

MIDS WORKING PAPER NO. 201

**Adapting Capability Approach to Understand
the Life Experiences of the Poor:
Making a Case from the Survey of Literature**

Ann George

Research Scholar

Madras Institute of Development Studies

mids Madras
spids Institute of
Development
Studies

MIDS Working Paper No. 201, July 2008

Adapting Capability Approach to Understand the
Life Experiences of the Poor:
Making a Case from the Survey of Literature

by Ann George

Madras Institute of Development Studies
79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar
Adyar, Chennai 600 020
Tel.: 2441 1574/2589/2295/9771
Fax : 91-44-24910872
pub@mids.ac.in
<http://www.mids.ac.in>

Adapting Capability Approach to Understand the Life Experiences of the Poor: Making a Case from the Survey of Literature

ABSTRACT

Capability approach by focusing directly on the lives of the individuals enables one to look into certain less discussed complex functionings and capabilities in the lives of the poor. This paper looks into the question of what it means to the poor to 'be' the disadvantaged in an unequal world with regard to three related functionings namely their perceptions of and reactions to the unequal social order, the concerns around which their most poignant sufferings and satisfactions are centered and their upward mobility aspirations. This review of literature, examining the lives of the poor through more intensive methodologies like participant observations, ethnographies and in-depth interviews reveals that there are complex layers within the same dimension, which remain rather obscured in the enumeration oriented studies of poor in economics. The paper finds that welfare economics in general and Sen's capability approach in particular would benefit from cross disciplinary exchanges with Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology etc and argues that the broadening canvas of welfare concerns made possible by the enunciation of capability approach, needs to be used further for engaging with the several nuances in the lives of the individuals (the poor) to understand complex topics of development economics, in this case poverty and inequality.

Key words: capability approach, complex functionings, poor, narratives, multidimensionality of poor, lived experience, habitus, deeprootedness of structures, agency, Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

It is only in the recent decades that economics led development discourses have woken up to the multidimensionality notion of poverty and started giving appropriate attention to it. Especially in India, studies on poverty have been largely on the nature, causes and eradication of poverty. Majority of studies have centered on the notion of income poverty or its proxies and involved measurement of the same – finding

trends, state- wise distribution, rural- urban divide and so on. However several studies in the 1980s [Chambers (1983), Jodha, (1988), Breman (1985)] came out with findings where other dimensions of life like self-respect, freedom from bondage etc were seen to be prioritized by the poor over mere material concerns emphasizing the need for attending to the multifacetedness involved in the lives of the poor. A re- emphasising of faith along this line of research happened when a global level study conducted as the background for World Development Report, 2000-2001 covering sixty countries and sixty thousand poor individuals came out with its report in which the narrators have clearly identified many more dimensions other than those pertaining to material well being as being important to their lives. With this study it appears that the conceptualisation of multidimensionality of poverty has come into vogue.

Corresponding to these empirical findings, theories of well being in welfare economics were also undergoing changes. A major shift in the focus of the theories of well being came about as a result of Amartya Sen's conceptualization and propagation of capability approach (See Sen, (1980,1985[1999], 1987, 1992). The approach calls for a direct assessment of the nature of lives led by the individual herself, thereby steering attention away from the conventional parameters of income and its proxies. Two concepts introduced by Sen namely *functionings* which refer to the set of *beings and doings* of lives of the individuals and *capabilities* which refer to the effective ability to attain those functionings which the individual considers as valuable, then become the parameters of assessment of well being. The vector of functionings could comprise of both elementary functionings like being healthy, nourished and so on and more complex functionings, which are more socio- psychological in nature. Sen quite often in his writings refer to the ability to take part in the life of the community as an example of complex functionings. In order to distinguish capabilities from the idea of opportunity in the traditional sense, Sen introduces another term *freedom*- the freedom to choose the life which one wants to live- the freedom or the *real opportunity* to choose the functionings of life. Many a time the capability approach is used to point out the very many *unfreedoms* in an individual's life.

Material poverty, hardships and the several vulnerabilities especially those pertaining to the basic functionings of the lives of the poor are extensively documented and studied in the development literature. This research however takes a different route. Here I look into the complex functioning of what it means to the poor to 'be' the disadvantaged in an unequal world with regard to three related questions.

First, how do they perceive and react to the various inequalities in the economic, social and cultural spheres? Second, what comprises their poignant sufferings and satisfactions in life? This is related to the first question. While academicians and policy makers have hitherto highlighted the disadvantages characterizing the lives of the poor, I examine what are the main themes and concerns in which the poor themselves recount their life stories- the concerns which might not have received adequate attention in the theorizing of poverty and inequality. Third, how are the aspirations and efforts being shaped- for transcending these situations of poverty and disadvantages- for their upward mobility?

Making use of the leeway created in welfare economics by the capability approach, studies in economics have been increasingly accommodating diverse variables in their analysis of well-being. Even then, the efforts have been to a large extent enumerative in nature, involving an identification and addition to the existing variables and stating and measuring the corresponding outcomes. While these studies are valuable in themselves a deeper and elaborate probing into each of these dimensions remains largely undone. A richer understanding of these dimensions could be obtained by intensive probing of how these evolved in the lived experience of the concerned individual. Capability approach allows for a venturing into the complex functionings of the poor. This paper explores the possibility of understanding these functionings from the experiences and perspectives of the poor. The literature in other disciplines especially in sociology, anthropology and psychology where considerable work has been done on these dimensions is able to give a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the above mentioned dimensions of the lives of the poor, thereby enhancing knowledge on further layers of *freedoms* and *unfreedoms* operating in their lives -those pertaining to the complex functioning of *being* disadvantaged.

This paper reviewing the literature consists of two main sections. Section 1 reviews the major works in the existing capability approach literature and discusses its potential as a framework for making deeper analysis of the lives of the poor. Section 2 is a review of theoretical and empirical literature on the three questions posed above. This paper is part of the dissertation which proposes to study the three functionings in the lives of the poor in the particular context of Kerala. Section 3 gives a brief discussion of why Kerala holds special relevance for a study of complex functionings, although an elaboration of the state's development experience is not within the scope of this paper.

1

In this section, I present certain core characteristics of the capability approach after which I scan some of the major discussions in the emerging capability approach literature. These are elaborated to show the concerns with which the literature has engaged so far and to identify the research gaps and the possibilities and requirements of further research to be done. Capability approach stems from an identification of the discrepancies existing between indicators of income, objective well-being and subjective well-being. First some elaboration is given to this discrepancy. Next is a discussion of how capability approach allows for refocusing the concerns of welfare economics and the scope it allows for choosing newer horizons of development. Following that is the section which deals with the difficult questions faced by the capability approach, of better defining and operationalising it for concrete purposes. One of the questions involved in operationalising the approach is the question of identification or selection of capabilities and this occupies a central place in many of the discussions. This is followed by an annotated survey of the empirical work in capability approach. Last I argue that the capability approach could be applied for even more varied purposes. Also by its potential for borrowing insights from other disciplines, the approach allows for a deeper understanding of complex human lives.

1.1 What is capability approach?

Capability approach, while assessing individual well-being or social arrangements, focuses on the individual's effective ability to lead the life he or she finds as valuable. Although this broader notion of wellbeing has been discussed even in the writings of early scholars like Adam Smith, Karl Marx and so on (Sen, 1993:46-48 as cited in Robeyns, 2003: 4), it is Amartya Sen who has developed this into the shape of an approach. This approach has brought a long overdue focus on to the multidimensionality or diversity notion of well being within the purview of welfare economics and the mainstream development studies which by and large were locked within the narrow parameters of income, GNP growth, industrial growth, employment and so on – all pertaining largely to development understood in the sense of material well being. The capability approach broadly provides a normative framework¹ for evaluation of different concerns of development like poverty, inequality, comparison of social arrangements, public interventions and so on. Capability approach varies from the abstract and the philosophical to very down to earth empirical applications and can be used in both global and local context.

This approach has evolved through Sen's writing in the past two decades. Since capability approach is a framework of thought rather than a well defined theory, the approach has got more refined over time through the writings of both Sen and other scholars working on the subject. It is to be noted that scholars from several disciplines have engaged with the notion and the issues considered are influenced by their disciplinary backgrounds, intellectual histories and interests. As such there is a wide range of discussions and concerns centering on the topic. Currently it is setting new agendas in welfare economics, development thinking, social policy, political philosophy etc. and is influencing documents like UNDP- Human Development Reports, which make crucial impact on policymaking. Another important change which the enunciation of this approach has brought in the academic scenario is that it has re-established the necessary and vital connections which many of the social science disciplines had in an earlier period with each other.

The core orientation of capability approach is that it assesses well being or individual advantage on the basis of what the individual is *effectively able to be or do*. Considering individual's capabilities as the core unit of assessment, this approach is used to assess the well being of a group, social states, policies and so on. The strength of the capability approach lies in what it denies as the space of assessment of well being especially the two parameters, which, were conventionally used namely that of utility and income. The approaches based on these two parameters can be roughly referred to as utilitarian approach and commodity based approach.

Utilitarianism, which dominated the theoretical discussions in economics, gives importance to utility/satisfaction/ pleasure/ desire fulfillment of the individual as the paramount unit of analysis of well-being. The beginning chapters of a standard economics text book start with this notion of psychological variable of utility, which is the factor underlying the concept of demand for goods and services. Despite the paramount importance given to utility, economists have not conventionally engaged with a direct measurement of this variable. Rather they imputed it on the basis of choice –through revealed preference. Broadly speaking, the notion of revealed preference states that one is able to capture the preferences of the people by observing the choice which they make. In other words, choice is nothing but the individual's preference which is revealed. In the applied work, what is measured is either the actual set of commodities and services, which is assumed to lead to well-being or just income, which represents the

purchasing power to acquire these commodities and services.

Sen points out that any evaluation based exclusively on utility criterion can be inadequate because of its leaving out several non utility information which is also relevant for assessing well being. The example which he states to make his point is the happiness of the poor woman, who could be satisfied despite lacking in very crucial objective indicators of well being; she might be severely under nourished or she might be a victim of many gender based discriminatory practices. Assessing well-being only on the basis of the woman's satisfaction would bypass all these objective undesirable scenarios. There are other vital indicators along with satisfaction, which needs to be considered for a holistic evaluation of well-being.

Commodities or income will also not serve as an adequate space of assessment and to focus on them would mean to stop the analysis at an intermediate space. Sen points out that commodities and income are only the *means* for following certain *ends*. The example he gives is that of possession of cycle as separate from the act of cycling. A mere possession of cycle would not automatically lead to the act of cycling, which is the end for which the commodity was purchased². It also requires that one is healthy enough to ride the cycle and one should have the skill of riding it and so on. This being the case, to stop the assessment at the realm of commodities would be inadequate. Rather the assessment should be in the space of 'ends' itself, which is the various actions and beings of an individual (following the example, the evaluation should be about the act of cycling itself). The space of commodities and income are merely instrumental. Sen uses the term *functionings* to refer to the *beings and doings* of the individual. The relevant functionings can vary from elementary beings like being adequately nourished, sheltered and in good health to more complex achievements like being happy, having self respect, taking part in the life of the community and so on.

This approach is further enriched by the notion of *capability*, referring to the opportunity or the set of available functionings from which the achieved functioning was chosen. In other words, it refers to understanding the circumstances in which the state of doings and beings came about. The basic vision in developing this objective is to draw attention to the 'problem of constraints' involved in the exercise of a functioning so that one does not equate a Brahmin fasting for spiritual rewards and the starving poor man on the same plane- that is while the functionings could be same, the conditions in which these functionings are achieved could be different. Here importance is given for choice, that is, whether the individual attained these functionings in choice/

choiceless circumstances. In order to distinguish his notion of capabilities from that of opportunity understood in the traditional sense, Sen introduces another term *freedom*- the freedom to choose the life which one wants to live- the freedom or the *real opportunity* to choose the functioning of life. Many a time the capability approach is used to point at the very many *unfreedoms* of the individual's lives.

A more concrete illustration of this point can be seen in a comparison of the attainment of low birth rate of China and Kerala. If one stops with an evaluation of functionings, then one will have to rank both the social arrangements equivalently. But reflecting more on the capabilities one finds that in Kerala, the outcome of low birth rate came more voluntarily from an increased public consciousness, whereas in China, it was brought about by state coercion. Clearly, the latter case where there was no choice to the individual does not make the best desirable social state. The emphasis on freedom is made in order to reflect all these. It involves *genuine choice* by which one means an absence of coercion –both stark and subtle and not one in which a person is forced into a particular life, however rich it might be otherwise.

The translation of commodities into effective capabilities goes through several intermediate processes. Ingrid Robeyns (2003) calls these intermediate steps as conversion factors. Robeyns classifies them into personal, social and environmental. Personal factors consist of skills, talents, health conditions etc. Social factors consist of public policies, social norms, discriminating practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies, power relations and so on. Environmental factors consist of climate, infrastructure, institutions, provision of public goods etc. All these factors play a role in the conversion of the characteristic of a commodity to the effective opportunity which it can deliver. For instance, even though the girl might have a bicycle to ride (the existence of the commodity) and there are wide roads in which it is safe to ride (facilitating environmental factors) and also she is an expert in cycling (enabling personal factors), the real opportunity of cycling weakens for her if the society where she lives considers girls' cycling as odd (that is disadvantageous social factors). As a framework guiding the making of political goals, the emphasis on capabilities rather than functionings falls in line with the liberal philosophical thinking, which gives importance to individual autonomy and freedom. It would mean that political goals should ideally aim at creating capabilities and leave the choice of the functionings to the individuals concerned. When it comes to guiding policy making or some other action program, the capability approach recommends that the effort should ideally stop at the level of building

capabilities. For example in case of family planning, the state can create required facilities and services, give information and try to build awareness of the need to avail these. But it should be left to the choice of the individual as to whether she wants to achieve the functioning of family planning by making use of these services.

The shift of attention to the realm of beings and doings brings in the question of value judgments with regard to the selection of capabilities from among the wide gamut of dimensions comprising human life. It needs to be noted that Sen has left the approach incomplete by not providing an objective account of the 'valuable' capabilities; he has left it open for the researcher to meet the requirements of applying it according to his/ her specific needs. This, he says, is for both fundamental and pragmatic reasons. Fundamental reason is that "the ideas of well being and inequality may have enough ambiguity and fuzziness to make it a mistake to look for a complete ordering of either". Pragmatic reason is that however much carefully one manages to rank capabilities, some ambiguity might nevertheless remain – hence pragmatic to leave it incomplete.

