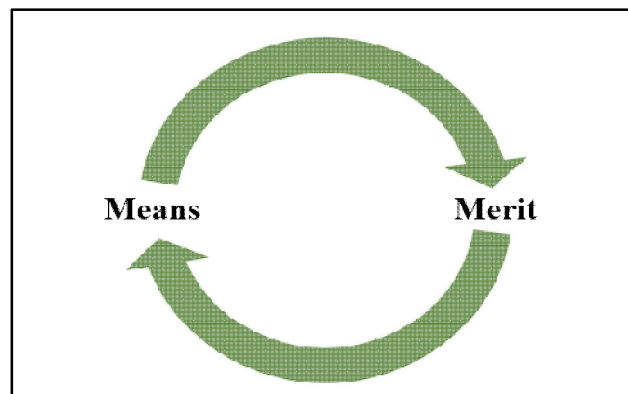


Figure 1
Means and Merit Cycle

As shown in figure 1, means and merit take a circular position. Means lead to merit, and merit leads to means. This process takes the form of a spiraling effect and puts those who have means in a meritorious position, and those who have merit in a close position to the means. In real life, merit is heavily related to the means. Merit is merit based in a literal sense, but in practice merit is often means based. It takes two or three years of privately funded coaching for a student to get a 'merit' rank to get admission into Indian Institute of Technology or Indian Institute of Management. The financial means are clearly enhancing, or directly taking the shape of merit for those who can afford to spend the required money for the private coaching, and those who cannot afford to spend on private coaching simply becomes non-meritorious. Hence, there seems to be less merit in merit, and it cannot be used to compare the merit of one individual with the merit of another individual in all circumstances. Merit seems to depend on circumstances and sounds reasonable in limited conditions only. Figure-2 illustrates the situations where merit may sound meritorious.



Source: Adopted (P-50)¹.

Figure 2

Differential Merits among Different Categories in Different Situations

Notes: i. Full lines represent different types of resources like natural resources, inheritance, social capital, systemic advantages, civic culture, cultural ‘superiority’, born into a dominant gender, part of dominant ideas, born into an affluent parental background in terms of education-income-wealth etc. of individuals or groups. ii. The competition starts at the end of the full lines, and broken lines represent the length of the race that need to be covered to become meritorious. iii. Category 1, 2, and 3 represent different set of individuals or groups with differential access to different types of resources. iv. Numbers 1, 2, 3 within a category represent individuals or groups who are competing to become meritorious.

As shown in figure-2, merit can be said to be reasonably measured in limited situations only. Category 1 represents individuals or groups who have not inherited any resources, instead, they seem to have inherited liabilities like born in a desert nation, born in a civil war torn country, born into a religion that is fundamentally conservative in nature, born into a ‘inferior’ gender like being female or third gender, being born to illiterate parents without any wealth, being born in a highly populous country with less resources, being born into a minority culture or ethnicity etc. etc. This places these individuals or groups in a vulnerable situation, and looking for merit from this category does not seem to make sense. Category 2 represents individuals or groups who have inherited both advantages and disadvantages, and are reasonably placed in the society. Category 3 represents individuals who have all the resources at their disposal – acquired through nature in a random way like natural resources, or acquired through socially constructed structures like being part of a developed country, being part of a dominant language like English, being born into a dominant race or gender, being born with good inheritance etc. Now, an inter-category competition for merit among various individuals or groups across categories 1, 2, and 3 does not make any sense. Individuals and groups in category 3 are naturally meritorious vis-à-vis categories 1 and 2. An open competition for merit across these groups apparently tilts the results in favor of the ‘meritorious’ categories i.e., in favor of individuals or groups in category 3. A competition for merit between category 1 and 2

also tilts the result in favor of the ‘meritorious’ group 2. In all the cases, group 1 is bound to lose the competition, and are apparent to become ‘non-meritorious’. To make the competition reasonable, a merit competition within categories may give us a reasonable way to test the merit of individuals or groups. A competition within a category puts the individuals and groups from that category on a same level in terms of natural or manmade resources or liabilities that they inherit or have access to. Individuals or groups within category 1 can be said to be equally poised in terms of facing the competition for merit. Similarly, individuals or groups within category 2 are evenly poised to face the competition for merit. But, an inter-category competition does not make any sense. Hence, the merit of merit can be said to be meritorious in certain circumstances only. An illiterate can compete with an illiterate, but not with a literate – anon-white can compete with a non-white, but not with a white person – a Sudanese can compete with a Sudanese, but not with a Swedish; and these are the limits and merits of merit¹⁵.

Conclusion

Merit depends on the means that an individual or group inherits or have access to. The ‘merit’ of an individual who has inherited billions of dollars is not same as the merit of an individual who has not inherited anything. Similarly, the merit of an individual who has not inherited any property or liability is not same as the merit of an individual who has inherited liabilities like poverty

or civil war. Means lead to merit, and puts the individuals or groups who have means in a further meritorious and close position to extra means. This apparently means, means derived merit further puts these individuals or groups in close access to further means. Individuals or groups that inherit different liabilities like poverty, heavy population density, and 'inferior' race or gender etc. apparently inherit less merit. These apparent natural or manmade socio-economic or political differences in inheritance or inherited merit or demerit puts individuals or groups on a staggered scale when it comes to 'merit' based competition. This apparently makes us question the merits of merit. Accepting the fact that merit is not always meritorious may help us to follow differential merit in different circumstances that could help us to filter merit within a given category. Universal approach to merit may force us to put all the resources in the hands of the well-off sections. Hence, a pessimistic and interrogative approach may help us when it comes to application of merit in authoritative allocation of resources to the individuals or groups.

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