In the capability approach literature, distinction is made between standard of living, wellbeing and agency³. Standard of living consists of those aspects, which are strictly pertaining to one's own life. Well being involves those actions done on behalf of others but which has a direct bearing on one's life (a friend's success adding to one's sense of well being) and agency refers to the totality of goals pursued by the individual and this can at times be at the cost of one's own well being. So we have these distinct categories in capability approach literature – well being achievement, well being freedom, agency achievement, and agency freedom.⁴

1.2 Subjective Well Being- Objective Well Being – Income Discrepancies

Des Gasper (2005)⁵ gives an interesting account of the discrepancies existing among the subjective well being (SWB), objective well being (OWB) and income indicators. In this recent article, he presents the different co-relations existing among these three indicators. Take the SWB – income relation, as the income moves from low to medium and high levels, SWB also moves proportionately to higher levels. This appears to be the assumption held by the economists, which is also reflected in considering GNP as the most important indicator of well being of countries. The extreme opposite case is stated by the anti development school, which postulates an inverse relation between SWB

and income, that is as income moves up from one level to another, SWB moves in the opposite direction (there are evidences for this, see Jerome Segal (1998)). The third scenario gives the picture of what seems to be a more general case, going by some evidences brought out by cross national comparisons and comparison of the same country over time. This is also known as the Easterlin paradox where, as income moves to a high level, SWB moves proportionately but only up to certain level after which it remains at the same level (See Easterlin ed. 2002).

The disproportion in the relation between SWB and income could also arise because of the changing nature of the OWB indicators; say the OWB indicators like health, education etc. are maintained with higher level of resources. It could also be that in the pursuit of more income, certain objective factors like good family life, friendship, recreation, health, religious beliefs and so on which could contribute to SWB have been crowded out. OWB consists of different dimensions and it could be that while some of them fare well, the others do not.

Even when income is falling, SWB can go up because of improvements in OWB indicators. Jodha (1989), studying the living conditions of some villages in Rajasthan found people reporting a higher level of satisfaction with life while their official poverty status moved up. On probing it was found that this satisfaction in life came about because of improvement in certain objective indicators like being able to send their children to school, having life transforming technology of transistor radios, having a greater variety in diet etc.

Similar discrepancies are possible between OWB and income and this is well captured in the UNDP-Human Development reports. The well known are the cases of some Middle East countries with high GNP but having poor performance in certain objective indicators of quality of life.

There are similar discrepancies between OWB and SWB. Sen has made his criticism on utilitarianism on this basis. He (Sen, 1984, P: 309) cites the case of a poor woman reporting perception of satisfaction regarding her health although the objective indicators show otherwise. Janakarajan and Seabright (1999) in a study in Tamil Nadu could not find good correlation between various conventional objective welfare indicators and feelings about these indicators. These evidences clearly bring out the fact that there are no automatic linkages between these three indicators and there is a need to pay separate attention to each of these. Here we reach the position of capability approach- which calls for a direct look into the lives represented by the totality of all the three indicators.

1.3 Re-Focusing Economics and Rethinking Newer Horizons of Development

Capability approach has made the path open for looking once again into the philosophy and central tenets of economics. Sen has critiqued a narrow understanding of rationality, which forms the foundational notion underlying welfare economics. Broadly speaking, the theme of rationality is conflated with the efficiency criterion, which is about finding the appropriate means to achieve several ends based on the principle of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. Efficient procedure, rather than an explicit engagement with the *ends*, discussing what is good or bad about such ends, who decides the ends and so on, is given the emphasis here. But Sen terms this adaptation of rationality, as *engineering rationality* and this adaptation has severely limited the scope of economic thinking. A wider notion of rationality, which Sen terms as *ethical rationality* is one which explicitly considers the ends of development. It would reflect on the society or culture which people value and would insist on periodic scrutiny by public discussion on value judgments, thereby re-establishing the vital connection of economics with ethics. In other words, capability approach, by making the total set of beings and doings the focal point of welfare economics, invokes this broader notion of rationality.

Sabina Alkire (2002) in her work on capability approach gives a detailed description of ethical and engineering rationality and poses the question whether after such transformation, economics would be in any recognizable form. Reflecting on this question, she says that Lionel Robbins who is considered to have played an important role in the slicing of economics from ethics, himself does not restrict the goal of economics merely to concerns of material aspects or that of exchange economy etc. (Robbins, 1932, p:135-6 as cited in Alkire, 2002, p:114). Here one can go back to the definition of economics given by Robbins (1932, p: 15) that economics is a science which studies human behavior as a relation between ends and scarce means having alternative uses. He further writes that rationality in choice is nothing but choice with the complete awareness of the alternatives rejected. It is here that economics gains its significance in that it makes available the implications of the different ends and means.

Basically the emphasis is then on giving the best possible description of the characteristics of the different proposals or policy options which includes an explicit consideration of the ends to which they are directed. Together, they might not lead to one best policy but

one can always through discussion and consensus reach some better options. The point is to no longer keep under cover crucial ends given that an achievement of some of these ends is not necessarily followed by an achievement of other ends, a point which was elaborated in the discussion of the discrepancies between income, objective well being and subjective well being.

Sabina Alkire through her work on capability approach has demonstrated how the broader concept of ethical rationality can be operationalised and how that radically influences development choices. Rather than doing a conventional cost benefit analysis , Alkire has included non economic benefits also in her cost benefit analysis- the result is that some interventions which could have got negative appraisals, going only by the financial criteria also received favorable evaluation.

The recent emergence of happiness research in economics further attempts to widen the boundaries of the subject (For more details, see Frey and Stutzer, 2005). Economics as mentioned before only implicitly referred to the concept of utility (or satisfaction or happiness), relying on choice to represent utility. What happiness research does is to evaluate utility or happiness or life satisfaction directly itself. It analyses how economic concerns like inflation, growth, public goods and institutional factors like good governance affect individual well being. Although happiness research is considered as different from capability approach, strictly speaking, happiness forms a subset of the various valuable capabilities and hence can be considered as part of the approach.

As one can see, capability approach is exploring newer horizons of development. It has brought about a change in the language and expressions itself. Human development is at times referred to as human flourishing, a much richer concept and life is referred to as full lives. The question now is of tackling hindrances to leading full lives. A more holistic range of dimensions integral to human development is being considered in development thinking. Martha Nussbaum's (Nussbaum, 2000: 78-80) list of desirable capabilities is presented to illustrate the type of components now considered as integral to human flourishing. Nussbaum argues for making a normative account of *good* (good life), the details of which will be discussed in the following sections. The list of dimensions charted out to guide political goals is given below.

Life: Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

Bodily health: Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have an adequate shelter.

Bodily integrity: Being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, that is being able to secure against bodily assault, including sexual assault, child abuse and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

Senses, imagination, thought: Being able to use the senses to imagine, think and reason- and to do these things in a 'truly human way', a way informed and cultivated by adequate education, including but by no means limited to literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self expressive works and events of one's own choice- religious, literary, musical and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non necessary pain.

Emotions: Being able to have attachment to things and persons outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect.

Practical reason: Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life.

Affiliation: Being able to live for and towards others, to recognize and to show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship. Having the social bases of self- respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as dignified whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails at a minimum, protection against the discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, caste, ethnicity or national origin.

Other species: Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature.

Play: Being able to laugh and play and to enjoy recreational activities

Control over one's environment: (i) Political – being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association (ii) Material- being able to hold property, not just formally but in terms of real opportunity and to have the property rights on an equal basis with others, having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwanted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being; exercising practical reason and entering into relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

1.4 Some apprehensions and concerns regarding capability approach

When income, the dominant and uni- dimensional category by which development was measured and addressed itself ran into never ending debates of measurement, comparison and evaluations, one can imagine the kind of ambiguity and uncertainty which capability approach brings about since, in the strictest sense, it allows for considering the full terrain of the dimensions of individual life. Some of the deeply unresolved questions are-

1. When one talks about the capabilities that one values, it opens to a wide spectrum of beings and doings – the question is how one does identify what is valuable?
2. Are they same for everyone; if not how to make comparisons between individuals, groups, communities, nations and cultures?
3. What relative weights are used to value different capabilities and what does one do when value judgments conflict?
4. How does one decide if the capabilities which are considered are comprehensive and complete?
5. How does one value perceptions? Will it not be specific to that particular period; would not the results change after some lapse of time?

Robert Sugden (1993: 1953) effectively brings out all the concerns together regarding the operationalising of the capability approach when he says “given the rich array of functionings that Sen takes to be relevant, given the extent of disagreement among reasonable people about the nature of good life and given the unresolved problem of how

to value sets, it is natural to ask how far Sen's work is operational. Is it a realistic alternative to the methods on which economists typically rely-measurement of real income and the kind of practical cost- benefit analysis which is grounded in Marshallian consumer theory?"

The way in which the literature in capability approach has addressed these questions is presented below. Mainly, the discussion centers around the selection of valuable capabilities, that is, while assessing well being, who decides which of the capabilities are to be considered as valuable. The debate is about whether there should be a single list of capabilities which can be referred to universally while making evaluations of well being or whether it is better to leave the approach incomplete. The idea of an universal account of selected capabilities is proposed by Martha Nussbaum – the purpose of which is to guide political goals and constitutional guarantees.

1.5 The selection of capabilities: Nussbaum vis a vis others

The basic idea behind charting out a central list of valuable capabilities is to invite more state and political participation in deriving human flourishing, an ideal encompassing many more aspects of good life, which is different from purely materialistic concerns of well being. As seen before, the list contained aspects like being able to search for the ultimate meaning of one's own life, being able to have pleasurable experiences and avoiding non necessary pain- all these would now require any political entity which takes capability approach seriously to remove the obstacles (at least those which in a consensus can be coming under political action⁶) in attaining these capabilities. Even more importantly, such a central account of good is necessary to reflect upon many unjust and in-egalitarian institutions, which are taken for granted in day-to-day life. Unless there is a normative account of good, one would simply bypass these questions because many a time these unjust institutions survive because of the silence of the oppressed subject.

Taking women's issues, Nussbaum has argued out the case for such a list (See Nussbaum, 2000). Any assessment of the well being of the woman's life should be done in the space of capabilities where the woman is considered as an end in herself. Woman as an end in herself needs to be explicitly stated because in many societies and cultures, women's role is considered as secondary and instrumental in facilitating the goals of man and the family. In countering the fears that this defining of a central account of *good* makes the world too mechanically correct where every one pursues his/her well being, she says that it need not be so and there is need to re-understand love and concern in more egalitarian

and less exploitative ways.

This normative account of *good* is brought about by discussions with a wide range of cultures and nations to arrive at some consensus. This list is meant to be flexible in the sense that it can be tested against alternative proposals of human well-being. There is no claim that it is comprehensive and the concept allows for multiple realisations. This means that it can be more correctly specified in accordance with local beliefs and circumstances. Most importantly the list is to do with the creation of capabilities and not functionings and these capabilities are advisory in nature.

According to Nussbaum the fear of paternalism needs to be examined carefully since in several cases, local traditions while advocating relativism and criticizing universal norms on grounds of paternalism and absolutism, consider themselves to be absolutely true in contradiction to their own claims. Citing the sweeping influence of Christianity and Marxism all over the world, Nussbaum reminds those people fearing imposition of external ideas that people are always resourceful borrowers and possess the critical character to deliberate on all these. Having said that, her position is that which favors informed – desire approach – wherein people are given an idea about a larger world with more varieties in the way life is led, after which the choice is left to them. For all the claims which Nussbaum makes that her list is humble and is open for revision, many scholars raise certain crucial questions as to who is going to decide , when and on what grounds about the revision of the list.

Sabina Alkire gives an elaborate account of the apprehensions regarding a central list of variables. She makes the case against such a list, especially to show how it is not the best desirable way of selection of capabilities in her particular research query- which deals with evaluation of three micro level poverty reduction programs on the basis of the capabilities which they generated. According to her, it is problematic to start with a *particular* list for a universal identification of capabilities. Many components of the list cannot be used to evaluate micro projects that are limited by narrower concerns and also by what is realizable. An assessment based on the starting point of a list can never over rule the problem of paternalism for *who are we to say what is good for them*. She therefore chooses a procedure which would lead to an identification of the valuable capabilities by the subjects under consideration themselves. This will be a case of *describing* rather than *prescribing*. The procedure is nothing but the act of reasoning involved in addressing the question of ‘why is one doing what one is doing’ –

iteratively answered, this will lead to the identification of certain core/ root values and if the process is completed, then the outcome would be a set of further irreducible ends.

In this micro situation, the people themselves make the solution of the problem of identification of valuable capabilities. The questions of value conflicts, relative weights, comparison, evaluation and the further selection of the projects are all resolved by people themselves. As the work of Sabina Alkire points out, the specific purpose to which capability approach is applied helps to draw contours to the vastness of this approach.

But the problem is that this method is suitable for only small endeavors. For large scale political and policy making and in cases of deep value conflicts which might occur in the comparisons of larger projects, social state of affairs etc, where people's views cannot be taken directly, the problem remains unresolved. Sen's position as noted before is that of leaving the approach open ended and incomplete and for each particular purpose to give its own rationale for the identification of capabilities.

1.6 Is capability approach too individualistic?

Another criticism made against capability approach is that it is too individualistic and treat people as atomized individuals and not as being actors and agents embedded in a social environment (Deneulin and Stewart, 2002).

The criticism has two aspects.

1. Capability approach does not give due role to the social embeddings or social environment which determine many doings and beings of the people.
2. The approach by focusing on the capabilities and functionings of the individual does not really take into account the fact that an individual is essentially a social animal, meaning that all her actions are not driven by and are related to one's own self; rather it could also be driven by actions benefiting others. In short, certain *beings* are interdependent in nature.

Capability approach may indeed be considered as individualistic in having the same view point of ethical individualism which postulates that individual should be the unit of moral concern in evaluative exercises. That is, the evaluation of social state of affairs should be on the basis of what it does for the individuals. This however does not mean that there

is no consideration of the social environment. Both in theories (where one is talking about *real* opportunities or *effective* capabilities) and in the several examples illustrating the merit of capability approach, the role of social environment is given due attention (for instance Sen and Nussbaum often cite the example of the limited capabilities of women conditioned by her social role). In fact the whole exercise of moving on from commodities to capabilities is to bring the role of several intermediary conversion factors which hamper/ facilitate easy and automatic translation of commodities into expected capabilities. Social factor is one such intermediary conversion factor. Thus the first aspect of the criticism may not appear to be valid. Sen responds to these criticisms in these words “I fear I do not see the basis of their diagnosis.”

What Robeyns (2003) notes is that while capability approach calls for a consideration of structures and constraints on choice, it does not offer a full account of the same. Hence there is a need to use other theories of choice, which would complement the capability approach. In the absence of it, the approach can be hijacked for bringing out evaluations devoid of any socially nuanced treatment.

The reference to community capabilities, say, a particular community has invested in educational institutions and hospitals for its community members would mean an aggregation of the capabilities, which have been delivered to its individual members through these services. Hence, in the strictest sense when capability approach talks about the capabilities of a community, it means an aggregation and averaging of the capabilities of its individual members (Robeyns, 2003).

About the second aspect that the individual is not merely interested in self interested actions and beings is taken into account by the notion of agency achievement and agency freedom which Sen has discussed (discussion in section 1.1). However the capability approach by making the individual as the end point calls for *reflection* on agency aspect of the individual. Sen often cites this example of poor woman, on being asked about her welfare answers that her family is doing well. This reflection is called for since women’s well being is more often than not tied to her agency role, attained even at the cost of her personal well being. A focus on agency will always transcend an analysis in terms of functionings and capabilities. But the concept of functionings has the potential to incorporate even agency functions of the people, say for instance, the functioning of a sense of fulfillment coming from one’s agency goals. All in all, one can say that considering individual as an end need not diminish the role of social environment in the making of these capabilities and is able to consider individual’s agency roles.

1.7 Does capability approach invite inappropriate government intervention?

Some authors like Paul Seabright (1993) and Ronald Dworkin (2000) bring out this worry whether capability approach is asking for too much interference into personal and plurally defined dimensions of an individual's life. In Seabright's own words "nothing is society's business unless it could be the subject of an appropriate hypothetical social contract. Thus it is not the business of the society at large whether people have happy marriages or believe in God because these are not the kind of things, which people could contract to do". This basically represents the fear whether the approach would interfere into domains in which government intervention is rather inappropriate.

What Dworkin says is that government intervention should be for a fair distribution in the sphere of resources and not of capabilities. In his own words, "the idea that people should be equal in their capacities to achieve desirable state of affairs, however, is barely coherent and certainly bizarre- why should that be good?-and the idea that government should take steps to bring about that equality - can you imagine what steps that would be? - is frightening."

Robeyns makes the following observation against Seabright's comments. She takes the case of happy marriages which Seabright gives as an example. While one does not expect the government to open counseling centers all over the nation to promote happy marriages, a government which takes capability approach seriously could take measures to reduce the stresses on marriage coming from aspects where government intervention would not be considered inappropriate-like working on unemployment and poor housing, both of which are found to be putting great stress on marriages. While capability approach calls for facilitating good life, it has not made any claims on the level and the forms of intervention to be made and who should make it.

Dworkin's criticism that government should worry only about the fair distribution in the sphere of resources does not hold much merit in the light of the reasoning which capability approach makes, namely that resources are means and not ends of welfare concerns. About the point of redistribution, capability approach in the strictest sense is not a theory of redistribution (a reference to capability approach need not necessarily invoke the idea of redistribution), although it has the potential to discuss the different proposals of redistribution. It only says that if redistribution is indeed the specific purpose with which one is concerned, then the approach would call for it in the space of capabilities rather than in the

sphere of commodities or resources.

Similarly, capability approach as mentioned before is essentially a framework of thought and guidance to public policy making and government intervention is only at the level of suggestion. There could be other actors drawing from the spirit of capability approach – academics, activists, civil society, NGOs, international bodies and so on. To the argument that capability approach thrusts paternalism, Robeyns says that we are born into a world where certain dominant arrangements of social living are already charted out. In that sense, paternalism remains a debatable idea. Besides Sen's focus is on capability building and ultimately the individual has the autonomy to choose the functionings.

1.8 Capability Approach and Adaptive Preferences

The position with regard to adaptive preferences, where the individual deals with unfavorable situations of her life by adapting to what ever is given, is again an unresolved area in capability approach. Sen, in making the case for capabilities, rejects utilitarianism since the process of achieving utility could be that of adaptive preferences where people learn to survive among the injustices and hardships (Sen, 1984:309).

It is crucial to note that what Sen has done is a rejection of an *exclusive* reliance on utilitarianism; as such the failure to note the subject's preferences (even that of adaptive preferences) would be going against the very liberal spirit of the approach. In value judgments, the conflict over subject's choice and the objective account of good remains as a highly irresolvable issue. Martha Nussbaum's position with regard to adaptive preferences is both positive and apprehensive. Positive since one is not weighed down by circumstances, which are quite difficult to change and negative because it fails to disturb existing unjust institutions.

It should also be noted that the endurance of several discriminatory practices needs to be carefully examined since it would contain multiple dimensions within it. For example, while the woman might be unhappy with some of the exploitative practices, she might also be valuing the security and the respect which she acquires as a married woman. Also she would be considering pleasant moments shared with spouse as valuable and would not want to sacrifice it on any account. There is indeed a delicate balancing of several factors, given the structural and institutional settings. Besides, when the individual is born into a particular situation, the tendency is to take it as given and learn the act

of living within the well-known and frequently experienced constraints. The questioning attitude and the discontent would be largely absent in such situations. This is not to miss that the oppressed does many a time realize that she is being discriminated which is evident from the tongue in cheek wisdom found in the talks of the native women and the various covert and overt strategies with which women handle their oppressed positions (Kabeer, 2001).

The essential difference between capability approach and SWB is that while capability approach sees adaptive preferences as equivalent to resignation and conformism, SWB looks at adaptive preferences as individuals overcoming the negative events in life. Theories on adaptation (Brickman and Campbell, 1971) point out how the mind moves to a neutral state when adjusting to pain or pleasure; the adjustment to fresh stimuli also depends on the past experience. Besides any proposition of changing the existing framework of thought even when it is highly unjust with an unrealizable proposition produces what is known as *cognitive dissonance* (Elliot and Devine, 1994) – to escape which the individual moves to the state of acceptance of one's reality. On the whole, the SWB theorists consider adaptation as natural as against the negative and deceptive⁸ connotations attached to it by the capability approach.

A more complex problem arises when happiness or life satisfaction can come as a trade off to another valued functioning namely that of autonomy and agency- of taking decisions and trying for changes on the basis of critical reasoning. Sen himself seems to give more weightage to this functioning of critical reasoning. It is less likely that people who have adjusted to their circumstances would try to bring critical changes in their lives. People who are unable to take the injustices are the ones who bring about changes even at the cost of their happiness. However the autonomy/ agency- happiness trade off can be different for different dimensions in the life of the same individual. It can also vary over time.

At the level of research, it is necessary to understand the totality of circumstances while evaluating adaptive preferences. The subjective wellbeing compartmentalization within capability approach is not really correct in the strictest sense of capability approach, which concerns itself with the entire terrain of human lives. Nor is these compartmentalisations desirable since human lives operate with an integration of the diverse dimensions within oneself, with one dimension influencing the other. As such, an integrated study of subjective and objective dimensions would be more insightful and rewarding.

At an action level, say for a program on improving the standard of living of the people, what is proposed is an *informed-desire* approach discussed earlier and creating conditions for the operation of more egalitarian capabilities (like making favorable property rights laws for women). The presentation of choice itself can take away the sense of peacefulness one has found in adapting to a given situation. Here, however exists an aspect of short run loss of the peacefulness gained by adaptation; but in the long run the individual may stand to benefit by the choice. For instance, studies on women empowerment (see Nussbaum, 2000) have reported women acknowledging their gains from associations, after being hesitant initially in the fear that these activities might disturb their existing way of life.

1.9 Empirical application of capability approach

Ingrid Robeyns (2003) gives an updated annotated survey of the empirical applications of the capability approach. Here, I present some of the studies from her survey in order to illustrate the newer dimensions being brought under the purview of development analysis. This survey is presented also for showing that capability approach has been applied in the empirical work predominantly for macro enumerative analyses.

The empirical works can be classified into those examining the relationship between income and other functionings, which in effect is like testing the usefulness of capability approach and those which have used the approach to assess the well being of a country or a group etc with regard to its performance in certain selected functionings. Further, a group of studies, limited as they are in number, have used qualitative information in their application of capability approach. Within these classifications, while some studies have focused on elementary functionings, others have also considered functionings more complex and socio- psychological in nature.

Almost all the studies examining the relationship between income and functionings suggest that income is not able to represent other functionings adequately and there is indeed a need to separately look at the various capabilities coming under development.

Sen himself (See Sen, 1985) has demonstrated the rationale behind the capability approach from his empirical analysis examining the relation between the rankings of different countries on the basis of GNP per capita and other crucial functionings like life expectancy, education, infant mortality, child death rates etc. In his analysis, he found that ranking results vary for different indicators and there is no direct relation between income and other functionings.

The Human Development reports, which have had a huge impact on policy making, are now made in such a way as to consider functionings other than income. Human Development Index (1990), Human Freedom Index (1991), gender disparity adjusted HDI (1993), income distribution adjusted HDI (1993), gender related development index (1995), gender empowerment measure (1995) human poverty index (1997) (UNDP, 1990-2003) etc. do not have a direct and positive relation with income always. The functionings that are incorporated in these indices are life expectancy at birth, education and adjusted real GDP per capita.

Ellman (1994), examining the living standards in Russia after the collapse of USSR has noted the severe negative impact on mortality and morbidity during the period, 1987-1993, which a welfare analysis concentrating on price, income and consumption data would have failed to capture.

Ruggeri Laderchi (1997) testing Chilean data showed the shortfall of functionings like education, health and child nutrition to point out that income is an insignificant determinant of these functionings.

Next I present some studies which have included complex and psycho- social functionings like anxiety, perceived well being, non material functionings affecting well being etc. These complex dimensions have been relatively less examined in the development literature and as such the incorporation of these amounts to broadening the horizons of development thinking.

Phipps (1999) compares well being of children in Canada, Norway, and U.S.A on the basis of ten functionings namely, low birth weight, asthma, accidents, activity limitation, trouble in concentrating, disobedience at school, bullying, anxiety, lying and hyper activity against equivalised income. This study again shows that the respective rankings in the measurement of functionings and incomes give different results.

Klasen (2000) compared expenditure and functionings poverty in South Africa. Her analysis of fourteen functionings, namely education, income, wealth, housing, water, sanitation, energy, employment, transport, financial services, nutrition, health care, safety and perceived well-being shows that expenditure poverty could serve as a proxy for functionings index at an aggregate level but the relation does not hold good when comparison of expenditure indices and functionings indices are done for quintiles. Some groups are found to be more functionings deprived than what is suggested by expenditure poverty.

The second classification of empirical works has not attempted to

examine the relation of the selected functionings with income. These studies have merely made use of the broadened framework of capability approach to examine the diverse functionings of life. Many of these studies have considered complex functionings like attainment of political rights, social relationships, social interactions, psychological conditions, non- material and psychological benefits, political participation etc.

Slottje (1991) used 20 indicators including political rights, civil liberty etc. to compute a well-being index for 126 countries.

Brandolini and D Alessio (1998) tried to capture six functionings using household survey of Italy, namely health, education, employment, housing, social relationships and economic resources.

Chiappero- Martinetti (2000) used the Italian household survey of 1994 to measure well being in the functionings and capabilities space by examining health, education, knowledge, social interactions and psychological conditions. She has analysed these functionings for different groups viz women, elderly, housewives, blue-collar workers and so on.

Robeyns (2002, 2003) has assessed gender inequality in terms of functionings and capabilities using the British Household Panel Study. These studies show that while women are more disadvantaged on more dimensions than men, they are found to have better social relations than men.

Dreze and Sen (2002) have analysed the Indian situation and found the absence of many crucial capabilities like health, education, freedom from hunger, political participation, reproductive health etc. They further discussed the impact of violence and nuclear threats on human well being. They have also provided an elaborate discussion of the role of goods and institutions which have failed to enable these capabilities. Even political and social events were used for explaining their quantitative findings.

From the list of studies presented above, one could see that majority of the capability approach applications are directed at identifying macro outcomes with regard to the selected functionings. Among the relatively few micro applications of capability approach is the study of Schokkaert and Van Oolegan (1990). This study looked at the different functionings of a set of unemployed people in Belgium and found that the negative psycho-social functionings resulting from unemployment influenced their quality of life more adversely than the loss of material income. The policy implication of this study is that mere welfare transfers would not suffice to improve well-being.

Sabina Alkire (2002) has operationalised capability approach by including benefits with regard to the non-economic functionings in the cost benefit analyses of three development intervention projects in Pakistan. She shows that the selection of the projects on the basis of capability evaluation is different from those based on the usual cost – benefit analysis.

Jasek- Ryddehl (2001) has done an asset mapping of the community's capabilities for developing an intervention project in a destitute area. The attempt sought to replace the role of experts with that of community members. This was done by a door to door survey asking people about their capabilities (talents and capabilities) and whether they would be willing to use the capabilities to help others.

David Clark (2002) surveyed the inhabitants of two deprived South African communities to find out which capabilities they reported as valuable. The study looked at the different set of capabilities a particular commodity generates for a particular group and how these are related to mental satisfaction.

1.10 Bridging capability approach and cross disciplinary insights

From the review of literature, it appears that the approach as a normative evaluative approach has its *norms* laid out at two different levels. The first level of norms deals with re directing the space of assessment to nature of lives as against commodities and utilities. The second level of norms has evolved over time through the writings of Sen and other scholars. This has given the approach the norm of an *agenda* or *advocacy*. At this level, the approach is more close to guiding action (either with state as the actor in large scale policy making or even in other small scale programs done by any small actors like NGOs , local government and so on).

At this second level of norms, the emphasis is on *what should be* rather than *what is*. Although not given in the strictly prescriptive form of Nussbaum's list of capabilities, one finds that there is a clear preference for certain capabilities over others. For instance the capability of agency and critical reasoning (that of taking decisions and trying for changes on the basis of critical reasoning) is preferred over the capability of adaptation. The changing of terminologies into human flourishing and full lives also shows the *implicit goal drivenness* of the approach, which comes at the second level of norms.

However the conceptualization of these goals like human flourishing, full lives, developing agency, critical reasoning, autonomy

etc., because of the very richness of these goals, immediately presents the vast gap existing between these goals and the ground reality. For instance, the proposition of Benedetta Giovanolo (2005), who in her work tries to develop the idea of human flourishing and the notion of happiness as something vitally connected to the notion of virtue and is deeply social. Her proposition is of conceptualizing human flourishing as realizing the highest good in the virtuous life in the highly important context of social relationships and friendships.

All these conceptualizations of human flourishing bring the stark contrast with how individuals and society actually function many a time- the society divided on grounds of caste, gender, class and so on and individuals' relationships affected by self interest, mistrust, jealousy, power relations etc. What I fear is that in the conceptualization of an ideal or a 'good' to which humanity needs to proceed, there appears to be a sense of *hurry* with regard to understanding the actual reality as it exists at present. Hence there is a need to go back to the first level of norms where capability approach is essentially focusing on nature of lives. Much work needs to be done to understand the complex nature of human lives especially since it is only recently attention in economics is being focused directly on lives rather than on living conditions. The capability approach should be appreciated for pointing out that individual life is not necessarily and primarily oriented to material and utilitarian concerns. It also needs to be appreciated for the scope it has given for understanding the complexity of life in terms of interrelated functionings and capabilities.

While agreeing with Nussbaum that the conceptualization of *good* is to engage with how there are shortcomings in it in actual life, what is pointed out here is that the literature on the empirical front has not sufficiently dealt with this issue. The emphasis even in the empirical work in capability approach has been on measuring functionings rather than on *understanding* of these functionings in more detail.

With regard to the subject of poverty, capability approach has made a leeway for enquiring into those dimensions hitherto largely ignored in the development literature- especially in the Indian context. The research proposed here enquires into three important functionings in the lives of the poor. One aspect of their life is that they belong to the disadvantaged side of an unequal socio- economic order. This research enquires into the various perceptions and reactions of the poor to this situation. Related to this enquiry is the question of what are the functionings through which they define their most satisfying and suffering points of life- do they speak of the conventionally identified

disadvantages and would there be positive functionings conferring feelings of satisfaction and achievements in their life narratives? Finally the functioning of upward mobility aspirations and efforts is examined.

There is a need here to mention that it is not simply a question of identifying a few more dimensions and a consequent stating of outcomes of these dimensions, which seem to be the case in most of the empirical work. One also needs to understand these dimensions in detail- going for an intensive theoretical and empirical enquiry. These dimensions can be studied by an enquiry into the various domains of the lives of the poor individuals – from their experiences and perspectives.

Capability approach, focusing on beings and doings of the individual stands to gain from other disciplines, where a wider range of functionings (other than material and physical functionings) is studied. Literature (especially from the discipline of sociology and anthropology) presenting/examining the narratives of the poor reveals several nuances and comprehensions with regard to these dimensions. Cues from theoretical works on class stratification and analysis further inform the capability approach. The explanations offered on the formation, operation and perpetuation of strata or classes also could inform capability approach on the larger mechanisms through which certain beings and doings of the individuals come about.

2

2.1 Literature on poverty: A brief classification

There is a very large number of studies on poverty in the development literature. Robert Chambers (2006, p.3) classified these studies into five on the basis of the essential “cluster of meanings” attached to the question of what is poverty. The first revolves around the concept of income or consumption poverty with emphasis on measurement and comparisons. In India, poverty has been predominantly conceptualized within this cluster of meaning. The second group of studies looks into more categories like assets, wealth, consumer durables, access to certain services etc. which are coming under the purview of material or physical well-being. The poor are found lacking them in both quantity and quality. A third group of studies looks at poverty as capability deprivation, wherein poverty is defined not just in terms of material lack but in terms of the inability to perform several other activities and achieve certain state of beings. A fourth cluster of meanings gives rise to a multi dimensional view of poverty comprising of both material and non-material dimensions, mutually re-enforcing there by creating a web of deprivation for the poor.

Chambers advocating a fifth cluster of meanings says that all the above mentioned clusters are essentially defined by the non-poor, which got conceptualized from the mind sets and background of academics, policy makers and social action groups belonging to a different socio-economic category. But in this fifth cluster of meanings, the voices of the poor are given importance wherein they define what is good or bad life for them. These are captured by means of participatory approaches, which are being adopted extensively. World Bank's participatory poverty assessment, noted earlier, covering 60,000 poor women and men from 60 countries (WDR, 2000/2001) is one of the most extensive exercises following this methodology. This extensive study could also show striking commonalities across the world, in several of the categories by which the poor defined their notion of well/ill being.

There are different issues involved in these five classifications. Some studies coming under these broad classifications undertook the task of identification of poor- be it in terms of income, or a wider range of material goods and services or in terms of certain other capabilities while some other studies look at the different components of lives of people who are already identified as poor. The participatory studies also generally start with an identified group of poor.

The proposed research that I report in this paper is an enquiry into three important functionings (which are mentioned at the beginning) of the lives of the people who are already identified as poor. Chambers has referred to capability approach with regard to the *identification* of poor on the basis of capabilities rather than income or other criteria. But this research is not going into the question of identification but rather looking at some of the less discussed functionings/ capabilities of the lives of the individuals who are already identified as poor.

Here the subject's own positions with regard to the dimensions are examined. The attempt could be seen as an addition to the orientation of the several participatory exercises giving voice to the poor and importance to their concerns. This addition happens firstly by enquiring more elaborately into these functionings and secondly by seeing them in their actual practices and as revealed in their experiences. To give an example, it is possible to add on to the *statements* of 'what are the valuable ends of life' by looking at what is revealed in their actual lived experience- which also reveals several more nuances like how one valuable end is prioritised over the other, how what is valuable need not become a definite end with appropriate conceptualization and effort orientation, how the pursuit of valuable ends are constrained otherwise etc.

Two sets of studies are included here- one looks at one or more dimensions of the experience of poverty and marginalization and the other presents the entire life- narratives given by the subjects themselves. The studies are mostly done in the context of US, Europe, Latin America etc. Of the two life history narratives, one is the work of Oscar Lewis (1961), *The Children of Sanchez*, which has presented the narratives of the lives of five members belonging to a poor Mexican family covering the entire stretch of their lives from their earliest memories to the day when the interviews were taken. The other work is done in the Indian context, *Viramma*, (Viramma et al., 2000) giving us the life story of a Pariah woman- the experiences of a woman facing severe economic deprivation and dependence and the worst forms of social discrimination namely untouchability.

2.2 Perceptions and reactions to inequalities: A case of mixed and multiple functionings

As mentioned before, more and more arenas of disadvantages are being brought under the study of poverty. But the questions of poor's own perceptions and reactions to their situations of relative deprivation have not been much looked at by economists. Where there is a reference to it, there is a hurried brushing aside of it. Amartya Sen's own position with regard to this can be seen as rather broad and devoid of nuances when seen in the light of the findings from those disciplines, which have focused on this aspect. Sen has referred to this as a case of adaptive preferences. He has made this reference in the context of rejecting utilitarianism (which was discussed in section 1.8) and for making a case of direct evaluation of the capabilities in the lives of the individuals. To present his own words "the most blatant form of inequalities and exploitation survive in the world through making allies out of deprived and exploited. The under dog learns to bear the burden so well that he or she overlooks the burden itself. Discontent is replaced by acceptance, hopeless rebellion by conformist quiet and most relevantly in the present context suffering and anger by cheerful endurance. As people learn to adjust to the sheer necessity of uneventful survival, the horrors look less terrible in the metric of utilities" (Sen, 1984:309)⁹.

A review of the set of literature which has engaged with this aspect has highlighted the agency aspect of the poor¹⁰. The picture of adaptive preferences and the poor as being passive allies to the inequalities can be unpacked to reveal a case of more complex picture of mixed or multiple functionings.

While largely ignored by the economists, the complex functioning

of the reactions of the poor who are left out of the mainstream life of economic, social and cultural status has engaged the attention of several scholars and has been the centre of debate in the Marxist and neo-Marxist schools of thought. The attempt of the scholars has been for a better understanding of the absence of resistance by the downtrodden. Among the explanations given by these thinkers, among whom one was Antonio Gramsci [Gramsci (1971) as referred in Scott, 1985] are ideas of internalization of subordination, hegemony of the consciousness of the poor by the dominant values, penetration of the world-views of the elite into the world-view of the poor and so on. The cumulative interpretation of all these theories is that the elite controls not just the means of production but also the ideological order of the society which puts them in privilege. This is done by the dissemination of the dominant ideas on what is legitimate, moral, beautiful etc, through the channels of media, education and religion.

James Scott (1985) in his path breaking work, the *Weapons of the Weak* makes a strong critique of these treatises and puts forward a counter proposition of resistance by the poor in their everyday activities, which he terms as the *everyday resistance*. According to Scott, the inferences on hegemony come from the observation of compliance in behavior and an absence of open protests or revolts from the poor. That this compliance is more of a pose is brought out on a closer look at the inner quarters of the lives of the poor. Their routine resistance consists of their efforts to mitigate or deny any extra claims made on their services and their never ending attempts to seize small advantages, to probe the limits of existing relationships and being very vigilant to what can be gotten away at the margins. The everyday negotiations for improved wages, the inefficiencies with which work is done, small pilfering and theft etc. can be considered as mere acts of self-interest. That the resistance connotation is added on to these acts is understood when these activities are seen parallel to the comments, gossips, character assassination, jokes etc., passed in their inner quarters, on the elite completely seeing through their pretenses and exploitation. This is however carefully kept within limits for they are keenly aware of their dependence on the elite class. Through this proposition, Scott has drawn attention to the point that the poor are not taking their disadvantageous position lying down. Although they are not thinking of any revolutionary restructuring of the existing social order, they are agile in everyday forms of resistance and this adds a layer of nuance to the usual understanding of poor as the helpless victims of an unfair social order. And this resistance, Scott says forms the massive middle ground which then results in the election failures of the leaders who have let them down

and the failure of development policies which have overlooked the subaltern perspectives and notions.

While this is indeed a penetrating analysis of social reality and brings forth one significant layer of understanding the issue of reactions to inequality and exploitation, a straitjacketing of this functioning into one single aspect of resistance might be problematic. As Susan Gal (1995) in a valid critique of Scott's treatise argues, the case is more of mixed functionings. It should be noted here that Scott himself acknowledges the role of cleavages in the form of kinship, neighbourhood factions, personal links, ritual links etc cutting across class, strengthening and weakening class conflicts. However, he does not give due attention and importance to all these in his analysis. Gal on the other hand, citing several evidences, notes that compliance need not always be a pose and individuals are found to be bearing mixed or contradictory positions in their lives depending on the particular contexts. Different reactions to marginality are possible even within the same individual. She notes from the study of Willis (1977) on working class English school lads that these students exhibited defiance all through which can be justifiably interpreted as resistance. But simultaneously, they had also imbibed some other aspects of the dominant ideology with regard to their perspectives on women and girls. She points out another case of simultaneously held contradictory positions, from Sennett and Cobb's (1972) study on the working class American men on the topic of the hidden injuries of class. Workers on the one hand complained of everyday assaults of their bosses on them. On the other hand, they blamed themselves rather than the class system for their lack of economic success.

In the Indian context, the case of mixed functionings is brought out in a study on the so called "lower castes" – Dalits in Tamilnadu by David Mosse (1994). The aspect of resistance by the Dalits to subordination placed on them in all spheres is found in their efforts for economic and social mobility making use of the educational and employment opportunities provided by the missionaries and in their acquiring new symbolic resources in the form of caste and political associations. Agency is revealed also in their clever manipulation of the very symbols and rituals, which keep them under subordination. The irony however remains that in the whole process, the fundamental postulates of hierarchies are not challenged; rather the attempt is more to prove that it is not they but the caste lower to them in hierarchy, which falls under the inferior positions enforced by the idioms of subordination. Along with upward mobility, claims for autonomy are

made by bifurcating the inferior roles into what are still done by them and what needs to be done by those communities which are below theirs in status. This study also reminds of the role of race / community / caste factors in the identity of individuals, which set their own norms of honour, respect, feelings of goodness of life etc and the corresponding marginalities.

Review dealing with the narratives of poor with regard to comparisons, which they make of themselves with others, also shows that very often, comparisons at a horizontal level between different ethnic groups, or between people in the same neighbourhood etc become more palpable and real. In the compilation of narratives of Oscar Lewis, this aspect is mentioned. One narrator mentions that thinking over inequalities is rarely done (at the same time defiance is to be found in his resistance to work as a subordinate). In another context, this narrator mentions about the distinctions and hierarchies maintained even amongst the poorest of poor and this happens to such an extent that one's upward mobility has to pull through the barriers posed in terms of jeering and backbiting of the fellow members of the community.

Weis and Fine (1991) looking at the social critique made by both white Americans and Afro- Americans, find the critique of whites to be that of blaming the other namely the Afro- Americans. The latter, however, makes penetrating social critique which becomes evident in their observation of the projection of the stereotypes by the media and society about their involvement in drugs and crimes which leaves out the bigger agents involved in all these, lack of jobs, police harassment etc.

Another thread of argument is that in many instances, it is not social order per se, which is critiqued, but the way it reaches the individuals as personal experiences. It appears that it is the *humanized version* of the social order that matters to the cognition of the individual. This is reflected in an illustration from a study done in the American context, where connections among race, class and gender in the everyday discourse were examined in the province of Columbia (Streicker, 1995). The comments reflecting on the social order made by the elderly among the poor are illustrations of the above mentioned argument. Reminiscing about good old times, they speak about how the rich were nice to them, paying well and helping them out even above their own crises and self-interests. They recall the sentimentality and solidarity about their relationship with the rich in the earlier times. They decry that things have changed now and in all walks of life, the selfish interests of the rich dominate. Rather than rich- poor differences per se, it is the change in

the kind dispositions towards the poor, which is criticised here.

Age, gender, the particular historical and socio- economic context etc seem to play a crucial role in determining the reactions to the inequalities. Weis and Fine (1991) in the above mentioned study observes that the adolescent stage is one where people make a strong critique of the structural injustices. But this phase soon changes over to a realistic resignation.

In Viramma et, al (2000), one could see that Viramma's position was largely that of internalisation of subordination (close to what Sen says about the poor becoming allies to these inequalities, with cloaking of it by religious dictums), where she ironically sees the reforms being brought to their lives as *kalikalam*. But her husband and son were found to be protesting against the exploitative positions of the landlord for whom they worked as serf labourers. Her son is found radically questioning the social order and the religious ideology to which it is tagged. This is also due to his political exposure, especially during the time of historical transition in the situation of the Dalits brought about through political mobilizations and government action.

Viramma's narrative also reveals the several processes behind this "allied existence" with a system of inequalities. On the one hand, this system of inequalities is taken as given by a social order getting legitimacy of Dharma. But Viramma also states it on pragmatic grounds. She realistically looks at the chain of their dependencies and the resulting vulnerabilities and repercussions, which could arise from questioning the established order. She views the politicians quite suspiciously, who according to her do not stay with them providing them with livelihood and security. The internalization of inferiority is also contingent on the inferior conditions one is forced to live with. Over time, one finds a dilution in this aspect as the conditions in which this was contingent change. For instance, Viramma never used to refer to herself as *Tamil*, but as changes happened, she says that they could pass off as Tamils given that they have started maintaining hygiene and are dressing well.

All in all, the literature reveals that the question of perceptions and reactions to the inequalities of the socio- economic order has several functionings operating beneath it. In general, multidimensionality is used to refer to different dimensions constituting the lives of the individual. What is understood from the review is that there could be multiple and some times contradictory layers of functioning within the same aspect itself. Literature reveals compliance, resistance, defiance and agency (either overt or covert) in their reactions. There is a lot more agility and

activity than what adaptive preferences would suggest implicitly. But then, this resistance/ agency is also partial. Having said these, a comparative resentment against inequalities per se seems to be bounded or contained, where relations between haves and have nots get established in more amicable terms. Review of literature shows that in general, rather than inequalities per se, the particular versions of it – like low wages, ill treatment, demanding of deference etc are resisted.

Two treatises from the literature on class analysis help throw more light on these findings. Emile Durkheim's analysis of class stratification and modern day inequalities, the core of which are the differences in occupation identifies one mechanism through which inequalities get legitimization or acceptability[(Durkheim, 1960 (1893) as summarized in Grusky and Galescu, 2005)]. According to Durkheim, modern inequalities are best explained not in terms of strong schisms between big classes but in terms of 'institutionalization of occupations', wherein institutional and jurisdictional boundaries are drawn for occupations (and its terms and conditions) through processes like certification and licensing required for occupational build up, forming associations or unions. This in turn produces shared understandings of the wages and other ideas around the occupation- making these differences in the society more acceptable and palatable. According to Grusky and Galescu, (p: 63) Durkheim's treatise of institutionalization of occupation does not extend to the lower manual sectors in its strictest sense in that here, occupational associations have failed to emerge, these occupations require less skills and training (which in its turn account for institutionalizing the boundaries) and institutionalization is unsettled by the effects of rapid changes in the manufacturing process. However, here again an informal institutionalization in the sense of shared ideas regarding wages and other conditions of work and social interactions which re- enforce these ideas gives a definition of what is acceptable. These shared/ commonly held ideas around occupation is *one* mechanism through which inequalities get legitimisation- containing the resentment of inequalities by the disadvantaged.

Pierre Bourdieu's class analysis is also helpful in identifying what one's class location does to the individuals. For Bourdieu, social class should be identified not in terms of individuals or a group of individuals but for the 'habitus' which it generates (Bourdieu, 1977 (1972), p: 85, as summarised in Weininger, 2005). At the core of class analysis of Bourdieu is the notion of habitus which is the matrix of dispositions including perceptions, appreciations about themselves and understandings, guiding the diversified tasks which the individuals constantly engage

in. These dispositions emanate from an understanding (this could be also pre- reflexive; a commonsensical rather than conscious) of the existing practices and norms of the particular socio- economic and institutional context. This gives a definition of what is appropriate and a delineation of the impossible and unthinkable within a particular situation from what is possible, desirable and inevitable. This delineation of the possible from the impossible and the desirable from the inevitable holds relevance to the discussion of the reactions to inequalities explaining accurately the process of containment of resentment- which need not be even at a conscious level but at a disposition level. To illustrate, while jokes against the well off might be a done practice, a continuous and strong resentment could be considered as ‘rather odd’ and ‘thinking beyond the possible’ even by the peer members in the lower strata (it is different in case of politically conscious groups or people). The habitus proposition also sees these dispositions as amenable to transformations by redefining what is appropriate. In the empirical findings, age, gender, political exposure, the particular development agendas of the state etc are found to be influential in making differences in the nature of reactions to inequalities, revealing the variety and possibility of transformation in the habitus.

2.3 Understanding beings of satisfactions and sufferings

The previous section discussed the various responses to inequality by the poor. This section looks at the question from another perspective. While academicians and policy makers have examined and defined the lives of the poor as objectively disadvantaged, I examine what are the themes and categories in which the poor themselves recount their lives. The books covering the life narratives as told by them, (Lewis, 1961; Viramma.et.al, 2000) mentioned at the outset of this section are the main sources of enquiry.

What is striking in these narratives is that even when poverty and series of constraints come out very clearly, it is not these which they are primarily recounting. Instead, the major proportion of these discussions is about their life worlds –of the various relationships, activities and events, which they engage within their community or in their immediate surroundings. However there are differences in the narratives in these two studies. While there is a near absence of discussion of their relation with the privileged in the narratives given by Oscar Lewis, there is considerable engagement on this aspect in case of Viramma’s life history. This is bound to be the case, given that this is the life story of a Pariah woman who experiences severe economic deprivation and dependence and the worst forms of social discrimination of untouchability. Also,

this is a testimony of the historical transition taking place in the lives of the lower castes where they begin to question the injustices of their lives¹¹. But here again, the narrative is largely skewed towards the discussion of other aspects of their life worlds rather than their severe disadvantages in their relation with the larger world. The point here is that, within their disadvantaged position, they seek and derive meaning in these other functionings giving them identity and achievements. These texts can be looked at skeptically as being mediated by the authors¹². Nevertheless a discussion of some of their most satisfying moments and their poignant sufferings could reveal the concerns most close to them. These texts do not represent the reactions of all the marginalized and are unlike the texts of the angry Dalit. These are nevertheless representations of the poor and highlight the possibility of them having a different self image rather than the conventionally understood passive and victimized self conceptions.

In the life history narratives, from what the narrators describe as the most satisfying and contentment giving moments, it appears that there is a realm of *within group identities* like that of being a good worker, good mother, father and in achieving all the status symbols of their community, which seem to be close to their inner most selves and which matter with an immediate urgency. In Viramma's narrative, we find an endorsing of the case of sub identities. People revel or are shattered in these satisfaction and disappointments with regard to the status symbols of their community; for instance the status one acquires as a capable and successful father or mother or the reputation one holds in organizing and conducting the important life cycle events and other ceremonies, functions and festivals of their community.

Especially important is the fulfillment of norms associated with the ascribed roles¹³ of the individuals- roles as father, mother, daughter, son, wife etc. Here satisfactions are tied with the norms defining what good, responsible, moral etc is. In the Indian context, getting their children good alliances is a symbol of parental responsibility and respectability. Viramma recalls how her parents beamed with pride on finding a good alliance for her. She recalls the incident of her father, who generally remains silent and keeps a low profile, coming to the forefront swelling with pride giving a description of the alliance to the other community members. An internalization of gender norms also defines the satisfaction experienced in their lives. This is illustrated where Viramma's mother in her death bed describes her life as having well lived, living up to the *good woman role* in all her ascribed roles as a wife, mother, mother-in-law and so on where behaving cordially and

obediently was found as ideal. In *Children of Sanchez*, as mentioned before, the men recall their childhood to be happier. This has to do with the fact that they could keep up with the masculinity identity expectations of their community. Again, among aspects which mattered most to them were their living up to the expectations of their father, who appears to be the central figure around whom their lives are led and the sub identity of being a good son or a good daughter.

Sub identities emerge in the work sphere as well. Viramma prides herself as a sturdy and trustworthy worker of the landlord. In the narrative of Oscar Lewis, one of the narrators describes his life as well lived partly for the reason that he was known as a good employee.

In another study, (Collins, 2005) done in the Canadian context bringing out the conceptualization of good life visualized by a group of poor women, relationship with family, children and friends is rated as one among the most important factors in good life along with emotions such as love, happiness, self esteem etc.

Would these mean that the poor are able to reach the realms of positive functionings? Some evidences from literature on this question are discussed here. A study on the strengths of the children of poor (Coles, 1965) done in the American context brings forth a positive observation of the poor, wherein, he notes that the children from the poor slum are having positive attitudes like energy, life, humour, vitality, openness, action, feeling, imagination, social criticism and critical eye for the fake and the pretentious. However, these characteristics fade off into resentment and resignation gradually. A pattern seems to exist in the American context with regard to this tendency where the vitality and happiness of childhood turns into despair and disappointment in adult life.

Even in the narratives given by Oscar Lewis, the happy moments which the narrators mention are more in their childhood, in the freedom which they experience especially in case of the boys who being daring in nature could keep up with the masculinity identity expectations of their community, of winning fights, of being adventurous, having affairs and sexual relationships, being good at sports and games and so on. Girl's space for recreation is limited; nevertheless they too have their share of fun in dance parties and in their relationships. Religion remains a solace. But all these change during the adulthood and one notes the transition of high spiritedness to despair, remorse and hopelessness. At the time of these interviews, all the narrators (except the father in the family) feel that their lives have been badly led and they have made a

series of mistakes and they state their realization that only consistent efforts can pull them up from the *hole* in which they are in now.

In the Canadian study a mere fulfillment of basic needs, namely the improvement in the living conditions in terms of freedom from debt, having savings to meet emergencies without stress, having some leisure time for rest and celebrations, having their cupboards full, having the possibility of treating oneself and being able to help others become the defining features of a good life. Having a cheque to spend as they like is a dream situation for them. Stress and worry are the major components of a bad life. They narrate their experience of starting with a comfortable stock of money and commodities in the beginning of the month and the mounting tension and stress which they inevitably face in the last days of the month. They also found the monitoring done by the welfare agencies as a shameful surveillance cutting on their autonomous space. Getting treated with good words and respect remains another unfulfilled aspiration for these women.

In contrast, Viramma's narrative, gives a brighter picture with regard to some functionings of her life- of her satisfying relationships, freedom and achievement of the several status symbols of her community. Despite the oppression, there is some autonomy which the pariahs exercise when it comes to their caste customs, culture, and relationship with their kith and kin. As Josaine, the co- author in Viramma, et.al (2000) puts it, beyond a point of subservience and obedience Viramma asserts her own rights in the family circle. In fact, as noted by other writers, the Dalit women enjoy higher autonomy and voice to state her preferences and protests than the higher caste women (See for instance Kapadia, 1996). She takes an active interest in the different festivals, life cycle events, the different kinds of people she comes across in her village, the spirits and Gods and so on. She conducts all the functions with meticulous care and finds meaning from that and exhibits a lively curiosity in people and life around her. In short she feels vitally connected to the world she is living which includes personified relations with nature, animals and the dead kith and kin. Death is not a permanent loss in their community for they believe in the presence of their dead ancestors and children in their lives. All these experiences, close to her inner most self, seem to defy her bitterness of bondage. But Viramma belongs to a generation of people who had largely internalized subordination and believed that as an order of Dharma, which relieved her largely of the frustrations of being at the receiving end of inequalities and untouchability. That she has many positive functionings has also to do with the fact that she belongs to a generation amidst whom oral culture was still alive with its

abundant cultural traditions and meanings.

Among larger empirical evidences, a global level study (World Development Report , 2000/2001) documenting the narratives of the poor across the world, shows that the poor identified vulnerability, voicelessness and powerlessness as affecting their capabilities to lead the kind of lives which they want to live- indicating strain in attaining the functionings which they value.

All in all, the subjects' own characterization of their lives could give a more holistic understanding of the lives of the poor. It showed that it *is not just lacks* which characterize their lives. Even in their constrained margins, there are times when they define and make their achievements. While this does reveal their agency and achievement of dignity, it does not give room for any complacency for the policy makers as poverty and hardships could also strain and affect these positive functionings, especially that of relationships to a large extent. Also, even where the subject herself feels a sense of achievement in the satisfaction of her ascribed roles, one cannot miss out the severe costs under which it is made. As noted before, the narrator in Oscar Lewis's compilation mentions his life as good also due to the fact that he is known as a good employee; but this he attained at the cost of working continuously-without breaks or holidays- which took a toll on his emotional capabilities and led to a series of problems in family relationships. Even in the narratives of Viramma, the fulfillment of their ascribed roles satisfactorily also meant that they got into more binding obligations. Also, studies (Kodoth, 2005) have noted that achievement of ascribed roles is attained at a cost, by land and other asset sales. Further, it may be noted that if there is a failure in any of these functionings, which are within their realm of achievement, then they get totally trapped in the webs of disadvantages – even in those limited spaces of autonomy and content- of their life worlds. Again, these positive functionings like that of the satisfaction of being a good woman and good worker need to be examined in more detail to see whether it is a case of merely abiding to gender and capitalistic norms or whether there are indeed points of negotiations and agency within the contours of these norms.

2.4 Understanding doings and beings with regard to the dimension of upward mobility

In India, the question of perpetuation/ removal of poverty is usually located in macro/ micro structural factors like agriculture, growth etc. (Harriss.et.al, 1992). Relationship between poverty, gender, caste, age,

legal access etc. has also been explored. There are also studies pointing to the perpetuation or further pauperization of the poor despite modernization and development (Jeyaranjan(1993), Breman 2003). The focus of this research is different. Here, the attempt is to see how being in the lower strata shapes the complex functioning of the upward mobility aspirations and efforts of the individuals. The micro level realm consisting of the different institutions influential in shaping the orientations, priorities, rationale and decision making of the poor are highlighted here. In the western scenario, especially in North America and Latin America, many more social and psychological functionings are examined in explaining perpetuation of poverty. These aspects have hitherto been largely ignored in the studies in India, which have focused at the material or physical aspects of poverty. But understandings of these functionings helps to get a holistic picture on motivations and decision makings-for poverty could not just affect the material living conditions- but also the formation of certain 'beings and doings' , in this case, their upward mobility orientations and efforts.

In the western context, the studies have broadly examined the two theoretical stances of a major academic debate, namely whether it is cultural factors or structural factors which are more responsible for the perpetuation of poverty. The term culture of poverty is coined by Oscar Lewis (1961; 1965) who became an academic celebrity with his work giving life history narratives of the poor individuals belonging to different places namely Costa Rica, Mexico and Puerto Rico. One of the earliest proponents of the structural arguments is Charles Valentine (1965). The cultural determinist school identifies the breakdown of key social institutions, namely the family, school, church etc as the major factor responsible for shaping wrong attitudes and choices for mobility, thereby perpetuating poverty. Culture of poverty refers to certain characteristics pertaining to the family structure, value- orientation, inter-personal relationships, spending patterns, time orientation, attitudes etc. Lewis identified around seventy interrelated social, economic and psychological traits. Lewis describes them positively as a design of living enabling them to cope with their miserable living conditions. However, this also develops a lot of characteristics which include feelings of resignation, immediate gratification of wants, absence of clear cut and step by step future perspectives, all of which can together thwart upward mobility. These sub cultural traits, according to Lewis lead to low educational motivation and inadequate preparation for an occupation leading to unemployment, despair and perpetuation of poverty. Murray's (Murray,1984) interpretation of the situation is that during the vital years of schooling, the student in the absence of credible sanctions and

tangible incentives does things considered as more fun giving, which are detrimental to their studies and eventually they drop out of the school.

Valentine's (1965) critical analysis of the culture of poverty doctrine is that the several of the identified characteristics of poverty, like crowded quarters, unemployment, low education etc are symptoms of poverty rather than some traits developing as an aftermath of poverty. With regard to behavioural and attitudinal traits, he says, any one who sees the picture in totality can see that many of these characteristics are matters of "situations of expediency" evolving in the context of highly random and unpatterned existence rather than something which is exclusively inherent in the people. Hence these traits need to be seen as socio-cultural responses to the structure which is perpetuated by the non poor and which operates in the form of structural changes in the economy, low wages, high rents, poor quality schools etc. It also presents itself in the form of many biases held against the lower strata especially the minorities which then poses hurdles in accessing jobs, advertisements (where advertisements will be placed only in those media which is more used by the well off communities), getting houses, mortgages, credit etc. Besides, these pathologies are defined in terms of distortions to middle class living styles or norms. According to Valentine, if not by design, but by inadvertence, Lewis has made a doctrine which has led to the *blaming the victim* interpretation of poverty. Valentine's counter proposal is indeed a valuable addition for it steers attention to the role of structure in perpetuating poverty. However his critique against Lewis is quite misplaced according to many scholars.¹⁴

Auletta (1982) has brought out a synthesis in her study where she distinguishes two categories of poor- one who are the victims of their own attitudes and another group who are victims of socio-economic forces. The attitudes of refusing to work even when work is available and the love of crime and violence which is considered as both exciting and heroic are pointed out as belonging to the cultural traits.

These sets of studies have given cues to a more varied range of functionings, like attitudinal and behavioural traits which can thwart upward mobility. What lays underneath the upward mobility aspirations and efforts can be understood as a matrix of both structural factors (like poor infrastructure in schools and homes and caste or class biases) and behavioural and attitudinal functionings (like not oriented towards working steadily).

A discussion of these behavioural functionings could give the

impression of blaming the victim (as was mentioned in the culture-structure debate) and saying that it is these characteristics which are at fault rather than the severe structural imbalances existing in the societies. Bourdieu's habitus doctrine¹⁵ helps to place this confusion in a better perspective so that these factors can also be examined without the connotation of blaming the victim. According to Bourdieu, social class is conceptualised not just in terms of financial capital but also in terms of cultural or symbolic capital, which people make use of to improve their positions. To him, social class should be identified not in terms of individuals or a group of individuals but as the set of dispositions which it generates [Bourdieu, 1977 (1972)].

What Bourdieu says is that the particular combination of cultural and financial capital gives rise to a dispositional matrix of perceptions, appreciations, thoughts and understandings which shape the diversified activities undertaken by the members of the class. Individual action is partially unique to them and partially shaped by the socio-cultural environment, especially through the institutions of family and school, wherein individual acts according to a mastery of a common code of conduct (not always consciously, but could be pre-reflexive) of what is appropriate (or allowed) in his or her socio-cultural environment. The view that certain dispositions are not inherently or intrinsically related to individual per se but rather to the particular social class to which he/she belongs helps in dispelling the *blame the poor* connotation inadvertently made by the culture stance. While maintaining that there could be patterns of behaviour exhibited by the poor which are reproductions of a set of practices, habitus allows for a more non-judgmental analysis of the perpetuation of structures. At one stroke, it takes away partially the blame on the 'irresponsible and not striving hard enough poor' and also the appreciation of the individuals in the higher income groups who through 'hard work and responsible behaviour' further their advantages. For much of these dispositions are shaped within the matrix of habitus, in the mastery of a common code of conduct. However, these dispositions are amenable to alterations with changes in the economy or other cultural influxes.

Capability approach talks about the need for examining functionings/ capabilities because of the existence of intermediate processes which might inhibit the translation of commodities into their desirable and consequent capabilities. These intermediate steps, it was discussed in section 1.1 were termed as the conversion factors consisting of personal, social and environmental factors. The influence of social and environmental factors on the 'beings' (here, of 'being motivated')

of the individual is among the central premises of habitus. Bourdieu has pointed out the role of cultural and social capital along with the financial capital, which help the upward mobility efforts of the well-off. It is the absence of these forms of capital or conversion factors, along with an absence of financial capital which impedes the existing opportunity for education, employment etc from becoming real opportunities or the complex capabilities of effective upward mobility conceptualizations and actions. The proposition in habitus doctrine which says that the collectivity to which the individual belongs delineates the impossible and the unthinkable and indeed inevitable within a particular situation from what is possible, desirable and what is even imaginable gives a cue for enquiring to what extent certain upward mobility conceptualisations gets some shape in the imaginations and whether these imaginations get further orientation towards actions of the individuals from the poor families. Capability approach has rightly re-focused attention away from commodities/ services (in this case that of education) to the desirable functionings which they are able to achieve and habitus highlights the intermediary processes facilitating/ debilitating the conversion of commodities into functionings. Acting according to the mastery of a common code of conduct dictating what is appropriate (or allowed) in an individual's socio-cultural environment is an important intermediary process highlighted by habitus.

2.5 The circumscription of agency and upward mobility aspirations: An illustration

The concept of habitus is explicated and improvised in a study (Young Jr, 1999) done in the US context examining the factors inhibiting upward mobility aspirations and efforts of a group of poor young Afro-American men belonging to the inner cities of Chicago. The context, it should be noted, is characterized by crime and other social problems. In making an account of their life experiences pertaining to the dimension of mobility, the study brings to attention the circumscription of agency by rules and practices which are not just legitimized but are also required to negotiate with the social experiences emanating in that particular social and cultural environment. This study takes the analytical concepts of social and symbolic capital embodied in the specific habitus and shows how divergences, contradictions and disruptions to mobility efforts occur due to insufficient stock of capital of all forms- financial, symbolic or cultural and social. The insightful contribution of this study lies where it identifies the divergent purposes of capital which can yield contradictory outcomes – facilitating in some instances and debilitating in some other instances.

Here, the author presents the account of these young men's experiences in some major institutional contexts namely that of family, school, church and neighbourhoods. Financial capital for pursuing studies is insufficient and bears a transitory nature in that there could be disruptions to the flow of finance at any time. The atmosphere of the poor household does not provide any kind of cultural capital (it could well be negative here). Parents while insisting on the need for right education are not able to give any other support other than verbal encouragement. Even in instances where the family has been able to give better chartered future plans, problems arising in the financial flow and family life have disrupted those plans.

Both in schools and the neighbourhoods, the priority and the major concerns of these young men are that of negotiating the violent terrain. In school, peer teasing, threatening, taunting etc form hurdles in following a good academic pursuit. According to many who share the habitus, fighting back is considered as an appropriate response in those circumstances. The violent terrain has also debilitated an easy interaction with the peer groups. For these young men, joining gangs, while facilitating easy mobility in their neighbourhood, adversely affected their chances of employment. Through this example, the author points out, how the poor living in these terrains use social capital (of forming gangs) for meeting their immediate life circumstances –for facing the violent atmosphere of their neighbourhoods. The author reminds how the non poor do not have to employ capital to survive and to meet immediate life requirements. What can be considered as maladaptive might be a form of capital accumulation to meet requirements specific to their social contexts.

The mobility inhibiting habitus could be seen in the kind of contacts which these young men come across. It is not just that they do not have any interaction with the professional or other well educated groups; it is also that they in their daily lives come across dozens of unemployed men setting a common code of conduct in some sense cushioning their disappointments. No serious discussions about job and mobility prospects are made in their peer meetings. This needs to be seen in contrast with individuals from higher income strata where among the friends' meetings discussions are carried out on job prospects, job experiences and so on. Here information and peer pressure are passed around. The improvisation of the notion of habitus lies in pointing out the divergent uses of capital where it simultaneously becomes an asset and a liability. This is one step more towards understanding the rationale of certain decisions and actions of the individual. As the author says

“the critical observer does not have to suspend normative reactions when evaluating behaviour or outlooks of the disadvantaged but must make room for assessing how and why the functioning of poor makes sense to them as they deal with their situation”.

Arjun Appadurai (2004) and Andre Beteille (2002) make similar observations regarding this subject. According to Appadurai, differences in the mobility attempts of the poor and non poor come from the differences in the possession of *nodes and pathways*. The richer segments of the society have a better navigational capacity implying the ability to make conscious links between the more immediate and far off aspirations whereas the poor have lesser repositories of experiences providing alternative pathways of mobility. Andre Beteille examining inequality in the Indian urban context finds the family to be the main agent, which through its transmission of cultural and social capital reproduces inequality. The home environment of the civil servant, he points out is different from that of the watchman. He draws attention to another important point. Even when children from higher class families exhibit problematic characteristics (the irresponsible and defiant behaviour attributed on the poor) the financial, social and the cultural capital already existing in the families helps to overcome these mistakes and allows them many more chances (pathways) to settle in life or at least cushion the downfall. Mistakes and wrong choices prove to be fatal in case of the poor.

3

3.1 Adapting capability approach to understand the life experiences of the poor: Proposing the study in the context of Kerala

Adapting Sen’s Capability approach, it is proposed to conduct a field study on the lives of the poor. Kerala is selected as the region for the study as it is noted for its unique trajectory of development. What is unique about Kerala is that the state could attain very remarkable degree of basic functionings as indicated by the high life expectancy, low infant mortality, high female- male ratio, low fertility rate, high literacy rate, near universal elementary education and reduction of consumption poverty, despite having relatively low level of income. Kerala’s uniqueness is applauded also because, the lower strata, with the exception of tribal and fishing community have not been excluded from the achievements as per most of the basic indicators of development. Besides, there is not much rural urban and gender disparities in the provision of basic functionings in Kerala. A study on the complex functionings stands more relevant in a state which has attained some

minimum standard of living for the individuals in the lower strata.

As mentioned by several authors, the state's achievements are located in the historical context, which includes the various social reform movements and missionary activities of the late 19th and early 20th century, especially among the former untouchables and backward communities, which led to their demanding more rights and services from the state (For detailed reference see Jeffrey (1992), Ramachandran (1997)). In the fertile ground prepared by the social reform movements, the Communist movement took up the concerns of the lower classes as their core political agenda and the poor were mobilized for various causes; for food, land, shelter, education, health, employment and other welfare measures. Workers and peasants who were organized led massive struggles. All these gave the poor a sense of their rights. The latter half of the 1990s witnessed further grass root level mobilization of the people under the programme of decentralization of government and "people's planning" at the local level. The programmes envisaged wider participation of people especially the poor in local governance. The government also organized, under the aegis of the local bodies, a flagship anti-poverty programme for women with their wide participation (Kudumbashree Programme).

Together, these social and political movements and the programmes made major social and economic changes leading to improvement in the basic functionings of the poor. Most of the existing studies on poverty in Kerala however have limited themselves to the aspect of living conditions or satisfaction of basic functionings, stopping short of an explicit venturing into the more complex functionings and capabilities in the lives of the poor. This research proposes to correct this lacuna by addressing the three questions discussed at the beginning of this paper in the specific context of Kerala. That is, what would be the perceptions and reactions of the poor in an avowedly class-conscious state to the still persisting inequalities in the economic, social and cultural spheres? How does political discourses and consciousness (with its ripple effects reaching even those not directly in the political process) change the engagement with this aspect? Second, what comprises their poignant sufferings and satisfactions in life and would the class consciousness attributed to the people of the state make the most poignant concerns of the poor any different in this state? Would these concerns reflect a social critique of the existing inequalities? Third, how does the acquiring of basic education and some minimum living conditions shape the aspirations of the poor in this state? Are these aspirations sufficiently strong to promote upward social and economic mobility? All in all, through a subjective evaluation of these situations of the poor in Kerala,

it is hoped to complement the objective observations of poverty, inequality and discrimination.

SUMMING UP

Capability approach by re-chartering the concerns of welfare economics has made the leeway in economics for examining the question of what it means to be the disadvantaged in an unequal world. This paper addressed this issue with regard to three related questions, namely, the perceptions and reactions of the poor to the various inequalities surrounding their lives, the concerns around which their most poignant sufferings and satisfactions are centered and how their aspirations and efforts are being shaped for transcending these situations of poverty and disadvantages.

In section 1 discussing reviewing some of the important literature on capability approach, I had argued that the possibilities made out of these widened boundaries should be used for further understanding the complexities involved in human lives. It was seen that the claim in favor of capability approach lies in what it denies as the space of assessment of well being namely that of the commodity based approach and utilitarian approach. The direct attention to the nature of lives in terms of the set of different beings and doings of the individual, propagated by the capability approach is made use of in this paper to look into certain complex functionings of the individuals belonging to the lower strata.

Some of the major engagements in the capability approach literature involved discussions on re-chartering newer horizons of development, addressing the criticisms and apprehensions posed against it, linking it and several other themes and attempting to operationalise it.

Section 1 discussed how the approach had brought about a change in the language and expressions itself. Human development has at times been replaced by a much richer concept of human flourishing and life has been referred to as full lives, meaning that the issue is one of tackling hindrances to leading full lives. Further, Sen has critiqued a narrow understanding of rationality, which forms the foundational notion underlying welfare economics. According to him, a broader notion of rationality (which Sen terms as the ethical rationality) needs to replace the engineering rationality which predominantly underlies economic concerns where the emphasis is more on efficient procedure to attain certain ends rather than an explicit engagement with the ends themselves. Capability approach by making the total set of beings and doings the focal point of welfare economics makes an engagement with questions on what people value, which then necessitates enquiries on society or

culture which people value. And this is in tune with the broader notion of ethical rationality, which explicitly considers and understands the various ends of development. This approach would be benefited by cross disciplinary exchanges.

Section 1 also addressed the several apprehensions about the approach. Some of the deep dilemmas center on the selection of valuable capabilities. In the literature, the debate is whether there should be a single list of capabilities which can be referred to universally while making evaluations of well being or whether it is better to leave the approach incomplete. For small endeavours, identification of valuable capabilities could be made by the people themselves. In case of large scale comparisons and conflicts with regard to the selection of valuable capabilities, the problem remains largely unresolved.

One could also find literature examining links between capability approach and themes like adaptive preferences, happiness etc. On the empirical front, a wider range of functionings/ capabilities has been examined; it ranges from basic functionings like life expectancy, infant mortality, adult literacy, school enrolment, employment, housing and sanitation to more complex ones like social relationships, friendships, security and perceived well being.

The review of literature had shown that capability approach as a normative evaluative approach has its *norms* laid out at two different levels. The first level of norms dealt with redirecting the space of assessment to nature of lives as against commodities and utilities. The second level of norms, evolved over time through the writings of Sen and other scholars, has given the approach the norm of an *agenda* or *advocacy*. At this second level of norms, the emphasis is on *what should be* rather than *what is* with a clear preference for certain capabilities over that of others. All this conceptualization of human flourishing, however, brings the stark contrast with how individuals and society actually function at present- the society divided on grounds of caste, gender, class and so on and individuals' relationships are affected by self interest, mistrust, jealousy, power relations etc. Hence the call is to go back to the first level of norms where capability approach is essentially a tool focusing on nature of lives.

Much work needs to be done to understand the complex nature of human lives, given that it is only recently that attention in economics is being focused directly on lives rather than on living conditions. The broader ethical rationality, which calls for an explicit consideration of the various ends (valuable capabilities) of development has to be

understood at a normative level (value as norm) and also at the level of how it operates in the actual (value as practiced). The attempt in this paper belongs to the latter category where it tries to operationalise ethical rationality in the subject of poverty through a cultural understanding of it- from the experiences which reveal values which are practiced. On the empirical front, the need for going beyond identification of more indicators and stating of the corresponding outcomes was pointed out. Each of these dimensions needed to be understood in detail and depth.

With regard to the subject of poverty, capability approach has made a leeway for enquiring into those dimensions largely neglected in the development literature, especially in the Indian context. The three questions enquired in this paper made use of the broadened boundaries of welfare economics. Studies in sociology and anthropology have already made considerable inroads into understanding these dimensions and a review of this literature enhanced knowledge on further layers of *freedoms and unfreedoms* operating in the lives of the poor- those pertaining to the complex functioning of *being* disadvantaged.

It was noted in section 2 that the empirical studies on poverty are increasingly considering the multiple dimensions of poverty. Here two types of research could be seen; one involved identification of different sets of poor when taking multiple dimensions, which may/ may not overlap. The other type of research involved looking at several other dimensions of the lives of the individuals, who are already identified as poor by some minimal socio- economic criteria. This research falls in the genre of the latter type.

The first question attempted to understand the perception and reactions of the poor with regard to the multiple inequalities of the society- in other words how do they react to being disadvantaged? Amartya Sen's own position on this question is that the poor learn to bear the burden so well that they overlook the burden itself. However many studies on the poor which were presented in section 2 had contested this interpretation of passivity of the less privileged and had recorded their voice and behaviour of dissent. Although the reactions to the generic question of inequalities appear to be more contained and passive (here again resistance could be seen in the jokes cracked on the rich, being critical of their lives etc), the further violations of the unequal system manifested in particular and personalized forms like flouting of minimum wages, uppity behaviour of the well off, ill treatment of them etc are found to be resisted more- either covertly or overtly. Age, gender, the particular historical and socio- economic context etc seem to play a crucial role in determining the extent of reaction to inequalities.

Multidimensionality is generally used for referring to the different dimensions in the individual's life, whereas the literature on the marginality of the lives of the poor reveals the operation of multiple functionings within one functioning itself. Individuals are found to be having mixed or contradictory functionings with regard to the inequalities surrounding them; on the one hand blaming the system and on the other hand putting the blame on themselves. Comparisons at a horizontal level, which are made between different ethnic groups or between each other in their own community and neighbourhood, form a layer of subjectivity, which needs to be paid attention.

The containment of resentment to the generic situation of inequalities is explained in class stratification theories. Durkheim's treatise of legitimization of inequalities through institutionalization of occupations was referred to in this context as one major mechanism through which the inequalities gain acceptability. Pierre Bourdieu's habitus was invoked since the processes through which containment of resentment happens were accurately described by this doctrine. Whereas the interpretation of adaptive preferences seems to imply conscious reflection and subsequent cutting down of preferences, Bourdieu's habitus speaks about a pre- reflexive space in which the individual delineates the possible from the impossible and the desirable from the inevitable. This implies a deeper layer in which structural inequalities operate where it is so naturalized that it holds back much conscious reflection on it.

Review of literature on the second question, namely what are the themes and concerns in which the poor themselves recount their own lives, revealed a realm of *within group identities* like that of achieving all the status symbols of their community, of achieving ascribed roles like being a good worker, good mother, father etc. In their position of their disadvantage, they seek and derive meaning and solace in these functionings- giving them identity and achievements within their lifeworlds. Subjects' own characterization of their lives could give a more holistic understanding of the lives of the poor in so far as it showed that it *is not just lacks* which characterize their lives. While this does reveal their agency and achievement of dignity, it is likely that poverty and hardships could strain and affect these positive functionings. Also, these achievements could have been attained at severe costs. Further, to be noted is that if there is a failure in any of these functionings which they have a possibility to achieve, then they get totally trapped in the webs of disadvantages – even in those limited spaces of autonomy and content- of their life worlds.

The third enquiry was on how the lower strata attempted to transcend these situations of marginality and disadvantages. It was probed to find out how being in the lower strata shapes the complex functioning of the upward mobility aspirations and efforts of the individuals. Explaining the perpetuation of poverty in terms of macro/micro structural factors has been done by other scholars in India. In this paper, the micro level realm consisting of the different institutions influential in shaping the orientations, priorities, rationale and decision making of the poor is highlighted. Here I am considering more psycho-social attitudes and behaviour which have been extensively looked at in the poverty studies in the western literature, but less addressed in the Indian literature. Characteristics pertaining to the family structure, value-orientation, interpersonal relationships, spending patterns, time orientation, attitudes etc. have been examined in these studies. These studies broadly examined the two theoretical stances of a major academic debate, namely whether cultural factors or structural factors are more responsible for the perpetuation of poverty.

Boudieu's treatise of habitus states that individual action is partially shaped by the socio-cultural environment, especially through family, school and neighbourhoods, wherein individual acts according to the mastery of a common code of conduct. Boudieu speaks of a space where individual's dispositions are not inherently or intrinsically related to him/ her *per se* but rather to the particular social class to which he/ she belongs. This makes a non-dichotomous (structure vs culture) understanding of the situation, where there is a dispelling of the *blame the poor* connotation inadvertently made by the culture stance. While maintaining that there could be patterns of behaviour exhibited by the poor- which is a reproduction of a set of practices, habitus allows for a more non judgmental analysis of the perpetuation of structures.

Capability approach in stressing attention on functionings/capabilities recognises the existence of an intermediate space which might inhibit the translation of commodities into their desirable consequent capabilities. In this case, one could see that the mere provision of schooling and an availability of employment would not serve the purpose of creating effective conceptualization and orienting of efforts towards achieving upward mobility. Within this intermediate space of conversion factors, the habitus doctrine points out the absence of financial, cultural and social capital, which then adversely affects the formation of upward mobility aspirations and efforts. Capability approach talks about explicitly considering the valuable ends of development,

reflecting on the society or culture which people would value. With regard to the 'mobility ends' of the poor, while these might indeed be considered as valuable, these might not become concrete orientations. The unfreedoms surrounding the poor are so many and so deeprooted that the act of valuing itself, in not translating to effective orientations becomes constrained or thwarted. Highlighting the unfreedoms operating at valuing and orientation level should be seen alongside the several structural factors, including poor schools, lack of employment which also severely limit and constraint the mobility efforts of the poor.

While participatory surveys could easily reveal 'what is valuable', a prioritization of these different ends (satisfaction of ascribed roles rather than security, entertainment and relaxation over savings) could be understood better from the different practices revealed through life experiences. Review of literature, which has examined lived experiences of the poor individuals, has made complex and nuanced comprehensions regarding each of these dimensions, where one is able to see multiple reactions to their situations of inequality, their own lifeworlds with its own concerns and a likely perpetuation of poverty through existing habitus.

Particular decisions of the poor, like participating in a poverty alleviation program can be thus understood as a consequence of weighing the several factors of their life worlds along with the material and non material expectations regarding the program. The decisions like joining a political/caste association also depend on the specific historically determined socio- economic and institutional context. The cultural understanding of the poor complements the objective observations of poverty, inequality and discrimination and helps to understand the deep rootedness of the structures of the same, albeit with threads of agency. The several nuances involved in lives of the individuals (the poor) and the consequent decision making and action needs to be understood for furthering knowledge on complex topics of poverty and inequality, especially in the context of failures of several poverty alleviation programs.

Based on the pathways derived from empirical observations and theoretical insights, this research is proposed to be conducted in the context of Kerala.

[This paper is part of my ongoing Ph.D research on the poor in Kerala. First, let me thank my supervisor, Prof. Padmini Swaminathan for her valuable support and guidance. I would also like to thank Prof. K. Nagaraj, Dr. Vijay Baskar, Dr. Karen Coelho, Jayashree and Sowjanya, whose comments have helped a lot to improve the paper. I am also grateful to my external referee for the valuable comments. I

would like to thank all other faculty members of MIDS for the discussions which have helped in attaining better clarity. I would like to express my gratitude to my father who has gone through this paper. My parents were always a constant source of support. My thanks are also to all my friends whose encouragement has helped me a lot.]

NOTES

- ¹ Capability approach as a normative framework of thought is the expression found in an introductory article written by Ingrid Robeyns (2003). In this introductory work of capability approach, Robeyns gives an effective summary of the major themes discussed in the literature. The discussion in section 1 draws a lot from this article.
- ² The act of cycling need not be the only end; there could be other ends to it like the possession of the cycle for keeping up with the social standards in a certain society
- ³ Agency is a term which has also been used in capability approach literature to indicate the capability of being able to take decisions and trying for changes on the basis of critical reasoning. In the literature of sociology and anthropology, agency implies a more active and conscious rather than passive and ignorant reactions of the subject.
- ⁴ For an illustration of these categories see Robeyns (2003)
- ⁵ Gasper says that he has not referred to SWB and OWB as methods of observation (self reported and non self reported). In this article SWB refer to feelings of well being and OWB refers to indicators other than feelings of well being.
- ⁶ Some more elaboration on this will be done in the discussion on whether the capability approach asks for too much government intervention.
- ⁷ This discussion with the same title is taken from the work of Robeyns (2003).
- ⁸ Deceptive because it conceals *true* well being by not revealing the other objective living states.
- ⁹ It should be noted that unlike the studies, which are presented below, the question of the subject's own perception regarding inequalities is not the central question in Sen's work- this famous quote of Sen has come from his observation while studying the health status of poor women in the Indian context, where he finds a difference between the objective indicators of their health condition and their own perceptions regarding it.

- ¹⁰ It needs to be mentioned here that this is one of the central topics of Marxian class analysis and has also engaged the attention of several important studies. For instance E.P. Thompson's remarkable work on the agency of the working class titled "The Making of the English Working Class".
- ¹¹ This narrative was recorded over a period of ten years, throughout the 1980s.
- ¹² Viramma's life history gives a detailed account of her rich cultural universe; but this could be due to the fact that the narratives were motivated by the queries of a scholar (Josiane Racine, the co- author in Viramma,et.al (2000)) working on ethno musicological research.
- ¹³ Ascribed roles are used here as it is used in Theodore. R. Sarbin's article in the book Psychological factors in Poverty (Allen, 1970), where the author distinguishes between achieved and ascribed roles of the individual. The achieved roles are those, which involve choice and individual achievement, for instance, getting a coveted job in the society. Ascribed roles are roles, which one is born with - like that of a father, son etc.
- ¹⁴ Many scholars have misinterpreted the position of Oscar Lewis charging him for propagating the doctrine of blaming the victim. This is effectively countered in an article by David. L. Harvey and Michael. H. Reed (1996). In this article, they argue that far from being a poor bashing doctrine, Lewis sees the poor as a resourceful and victorious group being able to survive such extent of wretchedness and instability. He has also identified structure as the ultimate cause of this pathology. Culture of poverty only becomes the more immediate cause. For Lewis, says Harvey and Reed, "it is the mechanisms of capitalistic production for profit and not the folk ways of its victims which causes the poverty. While holding many elements of poverty as flawed and dysfunctional, according to Lewis, this seldom rendered the poor incapable of meeting poverty's immediate challenges".
- ¹⁵ This is developed in a different temporal and spatial context but this also refers to the topic of perpetuation of structures.

REFERENCES

- Alkire, Sabina (2002) *Valuing Freedoms: Sen's Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction*, Oxford University Press.
- Allen, L. Vernon (1970) *Psychological factors in Poverty*, Chicago: Markham Publishing Co.

- Appadurai, Arjun (2004), 'The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and Terms of Recognition', in Vijayendra Rao and Michael Dalton (eds.) *Culture and Public Action*, Stanford University Press.
- Auletta, K. (1982) *The Urban Underclass*, Newyork: Vintage.
- Balestrino, Alessandro and Nicola Sciclone (2001) 'Should we use functionings instead of income to measure well-being? Theory, and Some Evidence from Italy', *Revista Internazionale di Scienza Sociali*, 109 (1), 1-20.
- Beteille, Andre (2002) *Equality and Universality*, Oxford University Press .
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1977 (1972)), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Loic.J.D.Wacquant (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Brandolini, Andrea and Giovanni D'Alessio (1998) *Measuring Well-being in the Functioning Space*, Rome, Banca d'Italia.
- Breman, Jan (1985) *Of Peasants, Migrants and Paupers: Rural Labour Circulation and Capitalist Production in West India*, Oxford University Press.
- (2003) *Labouring Poor in India: Patterns of Exploitation, Subordination and Exclusion*, Oxford University Press.
- Brickman, P. and D.T Campbell (1971) 'Hedonic Relativism and Planning the Good Society' in M.H. Appley (ed.) *Adaptation Level Theory*, New York: Academic Press.
- Chambers, Robert (1983) *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, London, Longman.
- (2006) 'What is poverty? Who asks? Who answers?', *Poverty in Focus*, UNDP International Poverty Centre.
- Chiappero Martinetti, Enrica (2000) 'A Multi-Dimensional Assessment of Well-Being based on Sen's Functionings Theory', *Revista Internazionale di Scienza Sociali*, CVIII (2), 207-239.
- Clark, David (2002), *Visions of Development*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Coles, Robert (1965) 'Strengths of the Children of Poor', in Robert. E. Willis and Harold. G. Vatter (ed.) *Poverty in Affluence*, Harcourt and Brace and World Inc, New York, Chicago.
- Collins, Stephanie Baker (2005) 'An Understanding of Poverty from those who are Poor', *Action Research*, Vol. 3 (1), Sage Publications, pp. 9-31.
- Deneulin, Severine and Frances Stewart (2002) 'Amartya Sen's Contribution to Development Thinking', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 37 (2), 61-70.

- Drèze, Jean and Amartya Sen (2002) *India: Development and Participation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile [1960 (1893)] *The Division of Labour in Society*, translated by George Simpson, New York, Macmillan.
- Dworkin, Ronald (2000) *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Easterlin, R. (ed.) (2002) *Happiness in Economics*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.
- Elliot, A.J. and P.G. Devine (1994) 'On the Motivational Nature of Cognitive Dissonance: Dissonance as Psychological Discomfort', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67,382-394.
- Ellman, Michael(1994) 'The Increase in Death and Disease under Katastroika', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 18,329-355.
- Finnis, John (1992) 'Natural Law and Legal Reasoning', in Robert George (ed.) *Natural Law Theory: Contemporary Essays*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Frey, S. Bruno and Stutzer Alois (2005) 'Happiness Research: State and Prospects,' *Review of Social Economy*, Vol. LXIII, June, no.2, p:207-228
- Gal, Susan (1995) 'Language and Arts of Resistance', *Cultural Anthropology*, 10(3), 407-424.
- Gaspar, Des (2005) 'Subjective and Objective Well Being in Relation to Economic, Inputs: Puzzles and Responses', *Review of Social Economy*, Vol. LXIII, June, no.2, p: 177-207.
- Giovanola, Benedetta (2005) 'Personhood and Human Richness: Good and Well Being in the Capability Approach and Beyond', *Review of Social Economy*, Vol. LXIII, June , No.2,p:249-269.
- Gramsci, Antonio (1971) *Selection from Prison Notebooks*, Quinten Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds and trans), London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Grusky, David and Gabriela Galescu (2005) 'Foundations of a Neo- Durkheimian Class Analysis' in Erik Olin Wright (ed.) *Approaches to Class Analysis*, Cambridge University Press.
- Harriss, Barbara, S.Guhan and R.H. Cassen (eds.) (1992) *Poverty in India : Research and Policy*, Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, L. David and Michael.H. Reed (1996), 'Culture of Poverty: An Ideological Analysis', *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol.39, No.4, pp- 465-495.
- Janakarajan, S. and P. Seabright (1999) 'Subjective and Objective Indicators of Welfare Change over Time' in B. Harriss- White and S. Subrahmaniam (eds.) *Illfare in India*, Delhi, Sage.
- Jasek-Rysdahl, Kevin (2001) 'Applying Sen's Capability Framework to

- Neighborhoods: Using Local Asset Maps to Deepen our Understanding of Well-Being', *Review of Social Economy*, LIX (3), 313-329.
- Jeffrey, Robin (1992) *Politics Women and Wellbeing: How Kerala Became a Model*, London, Macmillan.
- Jeyaranjan, J. (1993) 'A Village Economy in Transition: A Study of the Process of Change in Illippakorai, Tamil Nadu, 1960-1985', Ph.D Thesis, University of Madras.
- Jodha, N.S. (1988) 'Poverty in India: A Minority View', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November, Special Number, Vol.23.
- Jodha, N.S. (1989) 'Social Science Research on Rural Change: Some Gaps' in K. Basu (ed.) *Conversations between Economists and Anthropologists*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Kabeer, Naila (2001) *Bangladesh Women Workers and Labour Market Decisions: The Power to Choose*, New Delhi., Vistaar Publications.
- Kapadia, Karin (1996) *Siva and her Sisters: Gender, Caste and Class in Rural South India*, Oxford University Press.
- Klasen, Stephan (2000) 'Measuring Poverty and Deprivation in South Africa', *Review Of Income and Wealth*, 46 (1), 33-58.
- Kodoth, Praveena (2005) 'Fostering Insecure Livelihoods: Dowry and Female Seclusion in Left Developmental Contexts in West Bengal and Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 18.
- Laderchi, Ruggeri (1997) 'Poverty and its many Dimensions: The Role of Income as an Indicator', *Oxford Development Studies*, 25:3, p.345-360.
- Lewis, Oscar (1961) *The Children of Sanchez*, Penguin Books Limited.
- (1965) 'The Culture of Poverty' in Robert. E. Willis and Harold. G. Vatter (ed.) *Poverty in Affluence*, Harcourt and Brace and World Inc, New York, Chicago.
- Mosse, David, 1994, 'Idioms of Subordination and Styles of Protest among Christian and Hindu Harijan Castes in Tamil Nadu', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 28(1):67-106.
- Murray, C. (1984) *Losing Ground*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Narayan, Deepa, Robert Chambers, M. Shah and P. Petesch (2000) *Voices of the Poor: Crying out for Change*, Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha (2000) *Women and Human Development: The Capability Approach*, New York, Cambridge university press.
- Phipps, Shelley (1999) 'The Well-Being of Young Canadian Children in International Perspective', in LIS-working paper No. 197, Differdange: INSTEAD.

- Qizilbash, Mozaffar (2002) 'A Note on the Measurement of Poverty and Vulnerability in the South African Context', *Journal of International Development*, 14, 757-772.
- Ramachandran, V.K. (1997), 'Kerala's Development Achievements' in Jean Deze and Amartya Sen (ed.) *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ranis, Peter (1991) 'View from Below: Working Class Consciousness in Argentina', *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 133-156.
- Robbins, Lionel (1932) *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, London, Macmillan.
- Robeyns, Ingrid (2002) 'Gender Inequality: A Capability Perspective', Unpublished PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, Cambridge.
- (2003) 'The Capability Approach: An Interdisciplinary Introduction', <http://www.ingridrobeyns.nl/downloads/CAtraining20031209.pdf>.
- (2003b) 'Sen's Capability Approach and Gender Inequality: Selecting Relevant Capabilities', *Feminist Economics*, 9 (2/3), 61-92.
- Ruggeri Laderchi, Caterina (1997) 'Poverty and its Many Dimensions: The Role of Income as an Indicator', *Oxford Development Studies*, 25 (3), 345-360.
- Schokkaert, Erik, and Luc Van Ootegem (1990) 'Sen's concept of the Living Standard Applied to the Belgian Unemployed', *Recherches Economiques de Louvain*, 56, 429- 450.
- Scott, C. James (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press.
- Seabright, Paul (1993) 'Pluralism and the standard of living', in M. Nussbaum and A. Sen (ed.) *The Quality of Life*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Segal, Jerome (1998), 'Consumer Expenditures and the Growth of Need-Required Income' in D. Crocker and T. Linden (eds.) *Ethics of Consumption*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, p:176-197.
- Sen Amartya (1980) 'Equality of What?' in S. McMurrin (ed.) *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press.
- Sen Amartya (1984) *Resources, Values and Development*, Oxford, Basic Blackwell.
- (1985 [1999]) *Commodities and Capabilities*, Amsterdam, North Holland, reprinted by Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- (1987) *The Standard of Living*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

- (1990) ‘Gender and Cooperative Conflicts’ in I. Tinker (ed) *Persistent Inequalities*, Oxford University Press
- (1992) *Inequality Re-examined*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- (1993) ‘Capability Approach and Wellbeing’ in Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.) *The Quality of Life*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- (1993) *Development as Freedom*, NY: Knopf Publishers.
- Sennett, Richard and Jonathan Cobb (1972) *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, New York, Knopf.
- Slottje, Daniel (1991) ‘Measuring the Quality Of Life across Countries’, *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 73 (4), 684-693.
- Steicker, Joel (1995) ‘Race, Class and Gender in Cartagena, Columbia’, *American Ethnologist*, Vol.22, No.1, p:54-74.
- Sugden, Robert (1993) ‘Welfare, Resources, and Capabilities: A Review of *Inequality Reexamined* by Amartya Sen’, *Journal of Economic Literature*, XXXI, 1947-1962.
- Teschl Miriam and Flavio Comim (2005) ‘Adaptive Preferences and Capabilities: Some Preliminary Conceptual Explorations’, *Review of Social Economy*, Vol. LXIII, June, no.2, p:229-249.
- Thompson, E. T [1963 (1968)] *The Making of the English Working Class*, Victor Gollancz Ltd.
- Townsend, Peter (1985), ‘A Sociological Approach to the Measurement of Poverty- A Rejoinder to Professor Amartya Sen’, *Oxford Economic Papers*, New Series, Vol.37, No.4, 659-668.
- UNDP (1990-2003) *Human Development Report*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Valentine, Charles (1965), ‘The Conditions of Poverty’, in Robert. E. Willis and Harold. G. Vatter (ed.) *Poverty in Affluence*, Harcourt and Brace and World Inc, New York, Chicago.
- Viramma, Jean-Luc Racine and Josiane Racine (2000) *Viramma*, Social Science Press.
- Weininger, B.Elliot (2005) ‘Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu’s Class Analysis’ in Erik Olin Wright (ed.) *Approaches to Class Analysis*, Cambridge University Press.
- Weis, Lois and Michelle Fine (1991), ‘Narrating the 1980s and 1990s: Voices of the Poor and Working Class White and African American Men’, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol.27, No.4, pp.493-516.
- Wennerås, Christine and Agnes Wold (1997) ‘Nepotism and Sexism in Peer-Review’, *Nature*, 387, 341-343.

Willis, Paul. E (1977), *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs*, West- mead, Saxon House.

World Development Report (2000/2001) *Attacking Poverty*, World Bank.

Young, Jr. Alford (1999) 'The Non –Accumulation of Capital: Explicating the Relationship of Structure and Agency in the Lives of the Poor Black Men', *Sociological Theory*, Vol.17. pp. 201-224.

*

Recent MIDS Working Papers

2007

- 200 Exploring the Importance of Excess Female Mortality and Discrimination in 'Natality' in Explaining the 'Lowness' of the Sex Ratio in India
by D. Jayaraj
- 199 Welfare Pluralism: A Post Modern Rationale in Policy Making
by K. Jayashree
- 198 Making It Relevant: Mapping the Meaning of Women's Studies in Tamilnadu
by S. Anandhi and Padmini Swaminathan

2006

- 197 Understanding the Struggle for Panchama Land
by C. Jerome Samraj
- 196 Urban water conflicts in Indian cities: Man-made scarcity as a critical factor
by S. Janakarajan, Marie Llorente and Marie-Hélène Zérah

2005

- 195 Drought, Agriculture, and Rural Livelihood: A Case Study of Bolangir District, Orissa
by Mahendra Nayak
- 194 Farm Level Land and Water Productivity in Tank Irrigation: Some Methodological Issues
by K. Sivasubramaniyan and R. Sakthivadivel
- 193 Water Governance: A Historical Understanding of Mahanadi River Basin, Orissa
by Sushanta Kumar Mahapatra
- 192 Creative Social Research: Rethinking Theories and Methods and the Calling of an Ontological Epistemology of Participation
by Ananta Kumar Giri

2004

- 191 Microfinance - the Silver Bullet for Empowerment: Some Questions
by K. Kalpana

- 190 GATT, WTO and Rules on Regional Integration
by Moana Bhagabati
- 189 The Shifting Trajectories in Microfinance Discourse: A critical reading
of the Anti-Poverty Dimensions of Microfinance programmes
by K. Kalpana
- 188 Facilitating India's Trading Environment: An Overview
by Nirmal Sengupta and Moana Bhagabati
- 187 Interfaces in Local Governance - A Study in Karnataka
by Kripa Ananthpur
- 186 The Trauma of 'Wage Employment' and the 'Burden of Work' for
Women in India: Evidences and Experiences
by Padmini Swaminathan
- 185 Delegation to Devolution: West Bengal
by Manabi Majumdar and Indrashis Banerjee
- 184 Delegation to Devolution: Karnataka
by V. K. Natraj and Kripa Ananthpur
- 183 Efficiency of Water Use in Indian Agriculture
by A. Vaidyanathan with K. Sivasubramaniyan
- 2003**
- 182 A Gossipmonger's Revisit to Chettipalayam
by S. Neelakantan
- 181 Intellectual Property Rights for Traditional Knowledge – Economic
Analysis of an Incentive System
by K. Aparna Bhagirathy
- 180 Does better health influence economic performance in India? An
exploratory analysis at the district level
by Atheendar S. Venkataramani
- 179 Conditions and Characteristics of well Irrigation under Palar Basin,
Tamilnadu
by A. Vaidyanathan, K. Sivasubramaiyan and S. Mariasusai
- 178 Knowledge and human liberation: Jurgen Habermas, Sri Aurobindo
and beyond
by Ananta Kumar Giri

MIDS Publications

- Gender Inequalities:
Neglected Dimensions and Hidden Facets
by *Bina Agarwal* Rs.60
- State, Households and Markets in Education
by *Jandhyala B G Tilak* Rs.60
- Whither the Indian Village?:
Culture and Agriculture in “Rural” India
by *Dipankar Gupta* Rs.60
- Cultural Politics of Environment and
Development: The Indian Experience
by *Amita Baviskar* Rs.60
- Dalit Studies as Pedagogical Practice:
Claiming more than just a ‘Little Place’ in the Academia
by *Sharmila Rege* Rs.60
- Globalization: Its Portents for Indian Culture
by *U. R. Anantha Murthy* Rs.20
- Development as a Human Right or as Political
Largesse? Does it make any difference?
by *Upendra Baxi* Rs.60
- Üõö G→ôJ™ î I öè Ý Áèœ
ªî£° šðECKö˘: âv. ùùèò£Û; Rs.95
- Fó£Mì „ ê£j Á:
â™L ú §< Fó£Mìª ãñ£NèÀ <
î £ñv Ý ˘. @ó¾tñ; Rs.150
- å¼ ï èó° < å¼ Aó£ñ° <:
ªè£f° Š ð° FJ™ éÍ è ñ£ÿøfèœ
âv. còè‡ ìj Rs.150

Madras Institute of Development Studies
79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar
Adyar, Chennai 600 020
Tel.: 044-24412589, 24412295
Email: pub@mids.ac.in • Web: www.mids.ac.in